

**Christos Yannaras**

## **Jesus Christ**

Chapter 8 of *Elements of Faith*:

*An Introduction to Orthodox Theology*

(T&T Clark: Edinburgh, 1991), pp. 89-120.

### **a. The scandal**

The name “Jesus Christ” cuts the history of mankind in two, but at the same time it has constituted and still constitutes the greatest scandal for human thought. It is God who has become man, and such a union remains incomprehensible to logic and inaccessible in any way whatever to “positive” knowledge.

The Apostle Paul first noted that for the Greeks, at least, the concept of divine-humanity is really “foolishness” (1 Cor 1.23). The Greeks taught people correct reasoning and methodical knowledge, which cannot function without the definition of things. And things, whatever exists, are defined by their essence, that is, by a total of properties which make each thing that exists to be what it is. A flower is a flower since it has a stem and ‘petals and sepals and stamens and a pistil; it cannot be a flower and simultaneously have feet or wings, eyes to see or a voice to speak. And so even God, in order to be God, must be infinite, unlimited, omniscient, omnipotent, life itself and principle of motion; he cannot be God and simultaneously have a material and limited body, need oxygen to breath and food for nourishment, become tired, be sleepy, be grieved, suffer bodily.

The opposition of Greek thought to the concept of divine-humanity was expressed powerfully within the bosom of the Christian Church itself Two very characteristic expressions of this opposition were the heresies of *nestorianism* and *monophysitism* which troubled the Christian world for entire

90

centuries and which never ceased to represent two tendencies or inclinations in the attitude of Christians.

Nestorianism<sup>1</sup> expresses our tendency to see in the person of Jesus Christ a human existence in his essence or nature, to see just simply a man, an individual instantiation of human nature, though endowed by God with special gifts and extraordinary abilities. This tendency survives very widely in that large number of people who speak with respect about Christ, but who recognize in his person merely a great moral teacher, a very important man who founded what is qualitatively the highest religion so far, or a social reformer who led humanity to important ethical accomplishments.

---

<sup>1</sup> Founded by Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople (380-451).

Correspondingly, monophysitism<sup>2</sup> expresses our tendency to see in the person of Jesus Christ only an intervention of God in history, to see just simply the God who seemingly appears as a man, who is, that is, a “shadow” of a man and not man in his nature or essence. And this tendency survives in those people who want to maintain within Christianity a form of philosophical and ethical *dualism*, to maintain, that is, the unbridgeable polarization which accommodates itself so well to human thought between the divine and the human, the spiritual and the material, the eternal and the temporal, the sacred and the profane.

It is characteristic that from his view-point, the psychiatrist Igor Caruso (to whom we referred in the previous chapter) sees revealed in these two heresies two more general tendencies or propensities of human psychology. Each of these, if it is absolutized, leads to that heretical image of life which we call neurosis. Caruso recognizes the historical offspring of such neurotic tendencies in many expressions of an absolutized anthropocentrism or an equally absolutized idealistic interpretation of life and of truth. In fact we can discern a clear nestorianism in the optimism of rationalism, in the “efficiency” of moralism, in the overvaluation of historical criticism, in the mythologizing of human science, in the

91

scientific demythologizing of metaphysics, in the absolutization of politics and organization, in the priority of economic and productive relationships. And we can see the monophysite reaction expressed in puritan idealism, in contempt for the physical man, in distrust for the body and its functions, in the fear of eros and sexual life, in the “de-spiritualization” of structures, in the mythologization of visible authority, in the mysticism of infallible leadership.

Given, then, these antithetical tendencies of human psychology, the language of the Church seeks to fix the boundaries of the truth of her experience of God’s incarnation, His incarnation in the historical person of Jesus Christ. In the Third, Fourth, Sixth and Seventh Ecumenical Councils, over four full centuries, the Church struggled to save the truth of the incarnation of God from its falsification by an intellectual schema and axiomatic “principle”. The “Christ” of the heresies was an ethical example of a perfect man or an abstract idea of a fleshless God. In neither case is the life of men changed in any essential respect, the living body of man remains condemned to dissolve in the ground and the individual or collective “improvements” of human life are a farce, an absurdity, or bare deception.

The Church did not struggle for four full centuries over an abstract metaphysic or to safeguard an ethical example. She did not even struggle for the “soul” of man; she wrestled to save his body. Can the body of man, the flesh and not only the soul, be united with God “without confusion, without change, without division, and without separation”?<sup>3</sup> Can human nature constitute a single event of life together with the divine nature? If yes, then death does not exist. Then, the body is sown in the ground like wheat in order to bear fruit a hundred times over and man can realize the fulness of life.

---

<sup>2</sup> Founded by Eutyches, a priest in Constantinople (378-454).

<sup>3</sup> From the Chalcedonian Definition, the statement of the Fourth Ecumenical Council in 451 A.D. held in the city of Chalcedon.— tr.

She wrestled for four centuries to save the body of man from the absurdity of death, and to declare that the humble stuff of the world, the flesh of the earth and of man, has the possibility of being united with the divine life and the

92

corruptible to be clothed in incorruptibility. It was a struggle and a contest so that our conventional everyday language would be able to signify the dynamics of life revealed by the flesh of the Word. Along with language there are the exercise of the artist to speak the same truth with a brush, not figuratively or symbolically, but impressing on the drawing and in the colour the rendering incorruptible and the glory of human flesh; and the artistic song of the architect who “d6rationalizes” stone and clay and in whose building what cannot be contained is contained, the fleshless is made flesh, and the whole creation and the beauty of creation is justified; and the hymn of the poet and the melody of the composer, an art which subordinates the feelings instead of being subordinated to them, revealing in this submission the secret of life which conquers death.

## **b. Self-emptying**

To the opposition of the Greeks to the possibility of two different natures or essences being united in one single existence, the theology of the Fathers and of the Ecumenical Councils answers: This possibility exists in regard to God and man since both divinity and the humanity have a common mode of existence, the person. We have seen in the preceding that personal otherness and freedom from every natural predetermination, in accordance with the experience of the Church, is God’s mode of existence: the Person precedes the Essence; it hypostasizes the Essence; it makes it to be an hypostasis, a concrete existence. And the image of this divine mode of existence has been imprinted on human nature. Even if it is created and given, even human nature exists only as a personal otherness and a potential for freedom from its createdness— from every natural predetermination. Man was formed not only “in the image”, but also “in the likeness” of God (Gen 1.26): His personal existence constitutes the possibility of man’s attaining at some time the freedom of life which characterizes God himself, that is, eternal life which is not bound by natural limitations. The first Adam refused to realize this potential. God, then, intervened, not in order to

93

compel man to be like Him, but in order to be himself like man, by guiding the personal potential of human nature to the extreme accomplishment of hypostatic union with Divinity— an accomplishment unattainable even for man before the fall.

