CHAPTER THREE

For This Were We Created

When the disciples encountered the risen Lord and began to understand the truth of God that he reveals, and indeed is, they were also confronted with the reverse side of this revelation: the truth that they had abandoned him at the time of his Passion. This is made most clear in the account provided by the Gospel of John. Here, after the Passion, the disciples are back at the lake fishing, as if nothing had happened. Jesus appears, at the break of day, but is only recognized when he directs them to the place that they can find sustenance, and find it in abundance; only then does the beloved disciple say to Peter: "It is the Lord" (Jn 21.4–7). But before Peter could again address Jesus as "Lord," he is confronted by Christ asking him three times, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" (Jn 21.12, 15–17). Peter has to acknowledge his past, in which he denied Christ three times, as part of who he is; he cannot simply return to the more comfortable period before his time as a disciple, and a failed disciple at that. Only in this way can he once again be "Peter," the "rock" (the meaning of the name "Peter" in Greek) and his past failure be brought to a good conclusion in his work as an apostle.

These two episodes are linked in the Gospel of John by its description of their settings: Peter denies Christ while warming himself besides "a charcoal fire" (Jn 18.18, *anthrakia*); likewise, when he professes his love for Christ it is again by "a charcoal fire" (Jn 21.9), one which, together with the meal, was provided for them.[1] This is surely not accidental, for the Gospel of John is otherwise very sparse in such details, but is meant to recall the experience of Isaiah (who saw the glory of Christ and spoke of him, cf. Jn 12.41): after his vision of the enthroned Lord in the heavenly temple, Isaiah cried out, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts," but then saw a seraphim place in his mouth a burning coal (*anthraka*) taken from the altar, with the words, "Behold this has touched your lips, your guilt is taken away and your sins forgiven" (Is 6.1–7). This encounter with the Lord and the subsequent recognition that one is a sinner, but a forgiven sinner, is the basic movement for further theological reflection.

This same movement is evident in the scriptural reports of the preaching of the Resurrection. The Resurrection is always proclaimed to a specific audience; it is not simply a matter of giving information, nor is it proclaimed to a neutral or innocent audience—there are no "uninvolved bystanders" in this. As it is presented in the book of Acts, the apostle Peter begins by addressing the "men of Judaea and all who dwell in Jerusalem," proclaiming that "this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hand of lawless men" (Acts 2.14, 23). Although it is according to the plan and knowledge of God (the movement to theology that we explored in Chapter One: he was not simply put to death, but gave himself up), nevertheless, it was "all those who dwell in Jerusalem" who actually crucified Jesus. It is to these that the apostles, who have now assimilated their own past, proclaim that the crucified Jesus is the exalted Lord, raised from the dead and sitting at (and as) the right hand of God, to which the only response is to repent, be baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2.24–38).

As the apostles continue to proclaim this message, they themselves are arrested and delivered on the following morning to "the rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas . . ." (Acts 4.5–6): they stand, in the name of Jesus, in the very court that condemned Jesus, proclaiming to the same court God's vindication of the one they condemned. In the words of the apostles, Jesus is returned to his judges as their judge. As long as this court, and the whole city, continue to reject their words, continue to judge and condemn, they bring upon themselves the judgment of their victim.

But this is not simply a reversal of roles, with the victim now becoming the judge. Rather, while being a lawless act of violence, this same act is also one that, seen theologically, is encompassed in "the plan and knowledge of God," and so the return of the exalted Lord, who is not merely a victim but the one who gave himself up for the life of the world, is a return which is not presented by the apostles as a threat, but as an invitation for forgiveness and the "times of refreshing" in the presence of the Lord (Acts 3.19). This divine grace is manifest when his betrayers, judges, and those who crucified him, turn to him (repent) to know him as their Savior. He is this because, as Peter affirms, following Isaiah, "when he suffered, he did not threaten" (1 Pet 2.23): in and through the sufferings we inflict, he does not condemn, resist, or exclude; he suffers violence, but never inflicts it—he is the lamb of God who bears the sin of the world (Jn 1.29).

Such suffering is not merely passive—something forced upon Christ—but is voluntarily undertaken and, as such, is creative, making all things new (Rev 21.5).

As the preaching of the Resurrection extends beyond Jerusalem to those abroad, it spreads as a persecuted faith. Persecuting the Church, Saul is told that he is persecuting Jesus himself (Acts 9.5), and is then converted, regaining his sight, receiving the Holy Spirit, and being baptized, through one of the persecuted members of Christ (Acts 9.17). Those who receive the preaching of the apostles, and turn to Christ as their Savior, must also recognize in him *their* victim and themselves as needing the reconciliation that he alone offers. This brings a new depth of meaning to the biblical imagery of God making his own cause the plight of the oppressed and outcast: it is not simply the anonymous poor and weak who are victimized by rich and powerful others or unjust impersonal systems—and whose cause we might take up on behalf of God—but one who has suffered at *our* hands.

The unique, "once for all," nature of the work of God in the crucified and exalted Christ, his creative suffering, means that it is to him that all must turn and continually return: "We are, insistently and relentlessly, in Jerusalem, confronted therefore with a victim who is *our* victim."[2] What is embodied and enacted in Christ, though occurring at a specific historical moment and in a particular context, is nevertheless God's own work and, as such, eternal or timeless. The preaching of his crucifixion and resurrection is not restricted to the first century, any more than the raised Christ is merely a resuscitated human individual limited to historical and geographic boundaries. Rather, now that Christ is with God, and all authority in heaven and earth has been given to him, there is no place or time where he cannot be or cannot work: he is present, even now, to those who turn to him, as the victim of their own sins, and, as such, the one who is able to forgive and bring them into the life of God.

As with the disciples after the Resurrection, the primary locus for this encounter is a meal. The eucharistic celebration is not simply a fellowship meal or a commemoration of a past meal, but one which begins "in the same night in which he was given up": "We do not eucharistically remember a distant meal in Jerusalem, nor even a distant death: we are made 'present to ourselves' as people complicit in the betrayal and death of Jesus and yet still called and accepted, still companions of Christ in the strict sense—those who break bread with Him."[3] Through this recognition we enter into the companionship of the risen Christ—and he offers us a taste of a life not bound to death and hell. Only if we each approach the eucharistic cup as Isaiah received the burning coal, with the confession that I am indeed a sinner and, as the prayer before communion—following the apostle Paul (1 Tim 1.15)—puts it, "the chief of sinners," will we hear the words spoken to Isaiah and now said by the priest after we receive communion, "Behold this has touched your lips, your guilt is taken away and your sins forgiven" (Is 6.7). Only in this way will the eucharistic gifts be for us, as St Ignatius of Antioch describes them, "the medicine of incorruptibility."[4]

CREATION AND SALVATION

That Christ was "delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2.23), so that all could enter into the peace of God in the manner described above, invited later theologians to reflect further on the timeless work of God in Christ, seeing it as the very reason for creation. St Irenaeus of Lyons, at the end of the second century, put it in very striking terms:

> Since he who saves already existed, it was necessary that he who would be saved should come into existence, that the One who saves should not exist in vain.[5]

Such a statement today strikes us as odd. We tend to think in linear, historical terms, beginning with God having brought creation into being, followed by the first human beings, Adam and Eve, using their God-given freedom against their creator and so plunging the world into sin and mortality, a condition in which it languished while the work of salvation was gradually being prepared, culminating in the Incarnation of Christ. If, in this perspective, we affirm the unity of creation and salvation, it would be in the sense of the whole of creation being saved, or as the distinct events of creation and salvation both being fitted together into one salvation history under the control of the one God.

