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Types of Religious Lives

If we begin to study the historical place in which we find ourselves or more accurately, those types of piety which our situation today has developed, then we can, objectively and dispassionately, discern different categories of individuals who do not understand a person's attraction to religion in the same manner. Each category has its own positive and negative characteristics. It is entirely possible that only the sum total of these would give a correct panorama of the multifaceted Christian life. On the other hand, in classifying the types of religious life within Orthodoxy it must always be borne in mind that along with the distinctive and complete representations of one or another type, the majority of people will be categorized as representing a combination of two or even more religious types. It is very difficult to remain within the framework of impartiality and objectivity in classifying and determining the types because in reality each individual is attracted to his own concept of Christianity and repels any other understanding foreign to him. Here one can only wish to make every effort to avoid such partiality.

One perceives the incredibly multifaceted understanding of spiritual life from observing believing people, having conversations with them, and reading various books and journals devoted to religious themes.

If one makes an attempt to classify this variety into specific groupings, I find that at this given moment within Orthodoxy there are five types of piety: 1) Synodal, 2) ritual-centered, 3) esthetical, 4) ascetical and 5) evangelical.

To be sure, such a classification is to some extent arbitrary. Life is much more complex. It is very likely that there are other categories which I was unable to discern. But this arbitrary classification will be of great help in understanding many events in our lives and, to a certain degree, will allow a working-out of personal sympathies and antipathies in one's own spiritual path. Each spiritual type has its own, at times very complicated history, its own genesis, each being determined by the diverse circumstances of its origin. A person finds himself in one or another group not only by internal inclination but he is also to some extent predetermined towards it depending on the milieu from which he comes, his formation, education and influences. We will attempt to characterize each category from the point of its historical appearance, we will attempt to characterize its moral attributes, its way of life and even its skill, the force of its dissemination, creative possibilities which are contained within it, and its relationship to the current problems of Church life.

One: Synodal Piety

My first example is the Synodal type of piety. The Emigration flowed into Europe, one might say, before it had a chance to recover from its struggle, still passionately furious for having been deprived of the ideals of that great Russian land, of the White idea, etc. The Emigration carried with it not only its miserable baggage, not only bayonets and regimental banners, but their "portable" churches with iconostases made out of cloth stretched over wooden frames, sacred vessels and vestments. And having landed on foreign soil, it organized not only branches of the All-military Union, but its own Churches. For many the Church was a vital need for their souls. For many, this need was filled by some kind of an inevitable attribute of the autocratic Russian idea, without which it is difficult to speak about one's nationalism, about one's loyalty to the traditions and testaments of the past. The Church was a reliable and a recognized political and patriotic symbol. Its inner purpose somehow did not attract much attention— the important thing was that the anniversaries of the tragic deaths of national heroes or the anniversaries of the establishment of glorious regiments be commemorated. It was possible to organize solemn and serious demonstrations of one's unity, one's loyalty, to participate in services of intercession for the departed, to kneel on one knee during the singing of Memory Eternal(1), to gather around the Senior Officer Present. Very often a considerable degree of ingenuity and energy were expended to fashion a thurible or a candle stand out of empty food tins and to convert some kind of a drafty barrack into a Church. Its existence was essential but the motivations for this need often were of a national rather than ecclesiastical character.

If we try to find out where such an attitude came from it won't be hard to discover its roots in the previous ecclesiastical epoch, the time of the Church's Synodal period. From the time of Peter the Great our Russian Orthodox Church became an attribute of the Russian autocratic State, it became a department among other departments, it fell into the system of government establishments and attached to itself ideas, experiences and tastes of power. The State granted it protection, punished offenses against the Church, and in return demanded condemnations for offenses against the State. The State appointed the Church's hierarchy, kept an eye on their activities with the help of the Chief Procurator, assigned administrative tasks to the Church, and made it a party to its political expectations and ideals.

After two hundred years of such a system's existence the Church's inner structure was altered. Spiritual life was pushed back somewhere and on the surface there was an official State-sanctioned religiosity, attestations of which were issued to civil functionaries certifying that they have been to Confession and Communion, for without such a certificate the functionary could not be considered a loyal subject from the State's point of view. This system developed a special religious psychology, a special religious type of a person, a special type of ethical foundation, a special art and a special way of life. From generation to generation people were inculcated with the idea that the Church is of utmost importance, absolutely mandatory, but still it was an attribute of the State. Piety was one of the State virtues, necessary for the State's

need to have pious people. The priest is the State-appointed supervisor to look after the correct performance of religious functions by the religiously subject person and as such the priest held a respectable position. Nonetheless as an individual, he had no more respect than did other functionaries who looked after social order, the armed forces, finances, etc. The Synodal period saw a completely defeatist treatment of the clergy, a complete neglect of any special status and even a tendency to treat them as inferior, not allowing them entry into so-called society. People went to Confession once a year because this is what was required, they married in Church, baptized their children, buried their dead, stood through prayers of intercession on royal festivals, and as a sign of a special piety, served Akathists, but the Church was on its own, people went there when it was called for and it certainly was not called for to overdo one's churchliness. This was perhaps only done by the Slavophiles who by their conduct slightly modified the established, formal, official tone of polite relationship towards the Church. It is only natural that the Synodal type of piety was grounded, in the first instance, on the cadres of the Petersburg ministerial bureaucracy, that it was linked precisely with bureaucracy and in this way was spread throughout Russia through provincial bureaucratic centers to the local representatives of State authority.

This whole system predetermined the situation that the most religiously inspired and ardent people could not find a place for themselves in it. They either went to monasteries, hoping for a complete separation from any kind of superficial Church activity, or they simply mounted a protest, frequently protesting not only against the Church's institutional system but against the Church itself. This is how the antireligious fanaticism of our revolutionaries originated which, in its earliest manifestations, resembled the flaming passions of the original religious life. It attracted to itself all those who thirsted after an interior ascetical challenge, sacrifice, selfless love and unselfish service, all that which the official State Church could not offer to the people.

It must be said that during this Synodal period even the monasteries fell under the general process of the spiritual life's disintegration. The all-powerful arm of the State was extended over them, over their morals and way of life, and they were turned into one of the official cells of the overall ecclesiastical establishment.

Thus what remained in the Church were for the most part either the lukewarm or the ones who could control their religious impulses, or those who could channel their spiritual needs into the system of State values. In this way a system of moral ideals was developed. No doubt what was held in the greatest esteem was good order, a respect for laws, a certain reserve, along with a firmly expressed feeling of obligation, a respect for one's elders, a condescending concern for one's juniors, honesty, love of Fatherland, a reverence for authority, etc. No special exertions were required. Creativity was held down to the level and the general interests of the State machine. Religious zealots somehow failed to appear in provincial cathedral churches. Here were people of a different sort, Father Rectors, calm, business-like cathedral archpriests thoroughly familiar with Divine Services who made every effort to conduct them solemnly and with grandeur in splendid and magnificent temples, superb administrators and organizers,

custodians of Church property, official functionaries of the Synodal establishment, honorable people, conscientious, but uninspiring and uncreative.

And the cathedrals— the crowning expressions of the Synodal architectural craftsmanship— were gross in their massiveness, spaciousness, gilt and marble, huge cupolas, resonant echoes, immense Royal Doors, costly vestments, with colossal choirs which performed special Italian-inspired secular singing. The images on the icons could hardly be seen, having been encased in gold and silver covers. The book of the Gospels with its heavy binding, could barely be lifted by the deacon, and the deacon read it in such a way that at times it was impossible to understand a single word, but it was not his job to make the reading understandable: he had to begin in a type of an unimaginable low rumble and end in a window-rattling bellow, showing off the mighty power of his voice. Everything had a single purpose, everything was harmonized in all aspects of the epoch's ecclesiastical creativity, everything had as its aim the display of power, wealth, and indestructibility of the Orthodox Church and the great Russian State, which was under her protection.

How strong was this kind of ecclesiastical psychology? Certainly, one cannot imagine that this was the only type of religious consciousness but it is without a doubt that any other kind would have to be diligently searched for, since the "official" type was so overpowering. This is especially clear if we take into account that concurrently with such a conception of ecclesiastical life and religious ways, there was a development of our intense atheism. These people, according to Soloviev's accurate observation, while believing that man evolved from apes, laid down their souls for their friends. An outlet for love, sacrifice and heroic deeds could be found outside of the Church's walls. And within the Church anything which was different, was, by that fact alone, in opposition and flowed against the current; it was oppressed and belittled. This ecclesiastical psychology was based on a very solid way of life and this way, in its turn, nourished itself from it. Custom permeated everything: from prayer to the kitchen. It is evident from what was said that one can hardly expect a growth of creative forces.

Here everything is channeled towards conservation, to the preservation of the foundations, to the repetition of feelings, words, gestures. Creativity demands some new kinds of challenges; here there were none, neither in the field of ideas, nor in the field of arts, nor in the way of life. Everything was strongly guarded and protected. Innovation was not permitted. There was no need for creative principles. The Synodal type of religious life, which promoted other values along with spiritual ones, namely those of the State, the way of life and of tradition, not only distorted and confused the hierarchy of values, but often simply replaced Christian love with an egotistical love for things of this world. It is difficult and even impossible to see Christ, to experience a Christianization of life, where the principle of the secularization of the Church is openly proclaimed. This type of piety could not cope with the difficult task of rendering to God what is God's and what is Caesar's to Caesar. During its lengthy existence it more and more often let Caesar be triumphant. In it the Roman emperor conquered Christ not in the circus arena, not in catacombs, but at the moment of his recognition of the Heavenly King: at this

moment began the subversion of the Christian commandments by the commandments of the secular State. One can acquire Synodal piety by way of education, by way of habits and customs, but in no way can one acquire it by way of a desire to follow in the footsteps of Christ.