But God did not unite himself with man straight away in that situation where the potential ending of the journey toward his likeness with God could guide Adam. The historical person of Jesus Christ is a human particular like all the particulars after the fall— a separate particular, limited and conformed in everything to the measure of the createdness of human nature and the limitations of nature. Only in some very few moments, on Mt Tabor, did Christ reveal the real consequence of the union of God with man— the transfiguration of man into “glory”, a manifestation of God. In all the rest of Christ’s life on earth, the existential manifestation of the life of God is “in restraint”. The Church speaks of an “emptying” of God in the person of Christ, of a willing “voiding” or renunciation of every element directly

revelatory of his divinity: “he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, becoming conformed in the body to our humility” (Phil 2.7; 3.21).

This “emptying” of divinity in the person of Christ is a fruit of divine personal freedom, of the freedom of the incarnate Son and Word of God. It does not alter, nor does it affect the real union of the divine and human natures of Christ. Free from every predetermination of Essence or Nature, God can hypostasize in his Person not only his own Being (his Essence or Nature), but also the being of man. And by hypostasizing simultaneously the two natures in one personal hypostasis, he preserves the natural properties of each one, without being subjected to any necessity for the existential realization of these properties: Therefore he can “suppress or empty” the “glory” of his Divinity, as he can raise the weight of his material humanity when he walks on the waters of the lake. If the Person alone is that which hypostasizes Being, then no necessity of nature (divine or human) precedes in order to limit the existential manifestation of personal freedom.

94

### **c. “Without confusion” and “without division”**

God assumes human nature and makes it a participant in his own divine Nature by hypostasizing the common personal mode of existence of the two natures in a single existence, in one person. This one person is the incarnate Word, the second Person of the Holy Trinity “in flesh”, the only Son of the Father “become flesh”. He is Jesus, the Christ of God.

The union of the two natures in Christ is *without confusion* and *without division*. The two natures are not confused; the difference between the two natures is, not eliminated. The Divinity and the humanity each retain their own properties in one undivided existential realization, in the one person of Christ. The Church confesses Christ as perfect God and perfect man— there is no distortion or diminution or falsification either of his human or of his divine being.

But all these formulas are in danger of being understood as abstract concepts, if we ignore the mode by which the person hypostasizes nature (causes it to be a real existence) and, consequently, the union of natures. We must not forget that nature exists only as a personal hypostasis, only “in persons’ . And the person hypostasizes nature, since it summarizes in a single existential event, in the event of its own otherness and freedom, all the energies of its nature: volitional, rational, creative, loving and every other energy. We know nature only as an event which has been given effect, only by means of its energies which are carried and expressed existentially by the person. Nature without energies is only an abstract concept, an insubstantial intelligible “being”. Like the person without a nature (whose energies it hypostasizes existentially), it is merely an abstract “principle”.

The danger that we might understand the union of the two natures in Christ as an abstract theoretical “principle” by reference to “beings” which are simply intelligible and unrelated to any existential realization has been noted by the Church in the case of the heresies known

as *monotheletism* and *monenergism*.<sup>4</sup> This heresy accepts that Christ has two natures, divine and human, but maintains that the union of the two

95

natures results in one personal will and energy of the incarnate God the Word.

But only one will means only one nature, because a second nature which is not given effect as an existential event is in fact non-existent. If Christ had only a divine will and energy, then his human nature is in fact insubstantial; he was himself an existentially inexplicable semblance of man and humanity remained unassumed by the Divinity and unhealed.

For the Church Christ is the person of the incarnate God the word, a person who hypostasizes in a particular existential event both the divine and the human natures. The particular existential event is his personal otherness and freedom which summarizes and manifests the energies of the two natures. The person has priority over the nature (it gives existence and hypostasis to the nature). Personal difference and freedom summarize and manifest the natural energies without being subordinated to them. Thus, Christ's personal freedom is not subordinated to the energies of the two natures, but subordinates them and therefore orders them and reveals "his human will following and not resisting or opposing, but rather submitting to his divine and all-powerful will".<sup>5</sup>

Consequently, the precedence of the divine will in Christ is not a natural necessity; it is not that the divine will is imposed on the human by the force of its natural omnipotence. But this precedence is an accomplishment of Christ's personal freedom and, therefore, the Church proposes it in opposition to the use of freedom which the first Adam made. The first Adam refused to realize life (the personal existence of his nature) in the way of life, as a communion of love and erotic self-transcendence. His personal freedom (a manifestation and management of the natural energies which make up the event of existence) turned the volitional energy of his nature from the way of life to the way of death: He distorted life into individual survival, into an autonomous natural self-existence. And nature, existentially autonomous, is given effect as a necessity of life for its own sake, as an instinctive will for survival, for dominance, for perpetuation. Nature is made

96

autonomous by the personal possibility of life. The natural energies are untied from the freedom of the person (their personal management and expression); they become an existential purpose in themselves, a relentless necessity. Personal existence is given effect subordinate to nature and so to its createdness and, therefore, it results in death—the last natural necessity of the created.

In contrast, the second Adam, Christ, by his personal freedom subordinates the will of his human nature to the will of his divine nature, to the will of real life which is effected as a communion of obedience to the Father, as a self-surrender to His love. The will of Christ's divine nature is the common will of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, the will of life, the freedom of love— a freedom from every necessity and, therefore, synonymous with eternal

---

<sup>4</sup> Sergius, Patriarch of Constantinople (610-638), was the chief representative.

<sup>5</sup> St Gregory Nazianzen, *Theological Orations*, IV, § 12.

life. To this will of freedom which realizes life as self-transcendence and subordination of love, Christ subordinates his natural human will, and with this subordination he brings about healing, the cure of human nature. Human nature is no longer an autonomous necessity of self-preservation; it is not the attempt at self existence by what has been created ending inescapably in death. Now there exists a Person who sums up the energies of human nature in the free realization of life; now human nature shares by means of the will of the Son in the life of the Trinity. Its created character, its materiality, does not impede its hypostatic and existential union with Divinity, since what makes up existence is not the nature in itself and its energies (materiality or spirituality or immateriality), but the person who hypostasizes it.

#### **d. Perfect God and perfect man**

It is astonishing the attention the Church paid to the attempt to mark with exactness of expression the limits of the event which was completed in Christ, so that the union of God with man not be exhausted by that expression nor be supported by categories from conventional logic. Rather, she wished that the formulation of this truth be safeguarded from every misinterpretation which would alter man's capacity to share in

97

the immortalization of what is mortal being completed in the incarnation of the Word.