In the framework provided by such an approach, there has been much debate, especially in the renewed dialogue between Eastern and Western Christianity in the past century, regarding the content of the Fall and original sin. This debate has often turned upon the translation of Rom 5.12: "As sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, so death spread to all men, *eph o* all men sinned." If the Greek phrase *eph o* is taken as "in whom," as it was read by some Latin writers, then all human beings have sinned "in Adam" through their seminal identity with him, and his guilt, in turn, is passed down through all generations. If it is translated as "because" (as in the RSV), then it might be taken to imply that Adam's sin has resulted in the spread of mortality, through the fear of which we "were subject to lifelong bondage" (cf. Heb 2.15), a condition which impels each human being to sin. The value of this, it is claimed, has been to argue that though the "cosmic disease" of mortality infects the whole human race, nevertheless, sin remains a personal act, for which each is responsible.[6]

We have become so accustomed to speaking about "the Fall" that we have perhaps forgotten what it is that we are speaking about, or more exactly, *how* it is that we are speaking. In such discussions we tend to treat "the Fall" as if it were a historical event, one which could be correlated, for instance, to the Battle of Troy, and for which an account, some version of a theory of "original sin," needs to be given. We have, moreover, become used to asking counterfactual, hypothetical questions, such as the one which has surfaced with monotonous regularity since Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus, whether Christ would have become incarnate had there been no Fall. As we tend to speak of it, the Fall has resulted in an accidental alteration in the life of creation, resulting solely from free human will, such that St Irenaeus' statement, that we were brought into being in order to be saved, strikes us as confused and confusing, not to mention the fact that he does not even use the vocabulary of "Fall," preferring instead to use "apostasy" in striking terms that we will explore later.

Other Fathers also speak in similarly unsettling ways. St Athanasius, for instance, describes how, after they were created by God in his own image "through his own Word, our Savior Jesus Christ," human beings turned away from contemplating the Word, and he then brings in Adam, "the first of human beings," *as an example* of this.[7] St Maximus the Confessor affirms that the first man, "together with his coming-into-being," misused his God-given capacity for spiritual enjoyment so that his "first movement" was towards the things of sense-perception rather than his Creator, but that this was encompassed in God's overall providence for his creation: there never was a "time," for St Maximus, in which human beings did not stand in need of Christ.[8] In speaking in such ways, did the Fathers simply overlook, or not fully appreciate, what for us seems to be a given, "the Fall," an "event" subsequent to creation itself and the time in paradise, and for which an account needs to be given? Or is there something more, and something radically different, going on here?

We should consider again *how* it is that we speak about "the Fall." It might sound counterintuitive, but the starting point for the notion of "the Fall" is not the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis.[9] Although the Old Testament is well aware of the reality of sin and evil in the world, it does not explain this by referring to Adam and Eve. The writers of the Old Testament were quite capable of referring back to an earlier time for an explanation, as, for instance, when Isaiah says "your first father sinned" (43.27), though here the reference is probably to Jacob. In fact, the deed of Adam and Eve is not described, in Genesis, as "sin" (the term is first used in Gen 4.7, in the Lord's words to Cain), nor with similar words, such as "transgression" or "rebellion." The only period which has something in common with the customary picture of the Fall is the period before the Flood, when "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil . . . the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence" (Gen 6.5, 11). This is the only such statement in the Old Testament, but it is a world which was washed away: from this corrupt world God saved Noah and his kin, who, passing through the world in the ark, enter into a virtually new world (an image which, not surprisingly was taken as a type of baptism, cf. 1 Pet 3.20–21), the world in which we now live.

Moreover, the Old Testament assumes that it is possible not to sin. This is especially clear in the Psalms, where frequently the speaker declares himself to be free from all sin and evil, that he is not one of the many sinners and evildoers. For instance:

> I have kept the ways of the Lord and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all his ordinances were before me, and his statutes I did not put away from me. I was blameless before him, and I kept myself from guilt. Therefore the Lord has recompensed me according to my righteousness. (Ps 18.21–24)

The verses cited by Paul to establish that "all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin" (Rom 3.9ff), all have a greatly restricted scope in their original setting, and indeed, Paul himself, referring to his situation before his conversion, says that he was "blameless with respect to righteousness under the law" (Phil. 3.6).

The same is true in regards to the issue of death. God certainly directed Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, warning that "in the day that you eat of it, you shall die" (Gen 2.17), while the serpent argued with Eve, claiming that "you will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3.4–5). They, of course, ate the fruit, so that their eyes were opened. But they did *not* die, certainly not on that day. Death is mentioned in the punishment of Adam (but not Eve or the serpent), when he is reminded that "you are dust, and unto dust you will return" (Gen 3.19). But the brunt of the punishment lies in his work; not in the work itself, for he was brought into the Garden to till the ground (cf. Gen 2.15), but in this work becoming burdensome, for the ground is now cursed because of him, a source of continuing frustration, bringing sweat to his brow (cf. Gen 3.17–19). Death itself, returning to the dust, is not the punishment;

rather, it is the endless toil and its futility in which Adam now lives, with the earth producing thorns and thistles for him. Death is more the final expression of this futility, returning to the ground from which he is taken. Similarly in the case of Eve, death is not even alluded to, but that which she would have undergone anyway is now made painful (Gen 3.16x@$>).

"In that day" they did not die. The text of Genesis gives no suggestion that Adam and Eve were, prior to this moment, immortal and that "in that day" Adam "died" by becoming mortal. The warning of God is already a warning for mortals: do this, and you will die! When such a warning is given elsewhere in the Old Testament (as in 1 Kings 2.36–46), the execution happens immediately once the deed is known. Nor is it really accurate to interpret Adam's punishment in terms of a rupture in relations between God and human beings, a kind of "spiritual death," for God continues to talk with him and his descendants. Adam and Eve are not presented in Genesis as being immortal beings who by sin fell into mortality, but as mortal beings who had the chance of attaining immortality, yet by that very act failed.

Their privileged position, closer to the source of life than their descendents, is recognized by their longevity, although this is something shared by other figures before the Flood: it is after the Flood, not the expulsion from Eden, that the human life span decreases dramatically. Adam himself lived to be 930 old (Gen 5.5), seventy years short of a thousand, and others for equally long periods, with Methuselah being the longest lived, reaching 969 (cf. Gen 5.6–27); after the flood, however, life span decreased rapidly, with Abraham reaching one hundred and seventy-five years (Gen 25.8) and Moses only one hundred and twenty (Deut 34.7), and soon after seventy years was reckoned to be a full span of life.

Mortality, in fact, seems to be regarded as natural in the Old Testament. There are a couple of exceptions to the normal mortality of humans—Enoch (Gen 5.24) and Elijah (2 Kgs 2)—but they are the exceptions which prove the rule. In the Old Testament, death is not ubiquitously seen as a curse or a punishment for sin. In fact, the death of figures such as Abraham, whose lives are of significance for the unfolding of the narrative, are described in blessed terms: he "breathed his last and died in good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people" (Gen 25.8). Such a death, surrounded by children and their children, and completed with a proper burial, is seen as natural and right, a completion and fulfillment, and, indeed, even grants the perpetuity of the deceased's name: "The days of a good life are numbered, but a good name endures forever" (Sir 41.13).

If it cannot be said that, in the Old Testament, death is always a curse for human beings, neither can it be said that death is the last enemy of God. Certainly the existence of death is not attributed to God in the creation accounts of Genesis, a point affirmed directly in the later Wisdom literature: "God did not create death, nor does he delight in the destruction of the living; for he created all things for being" (Wis 1.13–14). But neither did God create the darkness lying over the face of the deep, needing to be separated from the light (Gen 1.2–4). While God might not have created death, he is certainly prepared to use it. God is "the source of life" (Ps 36.9) and is occasionally described as "the living God" (though only twice in the Psalms, 42.2, 84.2), but he is also prepared to use death: "I kill and I make alive" (Deut 32.39). The psalm used to open every vespers service, which describes the majesty of God's creation (and which may well have been written before the opening chapter of Genesis), inscribes death into the very pattern and rhythm of creation:

> When you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust;
> when you send forth your Spirit, they are created. (Ps 104.29–30)

God is the giver of life, but there seems to be no expectation that this should be a life without limits.

A couple of important qualifications regarding death in the Old Testament need to be made. First, it was not human mortality that was repugnant to the sight of God before the Flood, needing to be washed away, but human wickedness, specifically that "the earth was filled with violence" (Gen 6.11). Likewise, it is not death itself from which the Psalmist requests to be spared, but death at the hands of violent men (cf. Ps 86.14, 140.1, 4). Violent death does not occur at the will of God and, as such, is unnatural and ungodly. The ungodliness of the violent man, and of violence itself, is a theme which runs throughout the Old Testament, and into the New Testament in important ways, as we will see.