From the historical point of view this orderly system began to show cracks by the end of the nineteenth century. Suddenly a guest appeared in the Church, not entirely a welcome one: the Russian "intellectual."⁽²⁾ We will speak about his role later. At first it didn't take root too deeply in the nature of the Church's life. At first it was a phenomenon outside the Church.

Everything changed decisively from the moment of the February revolution and, in the Church, these changes were reflected in the All-Russian Church Council [of 1917] and the restoration of the Patriarchate.

However strong these changes were in the Church's historic way of life, they could not, of course, suddenly change the people's psychology, to refashion the temper of souls. It is because of this that the Emigration brought with it to foreign lands the memories of the Russian Church's Synodal period, its way of life, its art, its clergy, its understanding of the Church's role and significance in the overall patriotic scheme. It is very likely that even now the Synodal type of piety predominates. This is easy to see if we note that the whole of the special Karlowitz grouping of our Church life follows precisely this ideology, uniting Church and State, guarding old traditions, not wanting to take cognizance of the new conditions of life and continuing to preach Caesaro-papism. Not everyone who belonged to the Synodal psychology was attracted exclusively to that special group. Everywhere, in spacious cathedrals and in provincial make-shift churches, we can find people who confess their membership in the Orthodox Church and along with this, believe that the Church is simply the necessary attribute of Russian sovereignty.

It is difficult to have two views on the conformity of this psychology with the current problems of the Church's life. In the first place, life today incessantly demands from us such a manifestation of creativity that no grouping which lacks a creative agenda can possibly hope to provide. Furthermore there is no doubt that on the historical plane, the Synodal period has ended without the possibility of return; there is no basis to assume that the psychology which it engendered can outlast it for too long. In this sense it is not important how we assess such a religious type. Only one thing is important—that there is no doubt that it is dying and has no future. The future challenges the Church with such complex, new and serious problems that it is difficult at first to envision which religious type can most effectively and creatively meet that challenge.

Two: Strict Ritualism

The next type of religious life, that of the strict ritualist,⁽³⁾ bears traits of an entirely different origin. Compared to the Synodal type, it is archaic. It never died out. It intrudes into the Synodal piety, stands in opposition to it, but never struggles with it. The Synodal piety encountered strict ritualism in the Church from the moment of its own origin, inasmuch as the whole of Muscovy

Rus was permeated with its spirit. Old Ritualism grew out of it and absorbed its strengths into itself. Modifying itself and becoming more complex, it has lasted even into our days. It is perhaps the most frightful and stagnant remnant inherited from Muscovy Rus.

There is no question that the creative and theological level of Muscovy piety is extremely weak. Moscow adopted many things from Byzantium but somehow managed to miss its creative intensity. Moscow re-forged all of the tempestuous and antinomian vibrancy of Byzantine genius into an immovable form, a cult of the letter, a cult of tradition, a repetitious rhythmical gesture. Moscow was able not only to freeze its Byzantine heritage, it even managed to shrivel up its Biblical heritage, ossifying it and depriving it of its grace-filled and living spirit. In the words of an ancient prophet, it started to pile up commandment upon commandment, rule upon rule. It perceived the splendid flowing of Byzantine rhetoric as something that shall not be moved, introducing it into its compulsory order of service, ritualizing every impulse, clothing every religious lyric into a form of law.

The extreme expression of this stagnant, splendid, immovable, protective spirit was the Old Ritual. In this sense it has tremendous positive features: it preserved for us icons of ancient style, it preserved ancient chant, it kept in place, away from life's surges, a kind of a fixed form in the development of piety. But with all this it confused the hierarchy of values of the Christian way of life, preferring torture and even death not only in defense of the two-fingered sign of the cross but for the right to write "Iesus" as "Isus."

Here the matter is not of a simple lack of grammar but is much more serious. In the ensuing period this expanded into full view. Here the subject is belief in a particular magic not only of a word, a name, but even of each letter which composes the name. A frightful retribution has been visited upon the Old Ritualists for their treatment of Christ's truth. Go inside an Old Ritualist Prayer House. It contains everything which they held dear throughout their whole history. It has priceless icons in the ancient style, it has ancient books, it resounds in a special chant sung according to "hook" notation— all those things for which they struggled and endured martyrdom. It lacks only one thing. Behind its magnificent iconostasis, completely covered with icons in massive metalwork covers, it shelters nothing, it preserves nothing. The iconostasis is attached to nothing but a blank wall. There is no sanctuary, no altar table or oblation table, because there is no Mystery [Sacrament].

Everything has been preserved except the living spirit of the Church, everything except its sacramental life which deifies man. Only the splendid form remains.

One must give some thought to this phenomenon. Here people received a punishment for their victory, for having attained their aims. Once having distorted Christ's truth, they were left with its empty shell. One should think about this every time there is a temptation in our path to replace spirit with form, love with ritual. We are guarded from this temptation by the same danger, to be left with form and ritual and bereft of spirit and love. It is very likely that the symbol of the sanctuary-less Church is frequently reflected in human souls.

While losing the living spirit of Christianity, the Church of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has not been able to destroy within it that Moscow spirit of correctness of ritual: what is prescribed, what is permitted, what is to be guarded. Furthermore, while frequently being stifled in the official, famished, Synodal State-sanctioned Church, and not being able to find ways to some kind of living sources of faith, the human soul would run from the Synod-prescribed piety into the arms of ritual correctness, placing this in opposition to official conventionalism. Ritual correctness has something in common with ecclesiastical esthetics and asceticism, but in its essence it is something different. It is not simply that the stress is in a different place.

What is the moral make-up of the strict ritualist? What is his spiritual form? His greatest desire is for absolute spiritual order, the complete subordination of the inner life to the external rhythm which has been elaborately worked out to the minutest detail. The external rhythm encompasses everything within itself. Outside the Church he knows the spiritual significance of every detail of life, he maintains the fasts, he lives day in and day out maintaining the Church's cycle of services. He lights vigil lamps at prescribed times. He makes the sign of the Cross correctly. In Church he likewise stifles any impulse, permits no deviation from established gestures. He kneels at the proper moment during services, he bows and crosses himself at the proper time. He knows for certain that it is a crime to kneel from Pascha to Pentecost, he knows how many times he will go to Confession during the year and most of all, he has mastered the Order of Services to the minutest detail. He is angry and indignant if anything is omitted during Church services, because that is not to be done. Along with this he is completely indifferent if what is being read is incomprehensible or if it is being read too rapidly. This is not the person who prefers memorial services, services of intercession and akathists over others. No, his beloved services are the rarest ones, primarily those of Great Lent. He especially delights in the complexity of services when some fixed feast coincides with a movable one for example, when Annunciation falls during the last days of Holy Week.

For him the form and structure of the service frequently overshadows the inner content of individual prayers. He most certainly is a fanatical champion of Church Slavonic. The use of Russian in Church is to him a near blasphemy. He loves Slavonic because he is used to it. He does not want to change even the obviously unsatisfactory, ungrammatical and inaccurate translations. The lengthy recitations by the Psaltis immerses him into a particular atmosphere of piety, bringing on a specific rhythm to his spiritual life. This is what he really wants, he is not so interested in the content. His prayers are lengthy, he has an established and unchanging rule for them. This rule frequently requires the repetition of one and the same prayer and always in the same place. The Gospel and the Lord's Prayer have no special place within the general content of his rule; they are merely a part of the once and for all established harmonic whole.

If you tell him that you don't understand something, either in essence or because the Psaltis is reading too rapidly, he will answer that it isn't necessary to understand, it is only necessary to

achieve a particular atmosphere of piety during which occasional words come through clearly which are understandable and necessary for you.

Such a person's spiritual life is worked out in the smallest details. He knows the special technique for bringing oneself to a particular spiritual state. He is able to teach you how to breathe, in what position to maintain one's body during prayer, should the legs be near a warm or a cool place.

If one analyzes this special phenomenon it becomes clear that this strongly depends not on the Eastern Christian religion— we feel that here is a distinctive influence of Dervishism and echoes of Hinduism and more importantly, a passionate belief in the magic of the word and a combination of words, of gestures and the sequence of gestures. It is without a doubt that this belief in magic has under it very real roots. One can truly achieve many things with this method— a considerable degree of self-discipline, considerable control over oneself and over all the chaos of the human soul, even power over others, a complete ordering of one's internal and external life, even a kind of inspiration under the law.