We speak, then, in principle of the incarnation of God in the person of Christ, of God's becoming man. "We say that God has become man, not that man has become God."<sup>6</sup> When we refer to Christ, we do not define someone who is essentially a man to whom the Divinity has been united; there is no preexistent human hypostasis to which God the Word has been added. But God the Word "has framed" for himself living flesh "from the pure blood of the virgin", being himself the hypostasis which is made incarnate by this extraordinary conception. The assumption of human nature by the Word followed the way in which nature as an existential event is given effect: It has as a beginning the womb of a woman. There is formed and grows the living flesh which reveals the hypostasis or the person.

We speak of the incarnation of the Son and Word of God, of the second Person of the Holy Trinity. This does not mean that the Word acts independently of the other Persons and alone effects the assumption of humanity. The Church recognizes in the event of the incarnation of God the Word a common activity of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. Not that either the Father or the Spirit are in any way made incarnate with the Word. But while the distinction of the divine Hypostases is not removed and only the Hypostasis of the Word assumes human flesh, still the will and activity of the Trinity remains common to them even with respect to the incarnation— the uniqueness of God is preserved, the unity of 'divine life. This single totality of life and will and activity of the Divinity is summed up by Christ in his divine-human hypostasis: "for in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Col 2.9 RSV).

We confess Christ to be perfect God, but also perfect man. The whole Divinity is united in his person with the whole humanity. Every property and every energy of the entire human nature has been assumed by Christ, nothing human has remained outside of this assumption. The initiative for the

---

<sup>6</sup> St John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith*, 111, 47.

assumption is, however, in the one who assumes, who acts *singly* in respect of his hypostasis and *triadically* in respect of will and grace. But what is assumed is not a passive factor in the assumption. God in becoming incarnate does not compel human nature, he does not use nature as a neutral material for realizing his will. Human nature is offered to be assumed by God by a free personal consent—the nature is offered *entirely* and its self-offering is effected *uniquely* (since nature exists and is expressed only personally): It is the consent of the Virgin Mary, the free acceptance on her part of the will of God, which makes possible the meeting of the divine will with the human in the event of the incarnation of the Son and Word. “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Lk 1.38 RSV).

In these words is expressed a stance of self-surrender and self-offering, of acceptance of the will of God, and of absolute trust in his love. No claim to autonomy, no demand for self-protection. Mary offers herself for this conception and pregnancy only out of obedience to God; she disposes her existence in order that his will be done. And so the conception which is accomplished is free from any natural intentionality, free from every necessity and bondage to desire, lust, pleasure, from every instinct of reproduction and perpetuation. The natural energy of motherhood is transformed from an independent biological function into a personal event of free consent, of obedience to God, abandonment to his providence. And it is precisely freedom from natural necessity which shows Mary “even after giving birth to be Virgin”.

We say in the language of the Church that the union of God with man, the incarnation of God the Word is an event “transcending nature”. This means in principle: an event of reciprocal freedom (of God and of man) from every natural predetermination. In the person of the Blessed Virgin and Mother of God “the limits of nature have been defeated”, the presuppositions and necessities which dominate the created in its autonomy are removed by the uncreated. But the Uncreated, in his incarnation from the Virgin, also transcends the mode of the uncreated and begins to exist in the mode of the created; he who is outside of time enters time and he who is

uncontainable is contained and he who is before all ages is an infant and the impalpable assumes the dimension of individuality. For humanity to transcend nature is to be released from the limitations of createdness and the necessities of fallen autonomy. And for Divinity to transcend nature is freedom even from the freedom of unlimited transcendence of every predetermination or need—the event that transcends nature is that God “has come up to nature, that is, he has arrived at that which is less worthy and which he did not possess”.<sup>7</sup> From this double transcendence the only absolute existential event for the Church is revealed and that is the Person of God and his image imprinted on the personal existence of man.

---

<sup>7</sup> Maximus Confessor, *Scholia on the Divine Names*, P.G. 4, 229C.

## e. Theotokos

The Church recognizes in the person of the Blessed Theotokos that creature who— alone within all God’s creation, material and spiritual— attained to the fulness of purpose for which the creation exists, to the fullest possible unity with God, to the fullest realization of the possibilities of life. Her consent to the incarnation of the Son was not only a harmonizing of the human will with the will of God, but a unique existential event of co-inherence of the life of the created and the life of the uncreated: our Lady was counted worthy to share by her natural energy (the energy of will, but also of motherhood) in the common activity of the Divinity, that is in the very life of God. Her physical life, her blood, the biological functioning of her body, was identified with the life given effect in the incarnate hypostasis of God the Word. God the Word lived hypostatically as a part of her body; God lived within her womb with her own flesh and blood; her own natural created energy was identified with the energy of the life of the uncreated.

The Theotokos did not simply “lend” her biological functions to God the Word, because a mother does not “lend” her body to her child, but she builds up his existence with her flesh and her blood just as she forms the “soul” of her child with her

100

nursing, speech, caressing, affection. The Church insists that the Son and Word of God did not simply assume flesh in his incarnation, but a “flesh animated by a reasonable and spiritual soul”,<sup>8</sup> just as is the flesh of every human fetus. Christ assumed human nature with the whole of the energies of body and soul which go to make it up and express it. And the symbol of the Theotokos does not stop at constructing the flesh of Christ, but extends even to what we could call formation of his soul, of his human psychology, since the mother is the source and ground for the articulation of the first mental experiences, of the first awareness, of the first baby-talk, of the progressive entry of the child into the world of names and symbols, the world of people.

To be Mother of God, then, the Virgin Mary identified in her existence the life of the created with the life of the uncreated; she united in her own life the creation with its creator. And so every creature, the entire creation of God, finds in her person the gate of “true life”, the entrance to the fulness of the existential possibilities. “In her all creation rejoices, the company of angels and the race of men”. In the language of the Church’s poetry, every image which includes nature is ascribed to our Lady, in order to exhibit exactly the entire renewal of the created which was accomplished in her person. She is “heaven” and “fertile earth” and “unhewn mountain” and “rock giving drink to those who thirst for life” and “flourishing womb” and “field bringing forth atonement”. And the inimitable “semantics” of orthodox iconography translates the figurative statement of these images at one time in outline and at another in colour. It represents the Theotokos and throne of divinity, either as holding a child or praying, or sweetly kissing the Child, or “reclining” at the Nativity of Christ or at her own falling asleep. She is the new Eve who recapitulates nature, not in that autonomy contrary to nature and in death, but in that participation in the Divinity which

---

<sup>8</sup> St John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith*, 111, 46.

transcends nature and in the realization of eternal life. Because her own will restores the existential “end” and purpose of creation generally, she gives meaning and hope to

101

the “eager longing of creation”. When the faithful seek the intercession of the Theotokos for their salvation, they are not seeking some kind of Juridical mediation, but that their own ineffective will be contained within her own life-giving will, her will which affirms the saving love of the incarnate God.