Second, the Old Testament does use the term "death" in another, metaphorical or poetic, sense besides that of actual human death. If God stands opposed to the violence of men, what challenges him in return is "death" as an opposing force, seeking to ensnare human beings. For instance:

> The cords of death encompassed me, the torrents of perdition assailed me;
> the cords of Sheol entangled me, the snares of death confronted me. (Ps 18.4–5)

Such language possibly derives from older Ugaritic mythologies describing cosmic battles between God and "death" (the ancient Near-Eastern god Mot).[10] Yet in such passages (which are rare compared to the normal use of the word), the term "death" clearly does not refer to the end of a person's life, but to a metaphysical force opposing God, one which attempts to seize human beings, through sin, sickness, hostility, violence, exhaustion, and so on. The overcoming of this poetic "death" and the violence of the ungodly come together in the prophetic passages describing the hope of, and promise for, peace in the rule of God, perhaps on occasion (though seldom) hinting that even death in its normal sense might be vanquished: "He will swallow up death for ever" (Is 25.8; cf. Hos 13.14).

All that said, however, if the customary Christian understanding of "the Fall" (or at least some version of it) is not there in Genesis, or the Old Testament more generally, it certainly is there in the New Testament, in particular in the letters of the apostle Paul. But it is important here to acknowledge that what the apostle says about Adam's sin is based on his prior conviction that Christ is the savior of all. When Paul was persecuting the Church, he did not think that he stood in need of the Savior that they proclaimed: "as to zeal, a persecutor of the Church, as to righteousness under the law, blameless" (Phil 3.6). At this point, Paul was not waiting for a savior to deliver him from bondage to sin and death; at most the disciples were hoping for a political messiah, one who would restore the kingdom to Israel (cf. Lk 24.21; Acts 1.6). But then Christ confronted his persecutor in such a manner that, when his eyes were opened, he realized that God had acted in Christ to save the whole world, and so the only conclusion he could draw was that the world stood in need of salvation![11]

Put another way, the solution comes first, and then we begin to understand where the problem lies. Christ is, as we saw in the last chapter, the first principle or hypothesis for all Christian theology. In the light of God's action in Christ, the apostle Paul draws the typological parallel: "As sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, so death spread to all men because all men sinned" (Rom 5.12). While different theories have been advanced as to how death and sin spread to all human beings, each with their own strengths and weaknesses, it must never be forgotten that the basis for this claim is Christ's work of salvation.

As we have seen, theology moves from the historical statement, that Jesus Christ was put to death, to the theological affirmation that he gave himself up for the life of the world, so that the apostles can proclaim, in their message of salvation, that this Jesus whom "you crucified and killed by the hand of lawless men" was nevertheless "delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2.23). The apostle Paul takes this theological reflection, in the light of Christ, further, to affirm that even human apostasy, when viewed theologically, is in the hands of God. Realizing that if salvation has come through Christ, and righteousness through faith in Christ and not by the law (as is demonstrated by scripture in the person of Abraham), then the law must have had a different purpose, the apostle concludes, "Scripture consigned all things to sin, that what was promised to faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe" (Gal 3.22): the disciples of Christ had the scriptures and so should have known the one of whom they speak; that they did not convicts them, but also prepares them to receive the mercy of Christ. As such, "sin" itself is now no longer defined in terms of the law, but in terms of being "in Adam" rather than "in Christ," and the whole human race "in Adam," without Christ, can be described in St Augustine's phrase as one "mass of sin," without implying a pessimistic view of humanity: it is the precondition of needing Christ, who comes "to call not the righteous, but the sinners" (Mt 9.13). Not only the giving of the law, but also all the other intervening events and figures described in scripture, can now be seen as part of a "salvation history" leading to Christ, already speaking of him and under his guidance.

When the apostle Paul says, in another place, that "God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all," he concludes by marveling in wonder: "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Rom 11.32–3). Such statements are rarely taken into account in theories of the "Fall" and "original sin," and indeed it would be difficult to do so; there one would be more likely to speak of God consigning all to death once human beings turn away from him. But to do this, would be to envision creation without Christ, a creation in which, had human beings not sinned, there would have been no need for Christ. It would, in short, posit a hypothesis or first principle other than Christ himself, who, as the crucified and exalted Lord, opens the scriptures so that we can see the whole of creation and its history in his light. On this basis, the apostle Paul can view the sinfulness of human beings—and even the very creation of Adam, "a type of the one to come" (Rom 5.14), and the light which shone in darkness (Gen 1.3; 2 Cor 4.6)—within the overall plan of God which culminates in the Passion of his Son. Human weakness, and even death itself, are invested with profound new meaning by being elevated to a properly theological vision. There are no better words to express this than the doxology, the words of praise, opening the Letter to the Ephesians:

> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed

> on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us. For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Eph 1.3–10)

This is “the unsearchable riches of Christ” that the apostle proclaims, enabling all “to see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things,” made known to the angels only through the Church, “the eternal purpose which he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph 3.8–11).

LOOKING BACKWARDS AT CREATION

With this perspective, we can now understand St Irenaeus’ statement that “since he who saves already existed, it was necessary that he who would be saved should come into existence, that the one who saves should not exist in vain.”[12] Viewed in the light of Christ, beginning with the Savior, creation and salvation are not two distinct actions, but the continual process of God’s activity in his handiwork, bringing the creature, when he allows himself to be skillfully fashioned, to the stature of the Savior, by whom and for whom all creation has come into being. This process, as we will explore further, includes human apostasy, the acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil, the experience of sin and death.

Similarly, in presenting an apology for the Cross, demonstrating that “the one who ascended the cross is indeed the Word (*Logos*) of God” so that Christian faith is not irrational (*alogos*), St Athanasius extends this theological reflection to the very being of creation.[13] He affirms, on principle, that creation has been brought into being from nothing, *ex nihilo*, for nothing stands alongside the eternal and omnipotent God, independent of him; but the creation with which he is specifically concerned is that of the cosmos and the human race by the Word of God, “our Savior Jesus Christ.”[14] Moreover, the reason for the Word having come to created being shows us, according to St Athanasius, “that things should not have occurred otherwise than as they are.”[15] Athanasius takes this line of reflection to its limit when he asks, in very strong terms, what God was to do in the face of human apostasy:

> Be silent before such things, and let humans be deceived by demons and be ignorant of God? But then what need would there have been for the human being to have been created in the image from the beginning? . . . And what advantage would there be to God who made him, or what glory would he have, if humans who had been created by him did not honour him, but thought that others had made them?[16]

These are bold words indeed, suggesting that God has a “need” of creation, that it is to his “advantage,” and that he would have no “glory” were it not for his creatures. But rather than imagining God prior to creation, to postulate some kind of primordial lack in God himself—as he exclaims, in a different context, “such is their mythology, for it is no theology, far from it!”[17]—St Athanasius begins with the given fact of the revelation of God in Christ, that which *is*, and, on this basis and in its terms, develops a theology and cosmology in which Jesus Christ is truly the beginning and end, and the glory which he receives and exhibits as the crucified one is the glory which he had with the Father from all eternity—for there is no other glory.

That speaking of “the Fall” begins with the encounter with Christ means that we should not too readily equate “salvation history” with “history” as we generally employ that term—a record of things as they “really happened,” verifiable by other historical records, so constructing our own historical narrative, which we hold to be “true” by a criterion or canon of our own creation. As we have seen, it is *not* in terms of such a “salvation history” that Paul and the disciples of Christ read scripture prior to their encounter with the risen Lord, even if it certainly is thereafter. “Salvation history” is written from the perspective of the Cross, with its totality—creation, human sinfulness, the giving of the law, the preparation, and the work of salvation—simultaneously revealed in and through the proclamation of the crucified and risen Christ, the eternal plan or economy of God.

“Salvation history” certainly unfolds in scripture as a narrative, as we read from the opening verses of Genesis onwards, but reading this narrative as a “salvation history” is nonetheless a statement of how these scriptures appear retrospectively in the light of Christ. Ultimately, “salvation history” is based on, and truly is, a confession about Christ, the one who opens all the books of scripture to show how they speak of him and his Passion, and so, as we now confess, he is the one who has brought creation into being and guided its history, as spoken of in scripture, to its fulfillment in himself. The early iconographic depictions of creation, such as the marvelous mosaic in San Marco, Venice (Plate 2), give a vivid sense of how one can visualize creation coming into being and ordered by Christ, who is identified by the cross in his halo.