One thing which this way of life does not achieve is of course, love. One can speak in the tongues of men and of angels, and not have love. To be sure, acts of love and benevolence enter into the strict ritualist's rhythm of life. The strict ritualist knows that he must help the poor, especially during Great Lent. In his time he has sent cookies to those confined in prison, he might even organize a benefit, build almshouses and put on dinners for his poor brethren. But the basic motive for such activity is that it is prescribed, that it enters into the general rhythm of his life, it becomes a part of the ritualistic concept of things. In this sense he has a greatly developed feeling of obligation and obedience. Thus his relationship to a person is determined by a self-imposed obligation and not on a spontaneous feeling of love towards him. At the present moment this type of piety has a tendency to grow and multiply. And this expansion can easily be explained if we take into account all the haplessness, abandonment, neglect and exhaustion of the human soul. This soul is not looking for a challenge— it is afraid of its unbearable burden, it can no longer either seek anything or become disenchanted. The severe and the rarefied air of sacrificing love is beyond its strength. If life passed it by and gave it no external well-being, no external stability, then it turns towards an internal well-being with a special zeal, towards complete assurance and legitimacy of its inner world. It cuts itself from chaos with a sturdy, prescribed and permitted cover, and chaos no longer torments it. It knows the effectiveness of magic incantations, often expressed in incomprehensible syllables. Like a dervish, it knows the power of gestures and stances. It is protected and tranquil. All these particularities of the strict ritualist way determine its growth in our time. In all likelihood a long period of development awaits it.

It must be noted here that our era promises a development of strict ritualism from another aspect. Today we see a universal thirst for some kind of definite and concrete directives— how

to believe, what to struggle for, how to behave oneself, how to speak, how to think. We see that the world is thirsting for authoritative leaders, to lead a blind and dedicated mass behind them.

We know of the most frightful dictatorship that ever existed, a tyranny over ideas. The infallible center is the Party. For example, if the leader wills that we think and act in one way, then the individual who believes in the infallibility of the directive, easily, with such an amazing and incomprehensible ease, restructures his inner world to correspond with this directive. We know the presence of State-imposed philosophies and world-views. If we should admit that if somewhere the Church becomes supportive or at least tolerant of this, then it will be inundated with new cadres of people who have been brought up on mandatory directives and the strict ritualism will immediately teach them which path they must follow, where there is the least amount of doubt, where the directives are more accurate and will regulate one's whole life, where finally, the whole disorder of one's soul is tamed and consigned to specific cages. Here the strict ritualist's success is absolutely predetermined. But along with this one could not say anything about its creative possibilities. The very principle of a constant repetition of rules, words and gestures excludes any possibility of creative effort. From ancient times strict ritualism stood in opposition to prophesy and creativity. Its task was to preserve and to repeat and not to tear down and rebuild. If indeed, it does succeed, then this means the extinction of the creative spirit and freedom in the Church for many decades.

The main question however, which we would like to place before strict ritualism, is how does it respond to both of Christ's commandments about love for God and love for people. Does it have a place for them? Where is there within it a person to whom Christ condescended? If it can be imagined that occasionally there is an expression of its own kind of love for God, it is difficult to see in what way it expresses itself in love for people. Christ, who turned away from scribes and Pharisees, Christ, who went to sinners, prostitutes and publicans, can hardly be the teacher of those who are afraid to soil their pristine garments, who are completely devoted to the letter, who preserve only the statutes, and who govern their whole life by the statutes. They consider themselves spiritually healthy because they observe everything that is prescribed by spiritual hygiene, but Christ told us, it is not the healthy who are in need of a physician, but the sick. Actually, today we have two citadels of such an Orthodoxy: traditional Orthodoxy, statutory, patristic and fatherly Orthodoxy: Athos and Valaam— a world removed from our fuss and our sins, a world of faithful servants of Christ, a world of God's way and contemplation.

And what do you suppose upsets this world of sanctity the most? Is it the present calamities which are tearing us apart, the new teachings, heresies perhaps, the needs, the destruction and persecution of the Church, the martyrs in Russia, the trampling of belief throughout the whole world, the lack of love? Is this what alarms these islands of the elect the most, these summits of the Orthodox spirit? Not at all. What alarms them as the most important, the most vital and the most burning issue, is the question of the New or Old style in Divine worship. This

is what splits them into factions, for which they condemn those who think otherwise. This is what determines their measure of things.

It is difficult to speak about love in the light of all this, since love is somehow outside of either the New or Old Style. But it can be said, of course, that the Son of Man was Lord of the Sabbath, and violated that Sabbath precisely in the name of love. Where they do not violate it, where they cannot do it, is because they have neither His name nor love. Strict ritualism is seen here as a slave of the Sabbath and not as a way of the Son of Man. And truly there is something threatening and ominous here, precisely because in Athos and Valaam, the ancient centers of Orthodox traditional spirituality, a person can find an answer only to one question out of all which are raised by life: whether the Church must live by Old or New Style. Instead of the Living God, instead of Christ crucified and risen, do we not have here a new idol, a new form of paganism, which is manifested in arguments over calendars, rubrics, rules, prohibitions and the Sabbath which triumphs over the Son of Man? Idolatry in the world is frightening when it betrays Christ in the name of the State, the nation, the social idea, the petty bourgeois comfort and well-being. Still more frightening is the idolatry within the Church when it replaces Christ's love with the preservation of the Sabbath.

Three: Esthetical Devotion

It is difficult to trace the genesis of the esthetical type of piety. One can imagine that it had its representatives during all ages, easing off slightly only at times when the Church was faced with challenges of great spiritual tension, when the Church was in the grip of a struggle, when it was persecuted and when it was forced to lose touch with the very essence of Christianity. Even the origin of Christianity in Kievan Rus, according to the ancient legend, was determined by an act of well-known esthetic piety. St. Vladimir made comparisons between religions not by the substance of their inner content but by the strength of influence of their external forms. Thus he chose Orthodoxy for the beauty of its singing, for the grandeur of its rites and for that tremendous esthetic experience which so moved him. The authors of Muscovy Rus produced long and moving descriptions of Orthodoxy's beauty. Even the nineteenth Century, not known for special esthetical sensitivity, produced such a great model of an esthetic Orthodox personality as Konstantin Leontiev for whom beauty contained a special measure of truth and who rejected the religiously empty bourgeois world because it was monstrous, and he reached out to Orthodoxy where he saw beauty.

It is no wonder that in the twentieth century when there was a convergence of two factors— a bright and talented outpouring of esthetics upon the cultural upper strata of Russian life and the entry of a large number of people from that cultural stratum into the Church— and the esthetical type of piety was almost overpowering in determining many things. In the first order, it singled out very significant treasures. Esthetics was always linked with a type of a cult of antiquity, with a kind of archeology. It is not surprising that during the period when it flourished, ancient Russian art was rediscovered; ancient icons were found, restored and studied; museums of

iconography were established; schools of iconography were defined and described; Rublev and others began to be appreciated; ancient chant began to be restored. Kievan and Valaam chants found their way into the repertoire of Church singing; church architecture became better known thanks to a great number of publications on the history of art. These are, without a doubt, positive achievements.

But along with this esthetical approach to religion there was the growth of a particular moral mind-set, characteristics of which are easily found. Beauty and its appreciation is always the lot of a small minority— this explains the unavoidable cultural aristocracy of any esthetics. In defending the values of esthetics, a person divides the whole world into friends, who understand and appreciate its values, and into profane enemies. Imagining that the foundation of Church life is its beauty, the person will then divide all mankind into a small flock having a special esthetic sensitivity, and a crowd of those unworthies to be kept beyond the walls of the churchyard. The mystery of the Church, in that person's imagination, is to be grasped only by the elect. Not only would the sinners and the prostitutes be excluded from sitting at the feet of Christ, but all those who are too simple and naive would likewise be excluded, in order that he alone could find satisfaction from the highly esthetic beauty of Divine Services, etc.

Having esthetics as the sole criterion of what is proper, the sole measure of things, that person imagines himself as a part of some kind of a complex composition and feels obliged not to spoil it, not to displace it. He adapts to its general rhythm but he introduces that rhythm into his own inner life. He, like the strict ritualist, organizes his own special way of life and sees within it his own magnanimous virtue. The esthete is always attracted to the archaic. At times he may even be attracted to a type of rustic artistry. From this he develops an attraction towards specific segments of ritual, of individual hymns, Andrew of Crete's Canon, etc. Often the artistic value of that material is singled out, and if there isn't any, that is taken into account and then he is entranced by its antiquity, or struck by its stately composition, or by the rhythmic success of the whole of the Divine service.

The esthetic criteria displaces the spiritual and eventually pushes out everything else. The people in the Church are looked upon as either a crowd of worshipers, essential as props for the proper rhythm of worship, or as annoying and tedious barbarians who, by their ignorance, clumsiness and occasionally by their personal sorrows and special needs, encroach upon the general grandeur and arrangement of the service. The esthete loses himself in clouds of incense, is moved by the ancient chants, admires the severity and understatement of the Novgorod style of iconography. He will condescendingly take note of the somewhat naive wording of a hymn. He has partaken in everything, he is satiated, he is afraid to spill his treasure. He is afraid of tasteless detail, of human woes which may lead to sympathy, he is afraid of human weakness which may lead to squeamishness. In all, he doesn't like the petty, disorganized, confused state of the human soul. Without a doubt it would be difficult to find love within the esthetic type of religious life. Perhaps there is not even a place for hate in it. There is only that cold, highly exacting contempt for the profane, and an ecstatic admiration of beauty.