## **f. Historical co-ordinates**

In assuming human nature, God intervenes in time and places himself in human history. Jesus Christ is an historical person: He is born in a specific time and place, from a mother whose genealogical tree is rooted in and branches from a specific tribe of Israel, the royal family of David. And so he himself is a Hebrew by race, placed in the social conventions of the hellenized world of the Roman empire, subordinate to the ruling political structures in the land of the Hebrews occupied by the Romans.

His own name is a composite of the two languages and traditions which form the historical co-ordinates of his time period and will form the historical flesh of the first Church: *Jesus* is a Hebrew name, *Christ* is a Greek word. With “Jesus” we hellenize the Hebrew “Jeshua”, derived from a verbal root which means “I save”, “I help”. And the word “Christ” is an adjective used as a noun derived from the Greek verb for “I anoint” and means the “one who has been anointed”, he who has received “anointing”. In the Hebrew tradition, anointing with oil or myrrh was the visible sign of elevation to the rank of king or priest, a sign that the one anointed was chosen by God to serve the unity of the people or the relationship of the people with the Lord of Hosts. But the special Christ of God was, within the Scriptures, the expected Messiah and therefore the word “Christ” had become identified conceptually with the word “Messiah”. Combining the proper name “Jesus” with the title of rank “Christ”, the Church indicated the historical person and interpreted the fact which he incarnated.

Luke the Evangelist gives us the chronological reference points for the appearance of John the Baptist’s preaching and consequently of the beginning of Christ’s public life. He specifies the year which the Roman emperor is completing on

102

the throne: “in the fifteenth year of the rule of Tiberius Caesar”. This historical “mark” would be enough for a very exact chronological determination. But Luke persists with the scholasticism of an expert historian and so provides possible controversies about the historicity of Jesus. He states the chronology with reference to the local governors: “Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, Philip his brother tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lusanius being tetrarch of Abilene”. The political rulers are not enough, but he adds as well the chronological definition afforded by the terms of office of the religious rulers of Israel: “while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests” (Lk 3.1-2).

Luke’s sensitivity to exact chronology would be justified many centuries later when the wave of atheism in Europe after the “Renaissance” tried to prove the person of Christ to be mythical and unsubstantial, thereby giving an easy solution to the evaluation of his divine-human hypostasis against the “foolishness” and “scandal”. Successive generations of

investigators in the last centuries have engaged in an extensive and many sided inquiry into the historical credibility of the Gospels: Chronologies, references to persons, officials of the period, places, occurrence of events, came under the scrutiny of philology and historical criticism of the texts. Their verification was sought in the discoveries of the archeological spade. Christian apologetics cited a series of extra-Christian references to the person of Christ which appeared to confirm his intervention in history: Pliny the Younger (c. 112 A.D.), Tacitus (c. 115), Suetonius (c. 120), but also earlier references like the famous *testimonium* of Flavius Josephus (c. 93), the chronicle of the Samaritan, Thallus, written in Rome (a little before or a little after 60), the letter of the Syrian Mara Bar Sarapion (73 A.D.). By various routes, scientific investigation has verified the historicity of the person of Jesus Christ -without interpreting the fact which this Person made incarnate.

In the second "line of defence", western rationalism of the last centuries has invoked the "mythologizing" of the historical person of Christ by the first Christian community. The

103

"logic" of this interpretation was not trivial. We draw almost the whole of our information about the historical person of Jesus Christ from the texts which the first Christian community wrote for itself -Gospels, Acts, Letters of the Apostles. But this information expresses exclusively the idealized proclamation of the person of Christ, his identification with the messianic expectations, the religious pursuits, the missionary intentions of the first Christian community. There must exist, consequently, a difference and distance between the "historical Jesus" and the "Christ of the apostolic proclamation" which the Gospels preserve. In order for us to transcend this distance and to re-establish the historical truth about the person of Jesus, we must cleanse the gospel texts of the probable elements of "idealization" and keep only that information which can be proved historically indisputable. Of course, the problem which arises is: With what criteria will the "cleansing" of the gospel texts be undertaken and how far will it extend? To confront this question in practice has resulted in the creation of a variety of schools, tendencies and methods of interpretation, especially in the Protestant world, where each one confronts a different range of questions about the gospel narrative, arriving sometimes at the entire denial of the "supernatural" element, of the miracles and of the Resurrection of Christ.

All this speculation is, however, a consequence of a particular understanding of knowledge which especially characterizes western-european man and, by extension, the type of man which the western way of life forms. We have spoken in earlier pages about this demand for "positive" knowledge, the search for certainties which every human understanding can possess with assurance, without the uncertainty of controversies. It assumes an individualistic attitude to life, an attitude of individual security, assured self-sufficiency, a culture of the rights of the individual"— that is, a way of life at the extreme opposite of the ecclesial mode of existence. Of course, in preceding pages again, we have noted that the conclusions of the "Positive" sciences as they are called (both physics and historical and anthropological investigations) tend today to a theory of knowledge which proves that "positive", objective

104

and definite knowledge is unattainable. But it is difficult to restrain by theoretical efforts western man's demand to master knowledge individually and to exhaust it within the limits of

his subjective capacities for knowledge. It is difficult because this demand constitutes a fruit of a general attitude and way of life. In contrast to the ecclesial realization of life (life as a dynamic achievement of loving self-transcendence and loving communion) it is literally an heretical understanding of what it is to live and to be true.

However, within these same limits of western theology, many interpreters have proved the historical value of the gospel narratives and the groundlessness of the separation of the “historical Jesus” from the “Christ of the apostolic preaching” with thoroughness as well as with rational arguments. For someone of the western type and attitude, this apologetic assurance of the value of the Gospels has, without anything else, a paedagogical usefulness and can strengthen “weak consciences”. But the strengthening of “weak consciences” by apologetics has a clear and very definite limit: It can prove that the Gospels do not narrate myths, but real events certified by evidence verified many times over. Apologetics cannot, though, interpret the events of the gospel narratives, to bring to light the causes and the purpose of these incidents. No apologetic can certify the divine-humanity of Christ, the victory over death and the renewal of the created which was realized in the historic person of Jesus. And without the foundation of the truth of the incarnation of God and the deification of man, the gospel teaching stays an admirable, but finally utilitarian moralization, and the references to the miracles of Christ represent only an essentially uninterpreted supernatural “paradox”.