Approaching the mystery of Christ in this way, Paul can even speak, as we have seen, in terms of *our* election “before the foundation of the world” and of *our* having been “destined” to this. If such statements were made in any other way than retrospectively, on the basis of the encounter with Christ, it would make God into an arbitrary despot, who before creation decides who will be saved and who will not. But when one begins with the Savior Jesus Christ as the first principle, the hypothesis, what else can one conclude but that it is by him and for him that we have been brought into being?

Encompassing human sinfulness within this theological scope does not, however, remove our own personal responsibility: only when they were confronted with the one they had indeed denied and persecuted, did Peter and Paul know themselves as needing, and being offered, salvation. But the theological vision offered by the mystery of Christ elevates us to a height from which we can see our apostasy and sin as the arena in which God works, effecting a transformation that reveals the glory of God. As we saw in Chapter One, St Gregory of Nyssa affirmed that the power of God is made manifest in that which is external to him: in flesh, in darkness and in death, as Word, Light, and Life.[18] This transcendent, eternal or timeless, power of God enables us to see human sinfulness embraced within the whole scriptural economy of God, in a simultaneous movement of conviction and forgiveness, revealing our fallenness—that we have always stood in need of Christ, called into being by and for him—and yet in the same movement offering us the means by which our brokenness may be healed. In this retrospective perspective, we can speak of the “Fall” as being “blessed,” the *felix culpa*,[19] and see the “curse” of Adam and Eve, as depicted in the San Marco mosaic (Plate 2), as a “blessing,” with Christ making the sign of the cross over his repentant creatures.

So far we have only looked at the Creation and Fall as they appear in the scriptural narrative of “salvation history,” contemplating the whole economy of God, as narrated in scripture, with the Passion of Christ as our first principle, our hypothesis. But the movement that we have been tracing opens out into a universal perspective on the whole of creation and its history. Just as any history is written retrospectively, with the benefit of hindsight and leading to the point from which it was written, so creation itself and the history of the world (or the multitude of histories asserted in today’s world), when viewed from the encounter with Christ, are known as having been always guided by his providence in such a way that it finds its source and fulfillment in him. It does so in a manner that also includes the necessary moment of conviction—the consignment of all to sin and disobedience—to prepare for the reception of the gospel. Speaking of those who were not entrusted with the scriptures, Paul asserts: “What can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made” (Rom 1.19–20). Although this is often taken as implying a possibility of “natural theology,” that is, a knowledge of God apart from his revelation, from “nature” without a proper (theological) interpretation, the conclusion Paul draws is the opposite: “So they are without excuse”—they could have known God, but instead preferred the creature to the Creator (Rom 1.20ff). Again, only retrospectively can we see the power of God in the whole of creation in the form of the cross that, as St Justin Martyr points out, echoed by many others, is found everywhere, even in te banners of the Roman army and the structure of the human face.[20]

We can only speak of creation as having been brought into being by and for its savior Jesus Christ, and its whole history as having been providentially guided by him, from the moment that he is revealed within its history, at the Passion. Theologically speaking, creation and its history begins with the Passion of Christ and from this “once for all” work looks backwards and forwards to see everything in this light, making everything new. Christian cosmology, elaborated as it must be from the perspective of the Cross, sees the Cross as impregnated in the very structure of creation: *stat crux dum volvitur orbis*—the Cross stands, while the earth revolves. The power of God revealed in and through the Cross brought creation into being and sustains it in existence. As St Isaac of Syria commented,

> We do not speak of a power in the Cross that is any different from that through which the worlds came into being, [a power] which is eternal and without beginning and which guides creation all the time without any break, in a divine way and beyond the understanding of all, in accordance with the will of his divinity.[21]

Just as the date of the Passion of Christ in antiquity was considered to be 25 March (which, as we will see in the next chapter, was the basis for calculating the date of his nativity, nine months later), so also in antiquity 25 March was considered to be the very date of creation, the Creation which revolves around the axis of the eternal, immovable Cross.[22] As paradoxical as it might sound, one can say, theologically, that creation and salvation were effected simultaneously on that day, 25 March, ad 33, when Christ gave himself for the life of the world.

The change brought about by the Passion of Christ does indeed make all things new. The disciples no longer read the scriptures in the same way as before; now, in the light of the risen Christ, they read scripture differently, as the “salvation history” that we have been examining. Likewise, as we look more broadly at the whole of creation and its history, we see it in a new light, as having been brought into being by Christ and moving towards him as its fulfillment. Commenting on the change in the reading of scripture brought about by Christ, Origen makes a comment which can be taken more broadly:

> Before the sojourn of Christ, the law and the prophets did not contain the proclamation which belongs to the definition of the gospel, since he who explained the mysteries in them had not yet come. But since the Savior has come and has caused the gospel to be embodied, he has by the gospel made all things as gospel.[23]

He qualifies this statement later on, specifying that while the prophets (including Moses) did indeed know the grace which would be given in Christ, they veiled their message so as not to pre-empt the newness of the gospel.[24] While this would not persuade those who are not already persuaded of and by Christ, for those who have come to know Christ, the only conclusion that can be drawn is that he is indeed the one spoken of by the scriptures and the Lord of all creation and history. Seen, retrospectively, in his light, all is indeed filled with his light and speaks of his gospel.

It was through the encounter with the risen Christ, the one that they had betrayed and persecuted, that the apostles were able to understand the scope of salvation history, that they are fallen, but also offered forgiveness and resurrected life. If we are to follow in their steps, we should not begin with a claim to know ourselves as sinful and then find a savior who corresponds to what we think our problems are. Were we to do this, the end would assuredly be worse than the beginning. We may well sense that we have our own problems, and that all is not right with the world, yet *how* it is that we are sinful and fallen, and that the depth of our brokenness extends to the very core of our being, is not at all clear to us until we encounter Christ, the one who called, and calls, us into being and life. Christ provides the diagnosis of our condition and simultaneously provides the remedy. The proclamation of the crucified and risen Lord brings together all the brokenness of our life, unifying it, as it were, so that it can now be seen as a whole, recapitulated in a single vision, as our own salvation history in which he has led us to himself. Only in this way will we be able to open ourselves to the forgiveness and abundant life offered by the one who has taken our brokenness upon himself, in his broken body, nailing it to his cross—for it is by *his* Cross that this unity has been achieved and by *his* Cross that salvation is offered—and so allow our lives to be transformed, transfigured, resurrected. Salvation history, both that narrated in scripture and that of our own past, shaped now by the apostolic preaching of Christ according to the scriptures, is written upon and from the Cross, the exaltation of Christ.

"MY STRENGTH IS MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS"

"Law came in to increase the trespass; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 5.20–21). This principle does not grant, as the apostle Paul subsequently makes clear, a license to sin. It does, however, allow us to see the wisdom of God at work in our "consignment to sin" (Gal 3.22). The words of Christ to the apostle, that "my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12.9), provided a general principle by which the early Fathers were able to gain further insight into this aspect of the mystery of Christ.

Regarding the role of human apostasy—turning away from God to a life of sin—St Irenaeus points out that this now requires human beings to struggle, if they are to acquire a knowledge of God and to live in a manner befitting such knowledge. But this struggle is itself valuable, for endeavor heightens the appreciation of the gift. Moreover, as the faculty of seeing is desired more by those who know what it is like to be without sight, so also is health prized more by those who know disease, light by contrast with darkness, and life by death.[25] St Irenaeus develops this insight by contrasting two types of knowledge: that gained through experience and that arrived at by opinion. As the tongue learns of bitterness and sweetness only through experience, so also human beings acquire a knowledge of the good through the experience of both good and evil. Through experiencing both, and casting away disobedience through repentance, human beings become ever more tenacious in their obedience to God; but if they try to avoid the knowledge of both of these, they will forget themselves and kill their humanity.[26] Pointing out that the heavenly kingdom is more precious to those who have known the earthly kingdom, and, if they prize it more, so also will they love it more, and loving it the more, they will be more glorified by God, St Irenaeus concludes:

> God therefore has borne all these things for our sake, in order that, having been instructed through all things, henceforth we may be scrupulous in all things and, having been taught how to love God rationally [*logikōs*], remain in his love: God exhibiting patience in regard to the apostasy of human beings, and human beings being taught by it, as the prophet says: "Your own apostasy shall educate you" [Jer 2.19].