There is a dryness, more often than not concurrent with formalism. There is a concern for the preservation of oneself and one's world, which is so well harmonized and structured, from the encroachment of everything that might offend and upset that harmony. This unavoidable chill of esthetics will gradually cool even the fiery souls (Konstantin Leontiev for example, had a fiery soul by nature). They demand a chilling of everything surrounding them. They look for some kind of an eternal ice, an eternal pole of beauty, eternal Aurora Borealis.

The most incredible and strange thing is the possibility of the spread of the esthetic type amongst Russians whose souls as a rule, lack harmony, form and rhythm. Their fiery temper, their pithy expressions and at times chaotic character would, one could imagine, serve as a sure guarantee that they would be spared from esthetics. Perhaps there is a kind of a law of contradiction in effect here, forcing a person to seek within his world outlook, what will supplement his inner characteristic rather than express it. Perhaps he finds it impossible to get along with his inner chaos, to bear it, and as a result, to move into another extreme. But one often sees— oh, much more often than one can imagine— a peculiar extinction of that flame, almost a spiritual suicide which changes fire into ice, a surge towards an immovable stance, an intense search, and a fall into a rhythm of strange forms.

There is no doubt that the esthetic type of Orthodox piety, which by its very nature belongs to the upper cultural levels of Russian people, can not count on widespread dissemination. However the case here is not about numbers but precisely in that cultural quality of the bearers of Orthodox esthetics. In spite of their small numbers they could have and still can have a strong influence on the life of the Church in all its phases. What kind of influence? How strong is its creative effort? Here one must speak about an extraordinary paradoxical fact. The true preservers of creative works in the most diverse ages, nations and people, always valued someone else's genius or talent. The subtle critics and experts in the most minute details and trends of various artistic schools, these esthetes were never and nowhere creative themselves, and it might be because they so subtly and so intensely rated the works of others. This always resulted in a special kind of psychology shared by museum curators, collectors, experts and catalogers, but not by creative artists.

Creativity, even that which produces the finest works of art, is in its essence rather crude. Creativity aims to achieve something, to affirm something, always pushing something aside, rejecting something, breaking something. It clears a place for something new, it thirsts so strongly for newness that it would ignore everything that has previously been created, anything that's old, turning it into nothing in comparison with what it has wrought. The museum curator's psychology is not compatible with creative psychology: one is conservative, the other revolutionary.

What kind of conclusions can we draw about the future of this type of ecclesiastical piety? Our coarse, excruciating and tense life experience turns us towards the Church with all its aches, with all its coarse intensity. To be sure, our life demands creativity, which is capable not only of

reviewing and changing that which is old but to create anew, to respond to new problems, to enter into the novel and frequently crass and traditionless strata. The Church will be swamped with simple people. The Church will be overwhelmed with their problems. The Church must descend to their level. This would seem to seal the fate of the esthetic elite.

But precisely because an elite is unique, precisely because it is capable of formulating its ideas and expressing them and because it considers itself the guardian of all of the Church's treasures and truth, and is incapable of betraying, lowering or changing its own conception of the Church's beauty, it is incapable of self-sacrifice in love. Its understanding of the Church's foundation will fall behind, it will guard with body and soul the Church's gates against invasion by the profane. The crowd will shout: "We are being devoured by sores, the social struggle and hate have poisoned us, our way of life has been corrupted, we don't have answers for the questions of life and death— O Jesus have mercy on us!" But between Christ and the crowd will stand the preservers of Christ's seamless robe and will announce to the crowd that hate and struggle has distorted your faces, your daily labors have destroyed your gift to admire beauty.

But life itself is great beauty which cannot be seen by those who have not been tested by it. Sweet singing, emotional reading, the odor of incense, the beatific semi-dormant sensation wrapped in beauty will cloud over the sorrowful image of Christ, will force the stifling of laments, will force heads to bow, will force hope to be forgotten. For some this comfortable piety is a temporary lullaby; others will be repelled by it, leaving a great chasm between the Church and real life. The esthetic custodians of that piety will guard that chasm in the name of harmony, in the name of rhythm, harmony and beauty. The profane ones, left on the other side, will not try to leap across the chasm because they will be left with pain, struggle, misery, the horrors of life— and they will stop believing that it is possible and necessary to come towards the Church even with such heavy baggage. And then, within that godless and melancholy world, there will arise, if they have not arisen already, false Christs and false prophets, sectarian preachers in various forms and in various manifestations of mediocrity and shallowness, Baptists, Evangelicals, Adventists etc., who will offer to the hungry people some kind of an elementary and simplified message, some substitute for religious life of a rather poor quality, a small measure of good intentions and hysterical elocution. Some will respond to this. They will respond first of all to a basic human concern for their needs, but they will not be able to discern immediately that instead of the true and traditional Orthodox Christianity, they are receiving a questionable, semi-literate hodge-podge of starry-eyed idealism and charlatanism. The opiate will have its effect. And it will further deepen the chasm between the Church and the world. Under the careful protection of the lovers of beauty, under the protection of worldly delusion and detestation, the chasm may be there for ages.

Perhaps those eyes, capable of seeing love, will be able to see how Christ himself comes out, quietly and invisibly, from the sanctuary shielded by a splendid iconostasis. The singing continues to resound, clouds of incense still rise, the faithful are overcome in their ecstatic

contemplation of beauty. But Christ goes out to the porch and mingles with the crowd of the poor, the maimed, the cast off, the embittered, the holy fools. Christ goes to the streets, to prisons, to hospitals and into the shacks. Christ again and again gives his life for his friends.

How can we compare our beauty and our ugliness to his eternal truth and eternal beauty? Doesn't our idea of beauty look ugly compared to his eternal beauty? Or conversely, does he not see his Divine image, a reflection of eternal Glory and eternal Beauty in our ugliness, in our miserable life, in our festering sores, in our crippled souls? He will return to the temples and bring with him all those called to the wedding banquet, gathered from the highways, the poor and the maimed, the prostitutes and the sinners.

The most frightful thing is that it might happen that the guardians of beauty, who study and admire the world's beauty, will not understand and will not respect Christ's beauty, and will not let him inside the temple because he will bring with him the crowd deformed by sin, foolishness, drunkenness, debauchery and hate. Then their singing will dissipate in the air, the clouds of incense will be blown away and Someone will say to them: "I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink. I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me."

Idolatry, which has an affinity for the esthetic type of piety, will bring this about. It has within itself that which should serve only as Christ's outer garment, as an offering of human genius brought lovingly to Christ, but when the Church's splendor, beautiful singing, good order of services, becomes an end in itself, then that displaces Christ himself. When people render service to grandeur itself, it becomes an idol to which human souls are sacrificed— one's own and others. All the world's ugliness, its wounds and agony, is pushed aside and replaced, in order that they may not blemish that correct piety. Even the suffering and death of the Lord himself, his human exhaustion, is replaced by an aura of beauty, calling forth admiration and emotion.

Love is a very dangerous thing. At times it must reach down into the endless depth of the human spirit, it must expose itself to distortion, to a violation of harmony. There is no place for it where discovered and affirmed beauty reigns forever.

The esthetes make demands upon Christ's servants, upon the successors of the Apostles and disciples, upon priests, that they need not follow in the steps of the Apostles and disciples— to heal, to preach, to spread the Lord's love. They demand only one thing: that they be servants of the cult, be priests almost in the pagan meaning of that word. The priest is judged as how much he loves and knows the Ritual, how musical he is, how good is his voice, how coordinated are his movements, etc. It isn't important whether he, as pastor, knows his flock and whether he will leave the ninety nine to find the one lost soul and whether he will rejoice greatly that he has found it.

There is now a sinister phenomenon occurring in Soviet Russia. There, everything is forbidden to the Church— to preach, to teach, to carry out works of charity, to organize anything, to unite

the believers for a common life. One thing only is permitted— to perform Divine services. Is this something the Soviets overlooked? However, could this be a very subtle psychological gambit, based on the fact that Orthodox Divine services, without acts of love, without a deliberate life of holiness, without the possibility of preaching God's Word to sustain the hesitant believers, the newly tonsured— will be helpless in trying to be a witness to Christ's Truth before the secularized and God-deprived humanity. A spiritually hungry person will cross the temple's doorstep and will respond properly to the beauty of the services within it but he will not receive sustenance for his spiritual hunger, because he needs not only beauty but love and answers to all his doubts. This is how the authorities barricaded the doors to the Church. How often does it happen that, as a result of the wants of a particular group of faithful, the doors of the Church are virtually locked, where no secular authority demands it, but where the cold hearts of her children sets it away from the world in the name of a detached, measured, cold, beauty and form. In this case, perhaps it would be better if the Church did not have official permission to conduct Divine services and instead it would gather clandestinely in catacombs. For in having permission only to worship, the Church has no opportunity to bring to the world Christ's love in all phases of the world's life.