### **g. “Source” and “sources”**

In radically disputing the objectified “authority” of the papacy, Protestantism proposed the Bible as the exclusive *source* of Christian truth. The Bible contains the complete truth of the revelation of God in an objective and definitive way. It is a text which makes the word of God directly accessible to us as

105

an objective given without our needing supplements to revelation or intermediaries for faith and the reception of the divine word.

The Roman Catholic “counter-Reformation” objected to this absolutization of the authority of the Bible by Protestantism, proposing that there are two *sources* of Christian truth: the Holy Scripture and the Sacred Tradition. The “college of bishops” expresses and administers the Sacred Tradition, but only by means of its “infallible” head, the Pope of Rome, who is defined as the “visible head of the whole Church” (*visibile caput totius Ecclesiae*). By his sanction, the ecclesial Tradition acquires genuine authority. All those ways by which the revelation of God is formulated and interpreted constitute this Tradition: Ecumenical Councils, opinions of the Fathers, liturgical practice, creeds, rules of life.

Whether the Scripture alone or the Scripture together with the Tradition, it is still a matter of the source or the sources by which the individual derives the truth “from the object”; it is a matter, that is, of the need for objective authority, the need of western man to be assured individually that he possesses an indisputable truth— even if this assurance is achieved by his submission to an idolized schematization of the “infallible”, to the authority of supernatural revelation, or to the authority of science, to the divine inspiration of the texts of Scripture or, later, of the texts of Marx or any other ideology, to the “infallibility” of the Vatican

or to the “infallibility” of Moscow or any other “see”. The history of western man is a dialectic of submission and rebellion, where rebellion means in each case the choice of a different authority, consequently of a new submission, while the goal remains always the same— individual security, the protection of individual certainty about the truth to be believed.

Aside from the blood which was spilled (by the “holy wars”, the “Holy Inquisition”, the tortures which were established as an “investigative method in the trials of heretics”), enough ink was spilled to defend the authority of the Vatican, the “infallibility” of the Pope. Blatant forgeries of history were enlisted: that Peter was the first Bishop of Rome, that he exercised a primacy of power over the other

106

Apostles and subsequently bestowed this power to his successor Bishops of Rome, that Constantine the Great assigned the government of the western Roman state to the Pope with imperial rights (“pseudo-Donation of Constantine”), that very ancient canons treated the Pope as the supreme head of ecclesiastical— and also of political— power (“pseudo-Isidorean Decretals”), that Cyprian already in the 3rd century preached the papal primacy (“pseudo-Cyprian writings”) and many others. But ample ink has been spent as well by Protestants to defend the inspiration of Scripture, the immediate revelation of God within the biblical text alone. It has been maintained that the writers of the Bible were simply passive instruments without their affecting the writing, even by influencing the style or punctuation of the texts; they merely lent their hand writing mechanically what the Holy Spirit dictated to them. And this because only such a rational inspiration could assure supernaturally and without contradiction the infallible authority of the texts and give to the faithful the certainty that the Bible could possess the truth.

Within such a climate, scientific dispute about the historical credibility of the Scriptures or the supports for the Tradition took away the foundation of “faith”, that is, of submission to authority. Western man had to choose between atheism and the emasculation of his reason, or to accept compromise with a censored version of the gospel narrative, stripped of every “supernatural” element, suitable only for morally uplifting use, or even for political exploitation.

The life and practice of the undivided Church, like its historical extension in the theology and spirituality of the Orthodox Churches, knew neither one nor two sources of infallible authority. This does not mean that it disregarded or underestimated the meaning and the authority of the Holy Scripture and the Sacred Tradition. But it refused to separate truth from the realization and experience of the truth, the realization of life “in truth”. Before any formulation, the truth is an *event*: the historical realization of the triadic mode of “real life”. It is the body of Christ, the Church. The event of life which is the Church precedes both Scripture and Tradition— as his divine-human hypostasis precedes the teaching of

107

Christ, and without this hypostasis of life the gospel word remains, perhaps, a wonderful teaching, but unable to save the human race from death.

Scripture and Tradition define the truth and revelation of God to people without exhausting them. The words “truth” and “revelation” do not mean for the Church some “supplement” to our knowledge unattainable by our scientific or other reasonable method; they are not some

“articles of faith” which we must accept without contradiction because they have been given to us in a “supernatural” way, such that no one would dare to dispute them. For the Church, truth and revelation refer to God who reveals himself to people as “real life”. And life cannot be revealed with concepts “about” life, but only as an existential realization accessible to man. God’s mode of being incarnate in an historical person— in the Person of Christ who realizes life free from death— is the truth and revelation of life. Christ is “the way and the truth and the life” (Jn 14.6) and remains “yesterday and today the same” (Heb 13.8) as the way and mode of existence of his body, the Church.

We know, consequently, the truth and revelation not simply by reading the Holy Scripture and the “credal” texts of the Tradition, but we verify these texts with our participation in the Church’s mode of existence, in the way of the triadic prototype of life. We transform our individual approach to the texts into an ecclesial communion of the truth which the texts mark out. Outside of this communion, the ecclesial mode of existence, there exists neither truth nor revelation, but only some religious knowledge better or worse than other analogous knowledge. In order for us to know the word of the Holy Scripture, we must study it incarnate in the ecclesial Body of Christ, in the persons of the saints, of our spiritual fathers who “give us birth” into the life of the ecclesial communion.

The reading of the Holy Scripture in the undivided Church and afterwards in the Orthodox Church constitutes an act of worship: that is, an act of communion of the ecclesial body. We communicate with the word of the Apostles who became “11 witnesses” and “observers” of the “manifestation” of God (they heard and saw and handled his historical revelation), we

108

communicate with them by reading their texts, not as historical information, but accepting their testimony as a confirmation of life and unity of the eucharistic body. Every eucharistic gathering is also a revelation in practice of the gospel word; it is the realization of the life of people, living and dead, according to the model of the triadic unity, beyond corruption and death. This is the Gospel, which we celebrate every time in the Eucharist by accepting the reading of the word of the Apostles as confirmation of our direct experience there.

The gospel word of the Apostles is a word and revelation of Christ, not because Christ dictated it to them by some form of mechanical “inspiration”, but because the Apostles wrote down the relationship of life which they realized with Him, the same relationship of life which constitutes the eucharistic body in unity. They wrote down the word and revelation of this relationship which means as much the events or “signs” which reveal the mode of existence which this union renews as the didactic indication of the limits and presuppositions of God’s union with man.