Irenaeus immediately continues by placing this particular action of God within the economy as a whole:

> God, thus, determining all things beforehand for the perfection of human beings, and towards the realization and manifestation of his economies, that goodness may be displayed and righteousness accomplished, and that the Church may be "conformed to the image of his Son" [Rom 8.29], and that, finally, the human being may be brought to such maturity as to see and comprehend God.[27]

So, for St Irenaeus, the aim of the whole economy, including the apostasy, is twofold: first, that human beings may be brought to perfection, to a maturity in which they can truly know God; and, second, this perfecting of the creature at the same time manifests the workings of God, displaying his goodness and justice.

St Irenaeus also includes death within this economy, as part of the knowledge of good and evil acquired by human beings in their growth towards maturity and in so doing provides a further insight into the educative role of the struggle in which human beings, from the beginning, find themselves. Approaching the subject from a different angle, as a rhetorical argument, he argues that God could have created human beings perfect or as "gods" from the beginning, for all things are possible to him. However, created things, by virtue of being created, are necessarily inferior to the One who created them, and so fall short of the perfect: they are of a later date, infantile (St Irenaeus depicts Adam and Eve as infants), and so unaccustomed to, and unexercised in, perfect conduct. Yet, as it is possible for a mother to give an infant solid food, so also God could have made human beings "perfect" from the beginning, but they, still in their infancy, could not have received this perfection.[28] Not that the omnipotence of God is restricted by the nature of that on which he is working, nor that the infantile state, despite only beginning to grow towards its full perfection, is itself imperfect. As a creature, human beings can never be uncreated, can never cease existing in the mode proper to a creature, that is, *being created*. But the aim of this creating or fashioning of human beings is that they should come to be ever more fully in the image and likeness of the uncreated God. There can be, for human beings, no end to this process; they can never become uncreated. Their perfection lies, instead, in their continual submission to the creative activity of God, through which they are brought to share in the glory of the Uncreated.[29] Finally, Irenaeus concludes by sketching the whole economy in a few brief strokes:

> It was necessary, first, for nature to be manifest; after which, for what was mortal to be conquered and swallowed up by immortality, and the corruptible by incorruptibility, and for the human being to be made in the image and likeness of God, having received the knowledge of good and evil.[30]

Creation and salvation, the appearance of human nature and the vanquishing of mortality by immortality, belong to the same economy, the purposeful arrangement, in which the acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil has its place, contributing to the realization, in the end, of the original divine intention of fashioning the creature made from mud into the image and likeness of God.

For further consideration of the role specifically of death within the economy of God, we need to attend to the distinction, discussed earlier in this chapter, between the two ways in which the word "death" can be used: the actual death of human beings, returning to the dust from which they were created, and the poetic or metaphorical "death" as a powerful force opposing God and holding us in its bondage. It is this form of death, rather than death itself, that is of crucial importance in understanding the value of Christ's death in the New Testament: Christ did not simply die, he died a death on the cross (Phil. 2.8). Similarly, the very structure of the Gospels—the length and details given to the passion narratives—indicate that what is of importance is not simply that Christ died, but the *way* in which he died, as an innocent victim, something which is intimately linked, as we have now seen, with Christ's role as Savior.

While these two senses of the word "death" are, with a couple of possible exceptions, held apart in the Old Testament, they are brought together explicitly in the apostolic proclamation that the crucified—the innocent victim of a violent death—has been raised bodily from the dead. Not only does Christ's manner of death, as the innocent victim, enable our liberation from enslavement to death, in its metaphorical sense–something looked upon as unnatural from the beginning—but his bodily death and resurrection now establishes the unnaturalness of our actual bodily death, and therefore the hope of our bodily resurrection. These two important aspects are intimately related, though we must treat them separately to investigate the fullness of this mystery.

Our liberation from death taken in a metaphorical sense is made clear in the New Testament, especially in the passages of the apostle Paul describing baptism. How can we continue in sin, he asks, now that we have died to sin?

> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. For we know

> that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Rom 6.3–11)

While Christ has already died, we are to *consider* ourselves as dead to sin and alive to God: "Do not yield your members to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness" (Rom 6.13). Yet we are still under death, and so, while our death to sin in baptism is spoken of as an event in the past, our life with Christ is still in the future: if we have died with Christ, through baptism, we shall also live with him.

The bondage in which we are held captive by death and the devil is described clearly in the Letter to the Hebrews, which also, more than any other New Testament text, emphasizes the suffering of Christ as the innocent victim. It is the purpose of Jesus, it says

> that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage. . . . Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in all respects, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted. (Heb 2.24–28)

We have been delivered from the bondage in which we were held captive, by the fear of death, through one who has suffered as we suffer, yet remained faithful, when we turn to him as our own victim. Through this recognition, we enter into the companionship of the risen Christ, and he offers us a taste of a life, a resurrected life, not bound to death and hell—"the medicine of incorruptibility," in St Ignatius' words.[31]

There is an intimate unity and intrinsic connection between the Resurrection of Christ and our own resurrection, both from our metaphorical death and also our eventual bodily death. The Resurrection of Christ was not depicted in early Christian art until the end of the seventh century. The triumph of Christ over death was represented instead by the depiction of the triumphant, living Lord on the cross, the empty tomb, and his appearances to the myrrh-bearing women (e.g., see Plate 1, discussed in Chapter One). Only later, perhaps in the ninth century, as images of the Resurrection became more prevalent, did the conservative iconographic tradition produce an image of the dead Christ on the cross. But the icon of the Resurrection of Christ, the *Anastasis* (Plate 3), does not actually depict Christ's bodily rising out of the tomb. It seems, instead, to portray Christ's descent into the underworld, a feature that has often led to it being misleadingly called "Descent into Hell" or the "Harrowing of Hell"; misleadingly, that is, because the scene depicted therein is consistently called, either on the icon itself or verbal descriptions, the *Anastasis*. The resurrection it speaks of is in fact that of Adam or the human race "in Adam" effected by Christ's Passion. While iconographers did not hesitate to depict other major events in the life of Christ—his Baptism, Transfiguration, Entry into Jerusalem—their treatment of the Resurrection, proceeds otherwise, portraying the effect of Christ's Passion, destroying of death by death, giving life to those in death. This is, moreover, something that has not yet been fully completed: Adam is in the process of being pulled out of the realm of death.[32]

The early Fathers similarly spoke in striking terms of the connection between the Resurrection of Christ and our resurrection from death, metaphorical death in the present and physical death in the end. St Ignatius, for instance, directs us to "give heed to the prophets and especially to the gospel, in which the Passion has been revealed to us and the resurrection has been accomplished":[33] the Resurrection is "accomplished" in the gospel proclamation, as we are now freed from bondage to death by dying, in Christ, to sin and its tyranny. In like manner, St Athanasius, in his classic work *On the Incarnation*, after speaking at length about the Passion of Christ, does not even mention the resurrectional appearances of Christ as they are narrated in the Gospels (and on which we today tend to rely for confirmation that Christ did indeed rise from the dead). Rather he turns to present-day Christians, those who "take up the faith of the Cross" and "tread death underfoot, no longer fearing it, but with the sign of the cross and by faith in Christ trample on it as a dead thing," preparing, by ascetic exercises to bear witness to Christ even in their own death.[34] It is not the mark of a dead man, he continues, to persuade others to believe in him, to persuade them to live a righteous life and despise the idols they formerly worshipped: it is Christians themselves who are the witnesses of Christ's resurrection. This liberation from sin and the bondage of death is described by St John Climacus as "the resurrection of the soul prior to that of the body," manifest in those who have attained a dispassionate state, no longer swayed by the things of this world or the movements of our soul and body, something to which we will return in the final chapter.[35]

So far, we have spoken only spoken of "death" in the metaphorical sense, as the power of bondage from which we have been liberated by Christ's own Passion, a liberation which is also a manifestation of his victory over death. But this victory was not only over a "metaphorical" death, for he rose bodily from the dead to sit with the Father. This victory over both aspects of death enables us to see a further aspect to the mystery of Christ in our actual bodily death: the sowing of the mortal body in the ground so that, dying, it may rise as a spiritual body (1 Cor 15.35–57). There may well be a sense in which, even now, we might regard death as "natural," and count as blessed a death in good circumstances, as we saw it in the Old Testament considered by itself. It might be argued that this view would be a pastoral position to adopt when dealing with the bereaved. However, one finds a more categorical position in the words of St John of Damascus sung at the funeral service:

> I weep and I wail when I think upon death, and behold our beauty, fashioned after the image of God, lying in the tomb, disfigured, dishonored, bereft of form. O marvel! What is this mystery which befalls us? Why have we been given over unto corruption, and why have we been wedded to death? Of a truth, as it is written, by the command of God, who gives the departed rest.[36]

Death, and especially a good death, might, in one sense, be a natural end to life, but in a Christian perspective, it is always a catastrophe. Yet even here, in the midst of this catastrophe, as St John hints, there is a reason behind it: we are given over to death, by the command of God, and this is a marvel and a "mystery," the Greek word which in liturgical contexts is usually translated as "sacrament."