Four: Ascetical Piety

The ascetical type of religious life is not unique to Christianity. It existed at all times and in the history of every religion. This shows that it exists as an expression of some essential characteristics of the human psyche. One cannot say that asceticism belongs to Christianity alone— it is a common characteristic of Hinduism and Islam and it existed in ancient paganism. Moreover asceticism is a typical manifestation within a non-religious milieu so characteristic of nineteenth century revolutionary trends. It can be said that the periods in the life of the Church which were not penetrated by asceticism were periods of decay, decline, without talent and generally were flabby. It can also be said that the periods of secular history which lacked the stamp of asceticism were likewise unfruitful and without creative talent. Religious life is always one of asceticism, since it demands sacrifices in the name of higher spiritual values. Parallel with this, in its depths creative life is likewise a way of asceticism since it also demands total sacrifice in the name of higher creative values. It can be said that asceticism never died out within the Church. There were periods when it was dormant, when it was an achievement of solitary souls only. The most common and the most characteristic expression of religiosity was actually anti-ascetical.

With this in mind it seems that it is almost impossible to speak about the ascetical type of piety in conjunction with the other types which are more or less elective, whereas asceticism touches upon the eternal depths of religious life. Aside from such a genuine and eternal asceticism, there is another extraordinary phenomenon about which we must speak and which we must separate from and isolate from the general ascetical trend.

This special ascetical type has its roots not in Christianity but more likely in Eastern religions and it entered Christianity as a kind of a special influence of these religions and transformed the basic understanding about asceticism. The difference is not in the method of carrying out the ascetical ideal in life. These can be various but all these variations can be adapted everywhere and do not characterize a basic difference in their internal structure. The basic differences lie in what motivates the individual to enter upon the path of asceticism. There can be any number of motivations, many of which are, in varying degrees, incompatible with Christianity. There are even motivations which are in radical contradiction to Christianity. We will start with these.

These are specifically characteristic for Hinduism, these are the basics of Yoga. They resound in our days as fundamental principles of all kinds of occult teachings, of Theosophy and Anthroposophy. Their aims are to attain spiritual power. Asceticism is a specific system of psycho-physical exercises which restrains and transfigures a person's normal path and is directed towards the attainment of special attributes of power over the soul and over nature. It is possible, by a determined and repetitious effort, to control one's body. One can achieve tremendous psychic changes within oneself and a mastery over matter and spirit. Just as a gymnast must exercise to achieve dexterity, just as a wrestler must follow a specific regimen to develop his muscular strength, just as a singer must practice scales in order to perfect his voice, so must the ascetic of this type follow specific directions, must exercise, must repeat the same routine over and over, maintain a special diet, sensibly schedule his time, curb his habits, control his life, all this to develop to the maximum those forces with which he has been endowed by nature. The task of such asceticism is determined by the principle of harboring natural benefits, to develop them and to be able to apply them. He doesn't look for any transcendence, he does not expect any kind of supernatural powers. He neither thinks about it nor believes in it. Over him is stretched a tent separating him from the heavens and there is no path beyond that. But he knows that in this circumscribed natural world, not everything is fully utilized, that there are tremendous potentials, that it is possible, within its confines, to attain strength and power over all living and existing things, with only one limited reservation. Nature's powers are immense but even they have their limits. For him there is no other uncircumscribed or limitless source of power. Thus the task of such an occult ascetic is to accumulate, gather, preserve, expand and utilize all natural possibilities. This path can lead to tremendous achievements.

What then can be offered in opposition to such a unique spiritual naturalism? The only thing in this world which is more powerful than this is the teaching about spiritual poverty, about the distribution and the spreading of spiritual strengths, about the utmost impoverishment of the spirit. The only self-determination which is more powerful than this are the words: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." Although these words in themselves determine the whole essence of the Christian soul and the Christian response to the natural human power, it must be noted that the anti-Christian, occult relationships to asceticism have been introduced into our piety by

way of ancient Eastern influences, through Syria and through her particular type of religiosity. One need not overrate this ascetical influence on Christianity but nonetheless, it is still there.

There is another relationship where asceticism as a method for attaining higher spiritual values becomes an end in itself. The individual performs one or another type of ascetical exercises not for the purpose of being freed from something or because they give him something but simply because they are challenging and because they demand an effort. They add nothing to him in the outer world nor urge him onward in his inner path, but he simply feels that he cannot limit himself in any way and only because of this he must perform them. The surmounting of an obstacle as the only goal, an exercise for the sake of exercise is, at best, a working-out of a simple submission to disciplinary challenges and is, of course, a distortion of the ascetic path.

All of the above are trifles when compared with their fundamental conflict with the Christian world view. It concerns the very substances, the basic concepts of the goals of Christian life. This conflict in some way splits the Christian world into two basic feelings for, and understanding of, that world. We are speaking of the soul's salvation. It is without a doubt that the true and genuine Christian life offers the soul's salvation as its fruitful goal. The Church crowns her saints, martyrs, passion-bearers and confessors with the incorruptible crowns of eternal life in the Promised Land. The Heavenly Kingdom is eternal bliss. The Church teaches that there is a struggle involved to attain the Heavenly Kingdom. This is confessed by Christians of all convictions and persuasions. Along with this, the question of the soul's salvation becomes a sword which cuts through the whole of Christianity's spiritual world.

This understanding consists of two radical concepts which lead to different moral laws and to different standards of conduct. It would be difficult to overlook the fact that both concepts have notable and saintly champions, that both views have an indisputable, traditional authority within the Church. There are whole periods when ascetical Christianity was colored by one or the other shade of its understanding. Both schools have their systems, principles and practical rules. Look into the massive volumes of the Philokalia, read the Patericon, listen— even in this day— to sermons about ascetical Christianity. You will see immediately that there is a weighty and profound tradition of the ascetical school. You need only to accept its testaments and to follow their ways. Which are they? What are their teachings?

The person who bears upon himself the stain of Original Sin and who is called to salvation through the Blood of Christ has just that one goal— the salvation of his soul. This goal will determine everything. It determines the struggle against everything that stands in the way of salvation. It defines all means to attain it. The person on earth is, so to say, placed at the beginning of an endless path towards God and everything is either a hindrance or a help along that path. In essence there are two polarities: on the one hand, the eternal Creator of the world, on the other, the Redeemer of my soul. And this miserable soul of mine must strive towards Him. What are the means for passage along this way? The ascetical mortification of one's flesh is the first step. It is prayer and fasting. It is rejection of the values of this world and of

attachment to them. It is obedience, which likewise mortifies sinful will, as fasting mortifies the sinful, passionate flesh.

All actions of the soul, the whole complex of external activities which become the responsibility of that particular person, must be examined from the point of view of obedience. He cannot decline to do this, he is obliged to carry these out conscientiously if they are given to him as obedience. But he need not burden his soul with them constantly, since the soul must be burdened with one thing only— the path towards its salvation. The whole world, its woes, its suffering, labor in all its fields— is a kind of a huge laboratory, a kind of a field of experience, where I carry out my obedience, and humble my will. If obedience demands that I clean out stables, dig for potatoes, look after leprous persons, collect alms for the Church, or preach the teaching of Christ— I must do all these things with the same conscientious and attentive effort, with the same humility and the same detachment, because all these things are tasks and exercises which enable me to curb my will, a difficult and rocky road for the soul seeking salvation. I must constantly exercise virtues and thus I must perform acts of Christian love, but that love must reflect obedience— for we are called and commanded to love— and we must love.

The measure of love is self-evident. It is the measure of all things. While loving I must always remember that the fundamental task of the human soul is to be saved. No matter how love helps me in my salvation, no matter how beneficial it is for me, it must immediately be bridled and ended if it does not enrich but diminishes my spiritual world. Love is the same kind of pious exercise, the same kind of activity, as any other external act. One thing only is important— it is my obedient stance before God, my Deification, my turning towards the full experience of his eternal Good. The world may abide in sin, it can tear itself apart with its own defects— all these are insignificant things when compared to the immovable light of Divine perfection and all this is simply a place, a touchstone so to speak, where I can perfect my good acts. How can I even think that I can give something to the world? I, who am nothing, stained by Original Sin, corrupted by personal vices and sins? My gaze is turned into myself and sees only my own abomination, my own scabs and wounds. One must think about those, one must weep and repent, one must push aside all obstacles to salvation. Where is there time to worry about the woes of others— one does this by carrying out virtuous acts.

That's precisely how it is. In reality, you will not see this immediately, that this is how a person perceives the Christian teaching about love— he is merciful, he visits the sick, he is attentive to human misery, he offers people his love. But if you pay careful attention you will discern that he does this not because of a self-renouncing and sacrificial love, laying down his soul for his friends, but as an ascetical exercise. This is how his own soul is trained to save itself. He knows, according the Apostle's word, that love is the greatest of all, i.e. that beyond all other good acts there must be love— and he will train himself in this, along with other virtues— he will teach himself, he will force himself to love— so long as it is neither devastating nor dangerous. A strange and frightful holiness— or an imitation of holiness— develops as a result.

You will note a genuine and responsible path of real achievement, a refinement, a perfection, but along with this, you will experience a chill, you will sense a limitless spiritual parsimony, a kind of miserliness. Another person, another person's soul, becomes not the object, but a means for the benefit of my own soul. Such an understanding of Christianity is often a trait of strong and manly souls. It can become a temptation for the more precious, more self-sacrificing, for those closer to the Kingdom of God. It becomes more tempting for its limitless purity, for its intensity, in all its false and imposing versions of sanctity. What can be said here? How can one compare his own lukewarm state, his lack of action to this massive and vigorous spirit, striding forward with giant steps? How does one avoid being tempted?

There is only one thing, only one shield against such temptation. These are the words: "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing."