When the Church in the Eucharist lives the miracle of life freed from every natural necessity, then the miracles of Christ which the gospel narrative recounts are nothing but particular manifestations and details of this miracle itself. If the initial miracle is true— if the created can exist in the mode of the uncreated— then no other miracle is impossible, then “the limits of nature are conquered”, the limitations and necessities which govern the created are lifted. Then “the blind see again, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, deaf hear, the dead are raised” (Lk 7.22). For the Church, the gospel narratives of the miracles of Christ were never apologetic proofs which coerce reason and demand faith in the divine-humanity of Christ. But they were “signs”, signs which point to that event which the Church experiences every

time “in the breaking of the bread”: Life becomes imperishable and the mortal immortal in a manner “most becoming of God”.

109

## **h. Willing death**

Christ unites in his Person the divine and human natures. As God, he is the one “incarnate for us”. As man, he is the one who “has died and risen”. The incarnation of God without the resurrection of man, the removal of death, would be a defective truth, a theophany rather indifferent to man— unrelated in any way with the existential adventure of every man, his life and death.

The Church experiences the mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ as a way and manner which every man assumes who participates in the divine life, immortality and incorruptibility. We speak of a “way” and “manner” and we must try to say, even in the conventional concepts of our everyday language, what we mean.

The death of Christ was a willing death— “he gave himself up” (Eph 5.25). His death was not the unavoidable termination of the created nature, which the existential event tends to bring about with only its own functions, and which is led gradually to the weakening and to the final extinction of its psychosomatic activities. Christ gave himself up to death forsaking totally every tendency and aspiration for physical self-existence of the created and transposed the event of existence and life into a relationship with the Father, into his abandonment to the will of the Father, into the surrender of his “spirit” “into the hands” of the Father.

We die because after the fall it is our created nature which gives existence to our hypostasis or ego; we draw existence from the possibilities or energies of our nature which are not able by themselves to sustain self-existence and the principle of life, because they wear out and end at some point. But the hypostasis of Christ draws existence and life not from the human and created, but from his divine and uncreated nature, which exists as the freedom of the Father’s will and the response of the Son’s love to this will. The birth even of Christ’s bodily individuality is not a result of the autonomous impulse for perpetuation of the created nature— “not from blood, nor from the will of the flesh, nor from the will of a

110

husband, but he is born from God” (cf, Jn 1.13). Consequently his supernatural birth, by the standard of the created, alone was sufficient to assure the freedom of Christ’s flesh from corruption and death.

But the will of God’s love was to transform the necessity of death, which the fall imposed on human nature in general, also into the general possibility of incorruptibility and immortality. Therefore Christ accepts even death willingly, and so he places the final conclusion of man’s rebellion within the freedom of love and obedience to the Father’s will, that is, within the mode of existence of the uncreated. Hereafter everyone can transform the necessity of death into a freedom of self-renunciation from every demand of self-existence; everyone can repeat the movement of Christ, a movement opposite to Adam’s rebellion and repose the possibility of existence no longer in mortal nature, but in the personal relationship with the Father. In the person of Christ, human nature is granted the same relationship of life with

God which the Son has with the Father— and this is the meaning of the “adoption” on which Paul insists (Eph 1.5; Gal 4.5). Now, from the willing “destruction” of life “we save” life (Mt 16.25), “dying with” Christ “we live together with” him (2 Tim 2.11) forever. This is the meaning of the “discipline” which the Church defines as an imitation of the cross of Christ, this is the testimony of the martyrs who remain

examples” for the Church and give significance to its discipline: Life is not biological survival, but a relationship with God, the denial of the demands for life in itself, the realization of existence as a loving communion.

None of this means that for Christ death was exempt from the pain and horror which every human creature has at the uncoupling of this hypostasis from the way in which nature gives effect existentially to this hypostasis. Christ did not simply die, but summarized in his death all the tragedy which can be heaped up by man’s sin, the existential failure and missing the mark of his nature: His fellow people repaid him hatred and death, they who received from him only love and kindness. They killed him with violence and degradation, in the way in which criminals were executed, those who are

111

especially unsuccessful in human society. They put him up between two robbers, like a criminal himself He died with the martyr death of the cross— a death of extreme pain when the body, no longer tolerating to be supported on the wounds of the nails in order to raise the chest and to draw breath, surrenders to suffocation and choking. “And through all these things he showed his love for us.”

### **i. “Ransom” and “redemption”**

The loving self-offering of Christ is a “ransom” for the redemption” of every human death. Already in the time of the first apostolic community, the Church tried to say and to describe the experience of salvation which Christ’s death on the cross had given us. It used the inevitable images and categories of our everyday life, even though our everyday life is subject to the fall. And so in order for us to understand what the Church wants to indicate by means of these images from our fallen experience, we must purify them as much as we can of every individualistic, rationalistic, or utilitarian interpretation, that is from every element that holds life back.

We speak of “adoption”, of “reconciliation”, of “ransom”, of “redemption”, of “justification”. In our everyday life, these images function subject more to the mentality of relationships of transactions, of individual restoration, of subjective security. But the Church with these same concepts intends to indicate the sacrificial love of God for man, the restoration of the created to the life-giving relationship with the uncreated, the renunciation of the existential autonomy of the individual, the drawing of life from loving communion. How we are to construe these images is, then, an important question: will it be with meaning they have in the fallen condition or with the meaning they have in the ecclesial perspective?

A great misconception and distortion of the ecclesial truth about the abolition of death by the Cross of Christ had already appeared in the West by the first centuries and progressively dominated the spiritual climate. Tertullian, Augustine, Anselm, and Thomas Aquinas are the great landmarks in the

formation and imposition of this distortion which was finally proclaimed as an official teaching of the western Church at the Council of Trent (1545-1563). It is a matter of a legalistic interpretation of the biblical images of “ransom” which Christ paid with his death on the cross seeing that “he redeemed” humanity from slavery and subjection to sin and death— an interpretation adapted to the violent experience of man after the fall.

According to this interpretation, man’s sin is a disturbance and violation of the divine “order of justice” and at the same time an offense to the honour and majesty of God. The degree of guilt for this disturbance and offense is measured in proportion to the degree of importance of the one who has been offended— as in human justice. Then the infinite majesty and justice of God demanded an infinite substitute for propitiation. But finite man could not offer such an infinite substitute, even if the whole of humanity were sacrificed to satisfy the divine justice. Therefore, God himself undertook to pay, in the person of his Son, the infinite ransom for the satisfaction of his justice. Christ was punished with the death on the cross in place of sinful humanity and in order that sinful humanity receive expiation. In the teaching of Luther and of Calvin later, it is not simply divine justice, but the *wrath* of God which must be appeased by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

The changes which this theory occasioned in the faith of the Church is literally incalculable. It changed the truth of God by subordinating the freedom of his love to the relentless necessity of an egocentric and savage justice which demanded sadistic satisfaction. The God of the Church, from being a Father and “passionate lover” of mankind, was transformed into an implacable judge and menacing avenger whose justice rejoices (according to the view of Augustine) when it sees the sinners who are being tormented in hell.