After baptism, being united with Christ "in the likeness of his death," Christians are called to bear witness to Christ's own resurrection by themselves dying to sin (a metaphorical death) in the confidence that they shall also be united with Christ in the resurrection in the age to come (cf. Rom 6.5). The Holy Spirit has been bestowed in Christ, and dwells in Christians now, preparing them for the resurrection: "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you" (Rom 8.11). The resurrectional life of Christ begins, this side of the grave, in the life of a continual dying to this world, this world, that is, as it stands opposed to God. While "the resurrection of the soul" may be attained in this world, becoming a true witness to Christ's own resurrection, the body itself must still die before it is raised again.

There are various aspects to this "mystery" of bodily death. The first is what we learn from the experience of death itself, in its educative role. Until we lie with our bodies decomposing in the grave—the dust that we are returning to the dust from which we were created—our temptation will always be to think that we have life in and from ourselves. Even if we practice "dying daily," dying to sin and that which stands opposed to God, we can only express this as *my* action of dying! But when we are finally dead in the ground, then it is, to paraphrase the apostle Paul, no longer I who works, but God who works in me—then God can finally be the creator.

It is precisely this educative role of death that St Irenaeus, beginning with the Passion of Christ and viewing "salvation history" in his light, explored with great insight. In a manner similar to his treatment of the apostasy, considered above, St Irenaeus asserts that God was patient with the human apostasy, as he foresaw the victory which would be granted to the human race through the Word: as strength is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor 12.9), God demonstrates his goodness and magnificent power in and through our own weakness and mortality. St Irenaeus gives as an example of this Jonah, who, by God's arrangement, was swallowed up by the whale, not that he should thus perish, but that, having been cast out, he might be more obedient to God, and so glorify more the God who had saved him. So also, Irenaeus continues:

> From the beginning, God did bear human beings to be swallowed up by the great whale, who was the author of transgression, not that they should perish altogether when so engulfed, but arranging in advance the finding of salvation, which was accomplished by the Word, through the "sign of Jonah" [Mt 12.39–40], for those who held the same opinion as Jonah regarding the Lord, and who confessed, and said, "I am a servant of the Lord, and I worship the Lord God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land" [Jonah 1.9], that human beings, receiving an unhoped-for salvation from God, might rise from the dead, and glorify God, and repeat, "I cried to the Lord my God in my affliction, and he heard me from the belly of Hades" [Jonah 2.2], and that they might always continue glorifying God, and giving thanks without ceasing for that salvation which they have obtained from him, "that no flesh should glory in the Lord's presence" [1 Cor 1.29], and that human beings should never adopt an opposite opinion with regard to God, supposing that the incorruptibility which surrounds them is their own by nature, nor, by not holding the truth, should boast with empty superciliousness, as if they were by nature like to God.[37]

So, for St Irenaeus, God has borne the human race, from the beginning, while it was swallowed up by the whale. Although God did not actually create the human race *in* this condition, there was, nevertheless, no period of time before which human beings were not engulfed: there is, for St Irenaeus, no lost golden age of primordial perfection. This is not to deny that human beings themselves transgressed or apostatized, nor that there was an "author of transgression." The temptation for human beings is to think that the life they have is theirs by nature. Likewise, the devil's temptation is to offer what he could not give: Adam and Eve were beguiled under "the pretext of immortality."[38] Thus death is the result of human apostasy, turning away from the one and only Source of life; and at the same time it is the expression of the devil's dominion over the human race. But it is also embraced within the divine economy: when viewed from the perspective of the salvation granted by Christ through "the sign of Jonah," we can see that, as it was God himself who appointed the whale to swallow up Jonah, so also the engulfing of the human race by the great whale was "borne" by God in his arrangement, his economy, which culminates in the finding of salvation.

As the newly created humans were inexperienced, so they immediately gave way to temptation. But just as Jonah was swallowed by the whale that he might learn the true attitude to take with respect to God, so also, the human race was engulfed from the beginning as part of the divine economy, as an educational process, instructing us in the proper attitude towards God, culminating in an unhoped-for, but nonetheless divinely foreseen salvation, accomplished by the Word through the "sign of Jonah." This education, the whole of the divine economy, thus acquaints humans both with their own weakness, their total dependence on God, and also, and at the same time, with the strength and graciousness of God. As St Irenaeus continues:

> Such then was the patience of God, that human beings, passing through all things and acquiring knowledge of death, then attaining to the resurrection from the dead, and learning by experience from whence they have been delivered, may thus always give thanks to the Lord, having received from him the gift of incorruptibility, and may love him the more, for "he to whom more is forgiven, loves more" [cf. Lk 7.42–3], and may themselves know how mortal and weak they are, but also understand that God is so immortal and powerful as to bestow immortality on the mortal and eternity on the temporal, and that they may also know the other powers of God made manifest in themselves, and, being taught by them, may think of God in accordance with the greatness of God. For the glory of the human being is God, while the vessel of the workings of God, and of all his wisdom and power is the human being.[39]

God was thus patient while humans learned by experience their own weakness and death in their ungrateful apostasy, knowing that having passed through this experience, and having an unhoped-for salvation bestowed upon them, they would remain ever more thankful to God, willing to accept from him the eternal existence which he alone can give. In this way, human beings become fully acquainted with the power of God: reduced to nothing, to dust in the earth, human beings come to know their total dependency upon God, allowing God to work in and through them, to deploy his power in them as the recipient of all his work. Both dimensions of this economy—the engulfing of man, and the salvation wrought by the Word—are simultaneously represented by Jonah, a sign of both the transgressing human race and its Savior. In this way, human death has an educational role to play within the divine economy, enabling humans to experience to the uttermost their weakness and mortality in their apostasy from God, the only Source of life, so that they might thereafter hold ever more firmly to God.

Death plays a further role in this educational economy of God, as it is also the means of limiting the reign of sin. If death has come into the world as a result of sin (Rom 5.12), in reverse, death can also be seen as a restriction of sin: death cuts sin short, lest sin be immortal and as such unable to be healed. Viewed in this way, death can be seen not so much as an arbitrary penalty imposed for disobedience, nor as a consequence of human transgression—their turning away from the Source of life and so becoming mortal—but as a limitation on sin and death itself. As such, subjection to death can be seen as an act of mercy: it puts an end to sin through the resolution of man into the earth. Theophilus of Antioch, in the latter part of the second century, first arrives at this insight:

> It was not that the tree of knowledge contained anything evil, but that through disobedience man acquired pain, suffering and sorrow, and finally fell victim to death. And in so doing, God conferred a great benefit upon the human being. He did not let him remain for ever in a state of sin, so that through this punishment he might expiate his sin in a fixed period of time and after chastisement might later be recalled.[40]

This interpretation of the role of death within the divine economy is found in many Fathers thereafter. One further example of this is that of St Gregory of Nyssa:

> Suppose that some vessel has been composed of clay, and then, for some mischief or other, filled with molten lead, which lead hardens and remains in a non-liquid state; then that the owner of the vessel recovers it, and, as he possesses the potter's art, pounds to bits the ware which held the lead, and then remolds the vessel after its former pattern for his own special use, emptied now of the material which had been mixed with it: by a like process the maker of our vessel, now that wickedness

> has intermingled with our sentient part, I mean that connected with the body, will dissolve the material which has received the evil, and, remolding it again by the resurrection without any admixture of the contrary matter, will recombine the elements into the vessel in its original beauty.[41]

In this approach, then, death has a positive role to play, one might even say a remedial role: having learned by their own experience the utter weakness of their life in apostasy, without God, and so turning to God ever more firmly as the only Source of life, death terminates the apostasy, returning human beings to the dust from which they were taken, so that the traces of sin and apostasy can be purged from their body, and the human being can be refashioned in the resurrection.