If you measure the true essence of those things by the above criterion, you will begin to sense that such an ascetical rejection of the world is nothing more than a perfection of egoism, an irresponsible and an intolerable act of self-preservation.

And now there will be some strange contrasts, some surprising coincidences. Such a diametrically opposed positing of one's "I" before the world can and does take place in other than ascetical circumstances and even non-religious motivations. Are not the genuine representatives of this world likewise fenced off from the world by an impenetrable wall devoid of love? No matter what their particular concern in life may be, within their conscience there is always that insurmountable chasm between the "I" and the world. The more egotistical, i.e. the more secularized is the person, the further removed he is from the genuine life of the world. Furthermore, the world for him is a kind of an inanimate comfort or a kind of a vacuous trial against which he posits his sole animated "I". In this sense we can see that the opposites do coincide. We see here on both poles an assertion of one's own "I", an assertion of a grasping, greedy and miserly love of one's own possessions, be this possession what one attains by way of an ascetical path or by external material benefits of worldly success. The significant thing here is the obsessive and miserly relationship towards that possession.

What can one say about the role such asceticism can play in the life of the Church? Here, perhaps one must think negatively. The more horrible and sinful is the world, the more passionate is the desire to get away from it, the more difficult it is to love its image, distorted by hate and suffering, the greater the rejection of love. The more difficult the path within the distorted life, the greater the nostalgia for better things. Today the world is unhealthy and even dangerous for the salvation of the ascetic's soul. Clearly prudence demands that one avoid contact with it in order to keep oneself from that danger. However, the fervent intensity of the ascetical spirit which has abided in the human soul throughout all periods of history always

leads individual souls towards those heights where they can go to shake the world's dust from their feet, carrying out man's one worthy task— the task of saving one's own soul.

Here I would like to pause and touch upon some of the unique characteristics of today's world which makes it even more difficult for the person thirsting for ascetical detachment and a zeal for the salvation of one's soul. There is no question about one's inner and outer absence of well-being. There is the threat of war, an extinguishing of the spirit of freedom which tears people apart by revolution and dictatorship, class hatred, a decline of moral principles. One can't imagine any social ills which have not affected today's life. And along with this we are surrounded by a crowd oblivious of the era's tragedy. Along with this we are surrounded by limitless self-satisfaction, a total lack of doubts, physical and spiritual satiety, almost a total surfeit. This is not a feast in the time of plague. A feast during a plague carries its own immense tragedy, it is but one step, one gesture from religious contrition and enlightenment, it is a kind of a courageous despair. Yet if an individual who finds himself there, who wants to offer his love to the world, he will not have any difficulty in finding words, a welcome, an invitation and love.

Today, during the plague, we systematically add up our modest daily profit and in the evening go off to the cinema. There is no talk of a courageous despair because there is no despair— there is only complete satisfaction and complete spiritual peace. There is no need to mention the tragic psychology of today's person. And every fervent prophet, every preacher will face a quandary: on which side of the café table shall he sit, how will he bless today's stock market gains, how will he break through, trample and destroy this sticky, gooey mass surrounding the soul of today's philistine? How will he burn the people's hearts with words? The trouble is, they are covered with a thick, impenetrable, fireproof shield. Provide answers for their doubts? But they have no doubts about anything. Disturb them? But they are satisfied with their modest acts of charity. After all they don't feel worse than anyone else. Paint them pictures of the coming judgement and the eternal beatitude of the righteous? But they don't believe in any of this, and anyway they are completely satisfied with the blessings of this age. But this inertia, this self-satisfaction and the feeling of well-being of today's man is very difficult to take into one's heart and to love because it summons up incredulity rather than pity. This leads to still more reasons for wanting to shake off the dust from one's feet, because it becomes evident that no amount of participation in such a petty life can change anything in it.

Here arises a particularly elevated type of spiritual egocentrism. Alongside it all types of egocentrism likewise arise. A person becomes overburdened by his impotence, the person clearly and attentively becomes conscious of all his sins, all deviations and failures, the person sees the nothingness of his soul and is constantly disturbed by the snakes and scorpions which are nested there. The person repents of his sins but his repentance does not release him from the thought of his nothingness, it is not transfigured in him and he, again and again, returns to the only thing that interests him— the sight of his personal nothingness and personal sinfulness. Not only the cosmos and all of human history, but the individual person's fate, his

suffering, his failures, his joys and his dreams— all fade away and disappear in the light of my downfall, of my sin. The whole world reflects the glow from the fire of my soul. More than that— the whole world somehow burns up in the conflagration of my soul.

But my own understanding of Christianity at that moment demands the deepest analysis of myself, a struggle against my passions, a prayer for my own salvation. Such a person can come up with only one kind of prayer to the Creator of the universe, to the Pantocrator, to the Redeemer of all mankind— a prayer for myself, for my own salvation, for my own mercy. Sometimes this prayer is for absolutely final and frightful gifts. Sometimes the Creator of the universe is asked to respond to my very modest prayerful petitions— I am only asking him for peaceful and undisturbed sleep.

Spiritual egocentrism undermines genuine ascetical conditions. It walls off the person from the universe, it makes of him a spiritual miser— and this miserliness begins to spread and grow quickly, because the person begins to notice that the more he gains, the emptier his soul becomes. This occurs because of a strange law of spiritual life. In it everything that has not been distributed, everything that is saved, everything not lovingly given away, somehow degenerates, burns up. The talent is taken away from the one who buries it and is given to the one who increases his talents. And further accumulation becomes emptier and emptier, leading to aridity, to spiritual numbness, to a complete degeneration and a destruction of one's spiritual tissues. A process of auto-intoxication by spiritual values takes place

Every type of egocentrism always results in self-poisoning and a kind of satiety, to an inability of a proper mastery of material. It can be boldly stated that spiritual egocentrism is completely subject to this law. And this self-poisoning can lead the person to a complete spiritual death.

Perhaps this is the most frightening thing that threatens a person and it is especially frightening because it is difficult to discern, because it unnoticeably undermines genuine spiritual values with false ones, because at times it calls for a rejection of improperly understood profound Christian values without which it is impossible— a rejection of asceticism.

Five: the Evangelical Path

I will now move on to the Evangelical way of spiritual life which is as eternal as is the proclamation of the Good News, always alive within the bosom of the Church, radiant in the faces of saints and at times extending that radiance even to those righteous people outside the Church. (Here one must immediately make a clarification to prevent well-intentioned or deliberate mis-interpretations of the Evangelical way of religious life. Obviously it has no relation to the current Evangelical sectarianism which extracts a selective list of moral precepts from the Gospel, adds to this its own distorted dogma of salvation about being born again, coloring this with a hatred for the Church and now proclaiming this peculiar hodge-podge as the authentic concept of Christ's Evangelical teaching.)

The Evangelical spirit of religious consciousness breathes where it wills, but woe to those ages and to those people upon which he does not rest. And along with this, blessed are those who walk in his paths, even those who know it not.

What is the most characteristic thing about this path? It is a desire to "Christify" all life. To a certain degree this term can be contrasted to that which is understood not only by the term to "Churchify" but by the term "Christianization." To "Churchify" is frequently understood as placing life under a certain rhythm of temple piety, to subordinate one's personal life experiences to the schedule of the cycle of Divine services, to incorporate some specific elements of Churchliness into one's way of life, even referring this to the Church's Rule. But "Christianization" is often understood as simply the correction of the bestial cruelty of man's history with the help of inoculating it with a certain dose of Christian morality. In addition, this also includes the preaching of the Gospel to the whole world.

"Christification" is based on the words, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." The image of God, the icon of Christ, which truly is my real and actual essence, is the only measure of things, the only way which is given to me. Each movement of my soul, each approach to God, to people, to the world, is determined by the suitability of that act for reflecting that image of God which is within me. If I am faced with two choices and I am in doubt, if all human wisdom, experience, and tradition point to one of these, but I feel that Christ would have chosen the other— then all my doubts should immediately disappear and I would choose to follow Christ in spite of all experience, tradition and wisdom to the contrary. But other than an immediate consciousness that Christ is calling me to a definite path, are there any other objective signs which would tell me that I didn't imagine this, that this is not my subjective imagination or my emotional feeling? Yes, there are objective signs.

Christ gave us two commandments: to love God and to love our fellow man. Everything else, even the Beatitudes, are merely elaborations of the two commandments which contain within themselves the totality of Christ's Good News. Furthermore, Christ's earthly life is nothing other than the revelation of the mystery of love towards God and towards man. These are, in effect, not only the true, but the only, measure of things. It is remarkable that their truth is found only in their indissolubility. Love for man alone leads us to the blind alley of anti-Christian humanism and the only way out of it is, at times, to reject man and love towards him in the name all of mankind. But love for God without love for man is condemned: "You hypocrite, how can you love God whom you have not seen, if you hate your brother whom you have seen." Their linkage is not simply a combination of two great truths taken from two spiritual worlds but their linkage is a union of two parts of a single whole.