The successive waves of atheism in the spiritual life of the West in these last centuries, the repeated outbreaks of liberation from the “sadistic God” of the Roman juridical tradition, is not a phenomenon unrelated to this theory of the “satisfaction of divine justice by Christ’s death on a cross”, just as the

joining of Christian truth to the conscience by an unsurpassed weaving of guilt is not unrelated. This theory changes the ecclesial notion of sin as missing the mark and a failure of mankind; it accepts it as a legal transgression and punishable deviation. It is a cause of egocentric guilt and a ground of egocentric justification as well, because the psychic mechanisms of mankind after the fall still need guilt and often provoke it, seeing that by means of an objective and indisputable “redemption” they achieve the egocentric satisfaction of individual “justification”. The schema “guilt— redemption— justification” is a typical symptom of every “natural religion”, an expression of human psychology which refuses to give up the individualistic version of existence and seeks to defeat death by its own meritorious accomplishments, even strengthened by the exchange value of some transcendent “ransom”.

Thus the Church is transformed into a moralistic religion, serving the individual self-assurance of mankind. The Cross of Christ ceases to incarnate and to reveal the core of the gospel of salvation: The renunciation of life in itself, in order that life be achieved, the acceptance of death if the last existential resistance of individuality is to yield and existence

is to be drawn not from the created nature, but from the personal relationship with God the Father, the giver of life.

If the Cross of Christ became the symbol par excellence of the Church, a sensible expression and manifestation of the faith of Christians, it was not simply in order to recall the passion of the God-man and the price which was paid to the enraged justice of God. Christians impressed the sign of the cross on their bodies, revealing the willing self-renunciation of individual self-sufficiency, the sacrificial offering of their life to the will of the Father. "All visible things need a cross," said St Maximus the Confessor, "and all intelligible things need a tomb."<sup>9</sup> Everything that can be seen, everything which becomes accessible to us by means of individual senses and every knowledge which we acquire by our individual understanding, everything which seems to be subordinated to us

114

thanks to our individual abilities, must be crucified and buried, be put to death as individual certainties and a fortress of the ego, if they are to function as a loving relationship and self-transcendence.

Therefore Christians sign their bodies with the sign of the cross, not only when they pray, but "when they begin any deed whatever";<sup>10</sup> "over bread to be eaten, and over cups from which to drink, on coming in and on going out... when going to bed and when rising again".<sup>11</sup> Every phase and every turn of our everyday life is sealed with the mark of life-giving death, of obedience to the will of the Father, the will of life, because the Cross is not a sign of recollection and emotional or morally instructive reference, but a symbol and manifestation of conformation to Christ's mode of existence, the way of life. As such a symbol revealing the life which constitutes the Church and the hope of the faithful, the cross is impressed finally even on the tombs of those who have fallen asleep, affirming their entry into the "land of the living".

## **j. The Risen One**

Christ rose again on the third day after his burial. Both the biblical testimonies and the church's later iconography and hymnology allude to the resurrection indirectly, one could say, by means of signs like the empty tomb, the angel of God who freed the entrance of the grave, the linen burial clothes "lying by themselves". A particular moment when the dead body of Christ received life again and began to function biologically again is neither specified nor described as in the case of the dead whom Christ himself raised during the period of his public life. But there is the experience and evidence of his bodily appearances after the resurrection: The risen Christ appears to the myrrh-bearing women and to the travellers on the road to Emmaus and to the gathering of the disciples in the upper room in Jerusalem or on the shores of Lake Tiberias.

---

<sup>9</sup> "Chapters on Knowledge", §67 in *Maximus Confessor. Selected Writings*, tr. George C. Berthold (New York et al., 1985). p. 140.

<sup>10</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Ezekiel*, 9.4. P.G. 13, 801A.

<sup>11</sup> St Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, 13.36.

For the experience and certainty of the Church, the resurrection of Christ differs from the resurrections of the dead

115

which he himself realized in his earthly life. To the dead body of Lazarus, or of the son of the widow of Nain, or the daughter of Jairus, the sovereign command of Christ restores the dead functions of life, just as in the cases of other miracles he restored certain specific functions, the sight of the blind or the hearing and speech of the man deaf and dumb or walking to the paralytic— but, the bodies of those raised remained corruptible and mortal. All of them died again at some later time because their bodies which had once been raised were subject, as they were before they were raised, to the consequences of the human fall, to the necessity of corruption and death. The raisings of the dead which are described in the Holy Scripture are, to the human eye, astonishing examples of the power of God, that is, of his freedom from every natural limitation. This power can overturn the laws of nature but cannot change the *mode of existence* of nature. Such a change cannot be imposed from without; it can only be the fruit of personal freedom, an accomplishment of freedom. As we have often emphasized in the previous pages, it is the person who hypostasizes life and existence, and hypostasizes it either as a natural self-sufficiency (subordinating existence to the necessities of the created) or as an event of loving relationship and erotic communion with God (freeing existence from corruption and death). But love and eros are not imposed from without; they are only an achievement of personal freedom.

This achievement of freedom is completed by Christ on the Cross and is manifest existentially in his resurrection. By his obedience to the Father's will even to the point of death, Christ leads his human nature to the perfect renunciation of every demand for existential self-sufficiency, transposing the existence of nature into the relationship of love and freedom of obedience to God. And this nature which draws its existence from the relationship with God does not die because, even though created, it exists now in the manner of the uncreated, not in the manner of the created. Christ's raised body is a material body, a created nature. But it differs from the bodies of other raised people because it exists now in the mode of the uncreated, the mode of freedom from every natural necessity' And so, while it is sensible and tangible, with flesh and bones

116

(Lk 24.30), while it can take nourishment like all other bodies (and the risen Christ eats honey and fish before the eyes of his disciples (Lk 24.42)) and while the marks of the wounds which he received are obvious on him, still this same body enters the upper room "with the doors locked" (Un 20. 1) and vanishes at Emmaus after the breaking of the bread (Lk 24.31) and finally is received into heaven (Mk 16.19; Lk 24.51) enthroning the human "clay" in the glory of the divine life.