There is one further aspect to the mystery of death, when seen in the light of the mystery of Christ, and that is to see it in eucharistic terms. The life in death, begun by dying to sin in baptism as a "likeness" of Christ's death (Rom 6.5), finds fruition in the eucharistic self-offering of the Christian in his or her own bodily death in witness to Christ. This finds striking expression in St Ignatius, when he beseeches the Christians in Rome not to interfere with his impending martyrdom:

> Suffer me to be eaten by the beasts, through whom I can attain to God. I am God's wheat, and I am ground by the teeth of wild beasts that I may be found pure bread of Christ.[42]

St Irenaeus develops this imagery much more fully:

> Just as the wood of the vine, planted in the earth, bore fruit in its own time, and the grain of wheat, falling into the earth and being decomposed, was raised up by the Spirit of God who sustains all, then, by wisdom, they come to the use of humans, and receiving the Word of God, become Eucharist, which is the Body and Blood of Christ; in the same way, our bodies, nourished by it, having been placed in the earth and decomposing in it, shall rise in their time, when the Word of God bestows on them the resurrection to the glory of God the Father, who secures immortality for the mortal and bountifully bestows incorruptibility on the corruptible [cf. 1 Cor 15.53], because the power of God is made perfect in weakness [cf. 2 Cor 12.9], that we may never become puffed up, as if we had life from ourselves, nor exalted against God, entertaining ungrateful thoughts, but learning by experience that it is from his excellence, and not from our own nature, that we have eternal continuance, that we should neither undervalue the true glory of God nor be ignorant of our true nature, but we should know what God can do and what benefits human beings, and that we should never mistake the true understanding of things as they are, that is, of God and of the human being.[43]

There is clearly a close relationship between the dynamism and fruitfulness of the Spirit and the action of the Word operative in the processes that lead both to the Eucharist and to the resurrection. It is by receiving the Eucharist, as the wheat and the vine receive the fecundity of the Spirit, that we are prepared, as we also make the fruits into the bread and wine, for the resurrection effected by the Word, at which point, just as the bread and wine receive the Word and so become the Body and Blood of Christ, the Eucharist, so also our bodies will receive immortality and incorruptibility from the Father. As such, death, within the overall economy of God seen in the light of the Passion of Christ, takes on a eucharistic dimension, alongside its educative and limiting function, and the economy as a whole can be described as the eucharist of God.

In this way, then, without denying the catastrophic reality of human apostasy and death—that the creature brought into being by God to share in his own life and glory turned his back on his Creator and so ends up rotting in the grave—it is possible, nevertheless, to see the same reality embraced within the overarching economy of God, as a means of bringing his creation, made from mud, to the full maturity of a human being, made in the image and likeness of God, knowing both good and evil, but rejecting the evil by turning in repentance to God. This, at the same time, demonstrates the wisdom and the power of God, a power which is made perfect in weakness. This possibility is given by Christ's own Passion, opening up a theological vision which, retrospectively, infuses the whole of our human, and humanly created, condition, with the power of God, the power that he manifests on the cross. Finally, the goal of this whole economy is to bring about an accurate knowledge, as St Irenaeus put it, "of things as they are, that is, of God and the human being." The truth about God revealed in, through, and as Christ, the crucified and exalted Lord, coincides with the truth about human beings. Only by having a proper comprehension of reality—the truth about God and about human beings—can we become that which God has called us to be.

"BEHOLD THE MAN!"

Having searched the scriptures in the light of Christ to understand how and why we were brought into being, we can now return to the Gospel of John, to hear the words of Christ from the cross with a fuller comprehension. When

Christ said "It is finished" (Jn 19.30), he is not simply declaring that his earthly life has come to an end, but that rather the work of God is now "fulfilled" or "completed." The divine economy, that is, the whole plan of creation *and* salvation, told from this perspective, culminates at this point. The work of God spoken of in Genesis, creating "the human being [*anthrōpos*] in our image and likeness" (Gen 1.26–27), is completed here: as Pilate said a few verses earlier, "Behold, the man [*anthrōpos*]" (Jn 19.5). The work of God is complete, and the Lord of creation now rests from his work in the tomb on the blessed Sabbath. By himself undergoing the Passion as a man, Jesus Christ, as Son of God and himself God, fashions us *into* the image and likeness of God, the image of God that he himself *is* (Col 1.15).

According to the apostle Paul, the preaching of the gospel is to continue, building up the Church, "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4.13). That Christ is the first true human being, and that we ourselves only become fully human in his stature, is a point made by many Christian writers across the centuries. As the Letter of Barnabas puts it, "It is concerning us that the scripture says that he says to the Son, 'Let us make man after our image and likeness.'"[44] More dramatically, St Ignatius of Antioch implores the Christians at Rome not to interfere with his coming martyrdom:

> It is better for me to die in Christ Jesus than to be king over the ends of the earth. I seek him who died for our sake. I desire him who rose for us. The pains of birth are upon me. Suffer me, my brethren; hinder me not from living, do not wish me to die. Do not give to the world one who desires to belong to God, nor deceive him with material things. Suffer me to receive the pure light; when I shall have arrived there, I shall become a human being [*anthrōpos*]. Suffer me to follow the example of the passion of my God.[45]

For St Ignatius, undergoing death in witness to Christ—the "perfect human being" or the "new human being"[46]—is a birth into a new life, to emerge as Christ himself, a fully human being. For St Ignatius, moreover, there is a connection between the Passion of Christ and his title "Word of God," such that this title is one shared by those who confess Christ in martyrdom. Again beseeching the Romans not to speak on his behalf before the authorities, but rather to keep silent, he states that "if you are silent concerning me, I am a word of God; but if you love my flesh, I shall be only a cry."[47] By undergoing the same martyr's death as Christ, the suffering God, he hopes to attain to the true light, to true humanity after the stature of Christ, and so to be a word of God, rather than only an inarticulate cry.

For St Irenaeus, whose theological vision has guided much of this chapter, "the work of God is the fashioning of the human being [*anthrōpos*]."[48] When he asserts that "the glory of God is the living human being,"[49] this is not simply an endorsement of what we might now think it is to be "fully alive" in this world. Rather, for St Irenaeus, the "living human being" is the martyr, going to death in confession of Christ:

> In this way, therefore, the martyrs bear witness and despise death: not after the weakness of the flesh, but by the readiness of the Spirit. For when the weakness of the flesh is absorbed, it manifests the Spirit as powerful; and again, when the Spirit absorbs the weakness, it inherits the flesh for itself, and from both of these is made a living human being: living, indeed, because of the participation of the Spirit; and human, because of the substance of the flesh.[50]

The strength of God is made perfect in weakness, and so, paradoxically, it is in their death, their ultimate vulnerability, that the martyrs bear greatest witness to the strength of God. Not that they reckon death to be a thing of no importance, but that in their confession they are vivified by the Spirit, living the life of the Spirit, who absorbs the weakness of their flesh into his own strength. When the Spirit so possesses the flesh, the flesh itself adopts the quality of the Spirit and is rendered like the Word of God.[51] The paradigm of the living human being is Jesus Christ himself and those who follow in his footsteps, the martyrs, flesh vivified by the Spirit.

Five centuries later, St Maximus the Confessor similarly affirms that the man Jesus Christ "has fulfilled, in word and truth, with unchangeable obedience, everything that he, as God, has predetermined to take place, and has accomplished the whole will of God the Father on our behalf."[52] In the cosmic vision of St Maximus, Christ's work has removed all the divisions and separations which characterize our present experience of created reality, and which have resulted from the misuse of the power given to us for the purpose of uniting all in Christ. Among these is the distinction between males and females:

> First he united us in himself by removing the difference between male and female, and instead of men and women, in whom above all this manner of division is beheld, he showed us as properly and truly to be simply human beings [*anthrōpos*], thoroughly transfigured in accordance with him, and bearing his intact and completely unadulterated image.[53]

Following the apostle Paul (cf. Gal 3.28), St Maximus asserts that in Christ the distinction between male and female is removed. The removal of this distinction means that in Christ, and only in him, can we see both men and women as what they truly are: human beings.