These commandments are two aspects of a single truth. Destroy either one and you destroy the whole truth. In fact, take away the love for man and you destroy the man (because by not loving him you reject him, you make of him a non-being) and you no longer have a path towards the knowledge of God. God then truly becomes apophatic, only negative signs are

attributed to Him and even these are stated in your negative human expressions. He becomes inaccessible to your human soul because, in rejecting man, you reject humanity and you reject that which is human in your own soul, the very humanity which is the image of God within you, which is your only means to gaze at the Prototype. Needless to say, the human person of Christ taught you in his own human language, describing God's truth in human terms, that God reveals Himself through human concepts. Not loving, not having contact with humanity, we transform ourselves into a kind of a deaf-mute blindness with respect to the Divine as well. In this sense, not only did the Logos-Word-Son of God assume human nature to complete his work of redemption and by this, once and for all, sanctifying it and predestining it for Deification, but the Word of God, as the Good News, as revelation and enlightenment, likewise needed to become incarnate in the body of man's insignificant language. It is with language that people express their feelings, doubts, thoughts, good deeds and sins. In this way human speech, being the symbol of man's interior life, was likewise sanctified and grace-filled, affecting the whole interior life of man.

On the other hand one cannot genuinely love man without loving God. Actually, what can we love in man if we do not discern God's image within him? Without that image what is such love based on? It becomes a kind of a special, monstrous egoism in which everyone else becomes a particular facet of my own self. I love that in him which is compatible with me, which broadens me, which explains and which at times simply amuses and delights me. If however, this is not so, if indeed this is a selfless, non-religious love towards man, then it invariably will move from a specific person with flesh and blood and turns towards the abstract man, towards humanity, even to the concept of humanity and almost always result in the sacrifice of an individual concrete person upon the altar of this abstract idea, the common good, the earthly paradise, etc.

Two Types of Love

There are two types of love in the world: one that takes and one that gives. This is common to all types of love— not only towards man. Each person can love a friend, family, children, scholarship, art, motherland, one's idea, oneself, and even God— from either of these two points of view. Even those types of love which by common acknowledgment are of the highest category can carry this dual character.

Take maternal love for example. A mother can often forget herself, sacrifice herself for her children. This does not as yet warrant recognition as Christian love for her children. One needs to ask the question: what is it that she loves in them? She may love her own reflection, her second youth, an expansion of her own "I" in other "I's" which become separated from the rest of the world's "we." She may love her own flesh and blood that she sees in them, traits of her own character, reflections of her tastes, the continuation of the family. Then it becomes unclear where is the principal difference between the egotistical self-love and a seemingly sacrificial love for her children, between "I" and "we". All this amounts to a passionate love of what is

one's own, which restricts one's vision, forcing one to ignore the rest of the world, what is not one's own.

Such a mother will imagine that the worthiness of her own child is incomparable with the worthiness of other children, that his mishaps and illnesses are more severe than those of others and finally, that at times the well-being and success of other children can be sacrificed for the sake of the well-being and success of one's own. She will think that the whole world (herself included) are called to serve her child, feed him, quench his thirst, train him, make smooth all paths before him, deflect all obstacles and all rivals. This is a symptom of a passionate maternal love.

Only that maternal love is truly Christian which sees in her child a real image of God inherent not only in him but in all people, given to her in trust, as her responsibility, which she must develop and strengthen in him in preparation for the unavoidable life of sacrifice along the Christian path, for that cross-bearing challenge facing all Christians. With this kind of love the mother will be more aware of other children's misfortunes, she will be more attentive towards their neglect. Her relationship with the rest of humanity will be in Christ as the result of the presence of Christian love in her heart. This, of course, is the most radical example.

There is no doubt that the love towards every being is divided into these two types. One may passionately love one's motherland, working to make sure that she develops gloriously and victoriously, overcoming and destroying all her enemies. One can love her in the Christian manner, working to see that the image of Christ's truth is more and more evident within her. One can passionately love knowledge and art, aiming to see oneself expressed in them, to be proud about them. Or one can love them, being conscious of one's service, one's responsibility for the exercise of God's gifts in these spheres.

One can love one's idea of life only because it is one's own— and to oppose it, enviously and jealously, to all other ideas. Even in this one can see the gift granted to me by God in order for me to serve His eternal truth during my earthly sojourn. One can love life itself passionately and sacrificially. One can even reflect upon death in two ways. One can direct two ways of love towards God. One can see Him as the heavenly protector of mine or our earthly desires and passions. The other love will humbly and sacrificially offer one's small human soul into His hands. Other than the appellation— love— other than external similarities, these two expressions of love have nothing in common.

In the light of this Christian love, what must be the ascetical challenge to man, what is this true asceticism which is inevitably called for by the very presence of spiritual life? Its measure is self-denying love for God and for our fellow man. But an asceticism which places one's own soul in the center of things, looking for its salvation, shielding it away from the world, narrowly moving towards a spiritual egocentrism and fearing to diminish oneself even by withholding love— this is not Christian asceticism.

What can be used to measure and define the types of human lives? What are their prototypes, their primary symbols, their boundaries? This is the way of Godmanhood, Christ's path upon the earth. The Word became flesh, God became incarnate, born in a Bethlehem stable. This alone should have been fully sufficient to speak of the boundless, sacrificing, self-denying and self-disparaging love of Christ. Everything else is present in this. The Son of Man humbled His whole self, His whole divinity, His whole Divine nature and His whole Divine hypostasis beneath the arches of the Bethlehem cave. There are neither two Gods nor two Christs— one who abides in blessedness within the bosom of the Holy Trinity and another, who assumed the image of a servant. The Only Son of God, the Logos, became Man, lowering Himself to humanity. His later activity— preaching, miracles, prophesy, healing, enduring hunger and thirst, suffering Pilate's judgement, going the way of the cross to Golgotha and death— all this is the path of His humbled humanity and along with Him the condescension of the Godhead to humanity.

What was Christ's love like? Did it withhold anything? Did it take note of or measure its spiritual gifts? What did it regret, where was it ever stingy? Christ's humanity was spit upon, struck, crucified. Christ's Divinity was fully incarnate to the end in his spit-upon, battered, degraded and crucified Humanity. The Cross— an instrument of shameful death— became a symbol of self-denying love for the world. And at no time nor place— from Bethlehem to Golgotha, neither in sermons nor parables, neither in the miracles performed— did Christ ever give any indication allowing one to think that he does not completely and fully, sacrifice Himself for the world's salvation, that He had some reservation, some Holy of Holiness which He would not want to nor need to offer. He offered His own Holy of Holies, His own Divinity, for the sins of the world, and this is precisely where lies His Divine and perfect love in its fullness.

This is the only conclusion we can come to from the whole of Christ's earthly ministry. But can the power of such love be Divine because God, in offering Himself, remains God, that is, He does not empty himself, does not perish in this fearsome sacrificial dissipation? Human love cannot be completely determined by the laws of Divine love because along this path man can become devastated and lose sight of what is important: the salvation of his soul.

But here one need only to be attentive to what He taught us. He said: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross." Self-denial is important, without which one cannot follow Him, without which there is no Christianity. Withhold nothing, lay aside not only material wealth but also spiritual wealth, changing everything into Christ's love, taking it up as one's cross. He also spoke— not about Himself and not about His perfect love, but about the love which human imperfection can assume. "Greater love has no man than the one who lays down his soul⁽⁴⁾ for his friends." How miserly and greedy it is to understand the word "soul" here as "life". Christ spoke here precisely about the soul, about giving up one's inner life, about the complete and unconditional self-sacrifice as the example of the obligations of Christian love. Here again is no place for the harboring of one's spiritual treasures, here everything is given up.

His disciples likewise followed in His path. This is quite clear, in an almost paradoxical expression by Apostle Paul: "I wanted to be estranged from Christ to see my brothers saved." He said this, having stated that "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me." For him such an estrangement from Christ is an estrangement from life not only in the transient, worldly sense of the word, but from the eternal and incorruptible life of the age to come.

There are enough such examples to let us know where Christianity leads us. Truly, love here does not seek its own, even if this be the salvation of one's own soul. This love takes everything from us, deprives us of everything, as if ravaging us. Where does it lead? To spiritual poverty. In the Beatitudes we are promised blessedness for being poor in spirit. This precept is so far removed from human understanding that some attempt to read the word "spirit" as a later interpolation and explain these words as a call for material poverty and a rejection of earthly benefits. Others almost fall into a fanaticism, understanding this as a call for intellectual poverty, a rejection of thought and of any kind of intellectual substance. How simply and clearly are these words interpreted in the context of other Evangelical texts. The poor in spirit is the one who lays down his soul for his friends, offering this spirit out of love, not withholding his spiritual treasures.

Here the spiritual significance of the monastic vow of renunciation becomes evident. To be sure it relates not only to material renunciation, not only to the elemental absence of avarice. Here we speak about a spiritual renunciation.

What is the opposite of this? What vices are correlative to the virtues of renunciation? There are two, and they are frequently confused in real life. These are stinginess and greed. One can be greedy but at the same time not be stingy and even be extravagant. One can also be stingy but not have a greedy desire to possess what is not one's own. One and the other are equally unacceptable. If it is unacceptable in the material world, it is even less acceptable in the spiritual realm.

Renunciation teaches us not only that we not greedily seek advantages for our soul but that we not be stingy, that we always be extravagant in our love, that we achieve a spiritual nakedness, that our soul holds nothing back, that we not hold back anything sacred and valuable which we would not be ready to give up in Christ's name to those having a need for it.