The transformation in the mode of existence of Christ's human nature after his resurrection is shown in the Gospels indirectly again: it is not possible to define and describe it with the objective categories which determine our common everyday experiences. It notes an "otherness": he is the well-known "son of man", but "in a different form" (Mk 16.12). Mary Magdalene in the garden with his tomb in it thought him to be a gardener. The two travellers on the road to Emmaus thought him a chance passer-by. The disciples who were fishing in Lake Tiberias heard him asking them for something "good to eat" and did not suspect again

that it was he who was waiting for them on the shore. Everyone discovered him suddenly and self-evidently, but after they had been mistaken at the beginning. What is it that made him different in principle and which had to be transcended in order to recognize him? Certainly something which is not to be said but only experienced. Perhaps if the relationship with him stops at the apparent individual, it will not succeed in recognizing the hypostasis freed from individual self-sufficiency. We do not know and we cannot describe the experience; we can only dare to approach it interpretively from the events which accompany it: The body of the risen Christ is the human nature free from every limitation and every need. It is a human body with flesh and bones, but which does not draw life from its biological functions, but is hypostasized in a real existence thanks to the personal relationship with God which alone constitutes it and gives it life.

117

### **k. The general resurrection**

Christ “raised the Whole race of Adam when he rose from the grave” the whole race, every one. The experiences of individualistic fallen life impede us from understanding this existential relationship of one man with the whole humanity, of one person with the nature in general: How is the entire human nature cut off from the possibility of life in the person of Adam, and how in the person of Christ is the whole nature again “reconstituted” and given life? Our philosophical categories can at least help in understanding this event which is, however, a pivot and foundation for approaching the truth of sin and salvation, a presupposition for finding meaning in the tragedy of history.

„For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive;” “for as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor 15.22, 21 RSV). The Apostle Paul insists on the inclusion of the entire nature in one person, but the way in which or how this is accomplished, he indicates only with images. He speaks of the “dividing wall of hostility” which has been broken down in the flesh of Christ (Eph 2.14), of the “wild olive tree” which has been grafted onto the “cultivated olive tree” (Rom 11. 24). Nevertheless, his insistence on the abolition of death “through death”— to which the Church returns ceaselessly— permits us to articulate an attempt at interpretation, beyond the symbolism of the images: We may say, given the inadequacy of our language, that the personal freedom of Christ, accepting death willingly, leads human nature to the total renunciation of every demand of self-existence. And since each human death is the obligatory and given elimination of the individual’s existential autonomy, the love of God accepts each death in the way in which he accepted the sacrifice of his incarnate Son, as a removal of the resistance of the created to his reception by God.

Thus, in the person of Christ, risen and ascended “in the flesh”, God receives “all flesh”, when he lays down in death the demands of his self-existence; God is united with every one and gives him life. The death which was the “last enemy”

118

(I Cor 15.26) is proved now to be a triumph of the love of God, an entry into life. Therefore, “we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord... we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord... For we know that if the earthly tent we

live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor 5.1-8 RSV).

But first, that “what is mortal may be swallowed up by life” in death (2 Cor 5.4), every willing renunciation by man of his existential autonomy functions for the love of God as a repetition and imitation of the self-renunciation on the cross of the Son, because the flesh itself which we wear, even if it continues to draw existence and life from its biological functions, is the same nature as the flesh of the risen Christ who participates in the life of the Trinity. In his person our common nature has the same relationship with God as the Son has with the Father. And the love of the Father for his incarnate Son is not a sentiment or subjective experience, but a life-giving activity bestowing essence, constitutive of what exists. Therefore, when our individual flesh lays aside unwillingly (in death) or willingly (in baptism, spiritual discipline or martyrdom) the resistance of its self-existence, our created hypostasis is united with the current of life which flows through our nature after its hypostatic union with the Divinity in the person of Christ. just as, then, the love of God created all things “through the Word”, even so “through the incarnate Word” he renews all things and makes them incorruptible.

## I. The “eighth day”

The Church looks for “the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come”. This world of corruption and death will at some point in time complete its existential cycle, not in order to sink down into the non-existence from which it proceeded, but in order that it appear “in another form”— in order that the risen flesh of Christ be disclosed in its general, cosmic dimensions, that the world reveal the flesh of God, “that God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15.28).

119

This will be the “eighth day” of creation: In opposition to the “week which measures time”, the eighth day “indicates the mode of the condition beyond nature and time”.<sup>12</sup> It will be a time no longer of perishable succession, but a perfecting loving relationship which is fulfilled unceasingly in a dynamic transformation “from glory to glory” (2 Cor 3.18). Whatever we say now about this future glory will be only a dim portrait of that reality. “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face” (1 Cor 13.12 RSV).

In the dimensions of the “eighth day”, the reality of the Resurrection, the union of God with “the whole race of Adam” is revealed, his union with all men without exception. But this union, while it will abolish man’s natural distance from God, will not violate, not even then, the freedom of each person. And so, for those who are “worthy”, as St Maximus says, who accept the love of God, the union with Him will be a “divine and inconceivable pleasure”, while for those who are “unworthy”, those who have rejected the possibility of love, it will be “unspeakable grief”.<sup>13</sup> No other quality of life exists on the “eighth day”: love judges, love justifies.

---

<sup>12</sup> Maximus Confessor, *Chapters on Theology* 1.51, P.G. 90, 1101C.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 4.20, P.G. 90,1312C.

Until then we have a foretaste of what we look for within the limits of the Church, the limits of the dynamic “life and life, by transforming individual survival into a loving relationship (with the Eucharist, spiritual discipline, v. Eucharist in common to God, because what makes us exist is his own love— even before the general resurrection the love of God constitutes and gives life to the existence of us all, of the living and the dead: “None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself If we live,

120

we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s” (Rom 14.7-8 RSV).

What is the way in which the hypostasis of the dead, even though a created nature, is given effect and lives before the general resurrection? In what way was the human hypostasis preserved before the incarnation of Christ and his descent among the dead? How was and is the freedom of our personal hypostases expressed after the dissolution of biological individuality? All these questions receive their answer not with logical propositions which do not go beyond the possibilities of empirical verification, but with the movement of our trust and self-surrender to the love of God. Our individual understanding confirms our individual approach to life, the individual way of existence. Faith in God is a change in the mode of existence, and therefore the language of faith is not related to individual comprehension, individual intellectual self-sufficiency. It is a language hymning the love of God, a language invoking his mercy. His own love founds our personal hypostasis “through an excess of passionate love” and the passionate lover will never abandon his beloved to nonexistence. Without recognition and acceptance of this divine love, death is just a shocking and inexplicable absurdity. But on the contrary, for the faithful it is the last and extreme test of their trust and self-surrender to God, to God who “calls into existence the things that do not exist” (Rom 4.17).