This perspective is held throughout the Byzantine era. Nicholas Cabasilas, writing in the fourteenth century, also asserts that it is not Adam but Christ who is the first true human being in history:

> It was for the new human being [*anthrōpos*] that human nature was created at the beginning, and for him mind and desire were prepared. . . . It was not the old Adam who was the model for the new, but the new Adam for the old. . . . For those who have known him first, the old Adam is the archetype because of our fallen nature. But for him who sees all things before they exist, the first Adam is the imitation of the second. To sum it up: the Savior first and alone showed to us the true human being [*anthrōpos*], who is perfect on account of both character and life and in all other respects.[54]

Not only is Christ the first true human being, but he is the model in whose image Adam, "a type of the one to come" (Rom 5.14), was already created. As we have seen, this is something which we have yet to become: as history has unfolded, we first know the humanity of Adam, a life of apostasy and death, but this provides the framework and the means by which we are to grown into the stature of human nature as manifest in Christ himself.

Finally, an example from a Latin writer, who brings out one further aspect of this mystery. Combining the two accounts of the creation of the human being given in Genesis (Gen 1.26–7; 2.7), Tertullian focuses our attention on the body:

> Whatever [form] the clay expressed, in mind was Christ who was to become human (which the clay was) and the Word flesh (which the earth then was). For the Father had already said to his Son, "Let us make man unto our image and likeness; and God made man," that is the same as "fashioned" [cf. Gen 2.7], "unto the image of God made he him" [Gen 1.26–27]—it means of Christ. And the Word is also God, who "being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal to God" [Phil 2.6]. Thus that clay, already putting on the image of Christ, who was to be in the flesh, was not only the work, but also the pledge of God.[55]

Our body is not only the handiwork of God, being fashioned into the image and likeness of God, that is, of Christ who is to come, but also the "pledge" of God that this indeed shall come to pass. In the body, then, this clay, the mystery of Christ is being wrought, and so in the body Christians are now to "glorify God" (1 Cor 6.20). But before we turn to consider this aspect of being human, we should turn first to look further at our birth into this reality.

NOTES

[1] This is noted by R. Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1984), 34; a remarkable work, to which the following paragraphs are much indebted.

[2] *Resurrection*, 11.

[3] *Resurrection*, 40.

[4] St Ignatius of Antioch *Letter to the Ephesians* 20.

[5] St Irenaeus of Lyons *Against the Heresies* 3.22.3.

[6] As argued, for instance, by J. Meyendorff (*Byzantine Theology*, 2nd rev. edn. [New York: Fordham University Press, 1987], 143–46), though that it "makes sin inevitable" (p. 145) seems to undermine the very point being made. Moreover, reading *eph o* as meaning "because *of death*" makes the pronoun play too many roles: it cannot, together with the preposition, be a contraction, meaning "because," and also refer back to "death," to say that "because of death all men have sinned." The verse simply says that death has still spread to all *because* all have sinned. Cf. Ezek 18.4, "only the man that sins shall die." St John Chrysostom, in his seventeenth homily on First Corinthians (NPNF, series 1, vol. 12), argues extensively that one should not attribute sin to mortality.

[7] St Athanasius *Against the Pagans* 2–3. Ed. and trans., together with *On the Incarnation*, R. W. Thomson, OECT (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

[8] St Maximus the Confessor *Questions to Thalassius* 61. Ed. C. Laga and C. Steel, CCSG 22 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1990), 85; Eng. trans. in P. M. Blowers and R. L. Wilken, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: Selected Writings from St Maximus the Confessor* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 131.

[9] See James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), to which the following paragraphs are indebted.

[10] Cf. Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[11] Classically stated by E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), esp. 474–75.

[12] St Irenaeus *Against the Heresies* 3.22.3.

[13] St Athanasius *Against the Pagans* 1; see also the opening paragraphs of his *On the Incarnation*.

[14] *Against the Pagans* 2; for creation *ex nihilo,* see *On the Incarnation* 2–3.

[15] *Against the Pagans* 41.

[16] *On the Incarnation* 13.

[17] *Against the Pagans* 19.

[18] St Gregory of Nyssa *Eunomius* 35 [3], cited in Chapter One.

[19] The phrase *felix culpa* is from the hymn "Exsultet," traditionally ascribed to St Augustine but now generally ascribed to St Ambrose, and used at the lighting of the Paschal candle in the Latin tradition: "O truly necessary sin of Adam, which was blotted out by the death of Christ. / O happy guilt, which was meet to have such and so great a redeemer" [*O certe necessarium Adae peccatum: quod Christi morte deletum est. / O felix culpa: quae talem ac tantum meruit habere redemptorem.*] F. Brittain, ed. *The Penguin Book of Latin Verse* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1962), 94.

[20] St Justin Martyr *First Apology* 55, 60. Ed. M. Marcovich, PTS 38 (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1994); trans. in ANF 1.

[21] St Isaac of Syria *"The Second Part"* 11.3. Ed. and trans. S. Brock, CSCO 55, scrip. syr. 225 (Louvain: Peeters, 1995).

[22] Cf. T. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, 2nd rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 11.

[23] Origen *Commentary on the Gospel of John* 1.33. Ed. and French trans. C. Blanc, SC 290 (Paris: Cerf, 1982); Eng. trans. in R. E. Heine, FC 89 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1993).

[24] *Commentary on the Gospel of John* 19.28.

[25] St Irenaeus *Against the Heresies* 4.37.7.

[26] *Against the Heresies* 4.39.1.

[27] *Against the Heresies* 4.37.7.

[28] *Against the Heresies* 4.38.1.

[29] *Against the Heresies* 4.38.3.

[30] *Against the Heresies* 4.38.4; cf. 2 Cor 5.4; 1 Cor 15.53; Gen 1.26, 3.5, 3.22.

[31] St Ignatius of Antioch *Letter to the Ephesians* 20.

[32] See Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, 4–7 and passim, for many pertinent comments, though with caution.

[33] St Ignatius of Antioch *Letter to the Smyrneans* 7.

[34] St Athanasius *On the Incarnation* 27; see the whole section from 27 to 32.

[35] St John Climacus *Ladder of Divine Ascent* step 29. Trans. C. Luibheid and N. Russell, CWS (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1982).

[36] Idiomelon hymn, by St John of Damascus, in the funeral service; Sticheron from the Aposticha, Friday Vespers, Octoechos, tone 8.

[37] St Irenaeus *Against the Heresies* 3.20.1.

[38] Cf. *Against the Heresies* 3.23.5; 4.pref.4.

[39] *Against the Heresies* 3.20.2.

[40] Theophilus of Antioch *To Autolycus* 2.25–26. Ed. and trans. R. M. Grant, OECT (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970).

[41] St Gregory of Nyssa *The Great Catechism* 8. Ed. E. Mühlenberg, GNO 3.4 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 31; Eng. trans. in NPNF, series 2, vol. 5.

[42] St Ignatius *Letter to the Romans* 4.

[43] *Against the Heresies* 5.2.3.

[44] *The Letter of Barnabas* 6.12. Ed. and trans. K. Lake, LCL The Apostolic Fathers 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985 [1912]).

[45] St Ignatius *Letter to the Romans* 6.

[46] St Ignatius *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* 4.2; *Letter to the Ephesians* 20.1.

[47] St Ignatius *Letter to the Romans* 2.1.

[48] St Irenaeus *Against the Heresies* 5.15.2.

[49] *Against the Heresies* 4.20.7.

[50] *Against the Heresies* 5.9.2.

[51] *Against the Heresies* 5.9.3.

[52] St Maximus the Confessor *Ambigua* 41. PG 91.1309d; trans. in A. Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, The Early Church Fathers (New York and London: Routledge, 1996).

[53] *Ambigua* 41. PG 91.1309d-1312a.

[54] Nicholas Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ* 6.91–4. Ed. and French trans. M.-H. Congourdeau, SC 361 (Paris: Cerf, 1990); Eng. trans. C. J. deCatanzaro (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), where it is numbered as 6.12.

[55] Tertullian *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 6. Ed. and trans. E. Evans (London: SPCK, 1960); modifying the translation of Evans.