Spiritual renunciation is the way of holy foolishness, a folly in Christ. It is the opposite of the wisdom of this age. It is the beatitude of those who are poor in spirit. It is the outer limit of love. The sacrifice of one's soul is the turning away from the exclusive focusing upon Christ in the name of one's brothers. It is the casting down of oneself. But this is precisely the genuine Christian way taught to us by every word and every thought of the Gospel.

Why is it that the wisdom of this world not only oppose this commandment of Christ but simply fail to understand it? Because the world at all times lives according to the laws of material nature and is inclined to carry these laws over to the realm of spiritual nature. According to material laws, one must accept that if I gave away a piece of bread, then I became poorer by

one piece of bread. If I gave away a certain sum of money, then I have reduced my funds by that amount. Extending this law, the world thinks that if I give my love, I have become impoverished by that amount of love, and if I give up my soul then I become completely ruined and have nothing left to save.

However, the laws of spiritual life in this realm directly oppose material laws. According to spiritual law, every spiritual treasure given away not only returns to the giver like an unspent ruble but it grows and becomes stronger. He who gives, receives back in return; he who becomes poor, becomes wealthier. We give away our human treasures and in return we receive much greater gifts from God. He who gives away his human soul, in return receives eternal bliss, the Divine gift of possessing the Kingdom of Heaven. How does he receive that gift? In turning away from the exclusive focus upon Christ in a genuine act of self-negation and love, one offers himself to others. If this is indeed an act of Christian love, if this self-negation is genuine, then one meets Christ Himself face to face in the one for whom he offers himself and in that communion he unites with Christ Himself. He obtains anew that from which he separated himself, in love and in a true communion with the Divine.

Thus the mystery of union with man becomes the mystery of union with God. That which was given away returns. The love which was expended never diminishes the source of that love, because the source of love in our heart is Love itself: Christ.

Here we are not speaking about good deeds, not about the love which measures and parcels itself out, which gives away interest but keeps the principal. Here we are speaking about a genuine emptying out, in a partial imitation of how Christ emptied himself by becoming incarnate in humanity. We must likewise empty ourselves completely, becoming, so to speak, incarnate in another human soul, offering to it the full measure of God's image which is contained within ourselves.

It is this, and only this, which was rejected by the wisdom of this world, as a kind of a violation of the world's laws. It is this which made the Cross the symbol of Divine love— a folly for the Greeks and a stumbling block for the Jews, but for us— the only path to salvation. There is not, nor can there be, any doubt that, in giving oneself to another in love— be he someone homeless, sick or incarcerated— in him we will encounter Christ Himself face to face. He spoke about this himself, in his words about the Last Judgement, and about how he will call some to eternal life because they showed Him love in the person of every unfortunate and miserable individual. Others he sends away from Himself because they have hearts without love, because they did not help Him in the face of his suffering human brethren in whom He presented Himself. If we harbor doubts about this on the basis of our every-day experience, then the only reason for these doubts is ourselves, our loveless hearts, our stingy souls, our clumsy will, our lack of faith in His help. One must really be a fool in Christ to carry out this path to its fullness, at the end of which one encounters Christ Himself again and again. In this alone is our all-consuming Christian calling.

This, I believe, is the Evangelical way of piety. However, it would not be correct to think that this has been revealed to us once and for all in the four Gospels and the Epistles. This is constantly being revealed and it abides in the world. It is constantly being fulfilled in the world, and the image of this fulfillment is the Eucharist, the Church's most valuable treasure, its main activity in the world. The Eucharist is the Mystery of self-sacrificing love. In this is its whole sense, all its symbols, all its power. In it Christ is again and again voluntarily buried for the sins of the world, and again and again raises the sins of the world upon the Cross. And He gives Himself— His Body and Blood— for the salvation of the world. Offering Himself as food for the world, communing the world with His Body and Blood, Christ not only saves the world by His sacrifice, but he transforms each person into Himself, into Christ, that is He unites the person with His self-sacrificing love for the world. He takes flesh from the world, he Deifies this human flesh, he offers it for the salvation of the world and unites the world anew with this sacrificed flesh for its salvation and for its participation in this sacrificial offering. Along with Himself and in Himself, Christ offers the world as a sacrifice for the remission of sins, as if demanding from it this sacrifice of love, as the only path towards union with Him, i.e. for salvation. He raises the world upon the Cross. He makes of it a co-participant in His death and glory.

The words of the Eucharist have a significant ring: "Thine own of Thine own we offer unto Thee, in behalf of all and for all." In this sense the Eucharist is the Good News in action. This is the eternally abiding and the eternally accomplishing sacrifice of Christ and of Christ-men for the sins of the world. The earthly flesh is Deified in it and the Divine blends with the earthly flesh. In this sense the Eucharist is the true Divine union. And it isn't strange that in it the path to Divine union is so closely linked with our union with each other. It assumes consent with the exclamation: "Let us love one another so that with one mind we can confess the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one in essence and undivided."

It demands the flesh of this world as the matter of the mystery, it shows us Christ's sacrifice as a sacrifice for mankind, that is, as His union with mankind, it makes us into Christs, i.e. it again and again repeats the great mystery of God meeting man, it again and again makes God incarnate in human flesh. And this takes place in the name of the sacrificial love for man.

If, however, this sacrificial and self-giving love stands at the center of the Church's life, what then are its boundaries, where are the limits of this center? In this sense one can speak of the whole of Christianity as of an eternal offering of a Divine Liturgy beyond church walls. What does this mean? It means that we must offer the Bloodless sacrifice, the sacrifice of self-offering love not only in a specific place, upon the one altar of only one Temple, but that the whole world, in this sense, becomes the one altar of the one Temple— and that we must offer our hearts, under the species of bread and wine, in order that they may be transformed into Christ's love, that He may abide in them, that they may become hearts of Godmanhood, and that He would give these hearts of ours as food for the world, that He would commune the whole world with these sacrificed hearts of ours, in order that we would be one with Him, in order that not we would live but Christ would live in us, becoming incarnate in our flesh, offering

our flesh upon Golgotha's Cross, resurrecting it, offering it as the sacrifice of love for the sins of the world, receiving it from us as a sacrifice of love to Himself. Here indeed Christ is present in every way and in all things. Here is the measureless love of Christ. Here is the only way towards Christmanhood which is revealed to us in the Gospel.

What does all this mean in the worldly, concrete sense? How can this be manifested in every encounter with a person, in order that this encounter may be a real, a genuine encounter between God and man? It means that each time one must give up one's soul to Christ in order that He may offer it for the salvation of that particular person. It means that one unites with that person in Christ's sacrifice, in Christ's flesh. These are the only testaments which we received in Christ's preaching of the Good News and which are confirmed each time during the celebration of the Eucharist. Such is the only genuine path of a Christian and in the light of this all other paths grow dim and hazy. However, one must not judge those who follow other paths which are conditional, non-sacrificing, not demanding an offering of oneself, not revealing the whole mystery of love. On the other hand, one may not be silent about them either. Perhaps at one time it was possible, but not today.

Such frightful times are coming. The world is exhausted from its scabs and wounds. In the depths of its soul it calls out to Christianity, but at the same time it is so far removed from Christianity that it cannot nor dare not see its face in the distortion, humiliation and obscurity. It must be set afire with the flame of Christian love. Christianity must ascend the Cross in the world's behalf, it must make Christ Himself incarnate in it.

May this Cross, eternally raised on high be a folly for the new Greeks and a stumbling block for the new Jews. For us it will become God's power and God's wisdom. Let us who are called to be poor in spirit, to be fools for Christ, to be persecuted and abused—to know that this is the only calling given to us by the persecuted, abused, debased and humiliated Christ. We believe not only in the Promised Land and bliss to come. Now, this very minute, we partake of this bliss, right here in this dejected and despairing world. We are partakers of this bliss whenever, with God's help and providence, we deny ourselves, when we have the strength to offer our soul for our neighbors, when our love is not self seeking.

[end]

Mother Maria Skobtsova died on Good Friday, 1945, in Ravensbruck concentration camp near Berlin. The "crime" of this Orthodox nun and Russian refugee was her effort to rescue Jews and others being pursued by the Nazis in her adopted city, Paris, where in 1932 she had founded a house of hospitality. The following essay was written in 1937 and discovered in 1996 by Helene Klepinin-Arjakovsky in S.B. Pilenko's archive. The Russian text was published in the summer of 1998 the Paris-based journal, *Vestnik*. The copyright of the English text is jointly held by *Vestnik* and the translator, Fr. Alvian Smirensky (smirensk @ global2000.net). Translation as revised July 29, 1998. The complete Russian text is posted on the St. Philaret web site in Moscow at www.glasnet.ru/~stphilaret/

Notes

1. Kneeling on one knee instead on both, was the accepted military stance, eagerly imitated by boys and any other male with even the remotest— real or imagined— connection with the military (Trans.)
2. In Russian, "intelighent." Not necessarily a complimentary term in this context and not synonymous with "intelligent person." (Trans.)
3. Here obviously the author does not have in mind the individual who is careful and conscientious in carrying out the Divine Services properly but rather the pedant who simply insists on a mechanical conformance with the letter of the rubric (Trans.)
4. The Russian, Slavonic and Latin translates the Greek word "psychyn" as "soul (life principle)." The accepted English translation is "life." (Trans.)