

The Shape of Orthodox Ethics

There has been much written of late about virtue ethics. Some of it has been overly anxious to designate this or that ethic as a virtue ethic in contrast with others which are natural law ethics or love ethics. The degree to which virtue language shapes Orthodox theology and spirituality is impressive. And it would be convenient simply to classify Orthodox ethics as one example of a virtue ethic. Yet I doubt seriously that any Christian ethic is so simple as to be described adequately by a single handy rubric such as *virtue ethic*. This observation certainly applies to Orthodox ethics. A discussion of virtue and love in Orthodox ethics is, however, helpful in introducing the content and contours of an Orthodox ethic. This and the following chapter do just that.

VIRTUE AND THEOSIS

An Eastern Orthodox ethic values virtue highly, but not rationalistically so. The virtuous person is not Aristotle's *spoudaios*, in whom right reason alone reigns supreme. Such a person is, rather, the new Adam, the theanthropic being in whom divine love is incarnated and creature is reunited with Creator. "In love," wrote the fourteenth-century Byzantine theologian Nicholas Cabasilas, "the brightness of all virtue consists, and, as far as human effort is concerned, it constitutes the life in Christ."¹ Right reason, argues Cabasilas, is not sufficient for human beings to achieve the full theanthropic potentiality of their nature. Indeed, "right reason shows that it is impossible" for persons "to become perfectly virtuous" without the transfiguring power of love. "Perfect virtue is possible only for those who have been set free from all envy and malice, and who display genuine and perfect love toward

their fellow men.”² Right reason identifies the good and understands that the good must be sought for its own sake. But only love for the good and God who is the source of all goodness frees the human being to go “beyond his nature and [become] like God.”³

Theosis is the theological concept through which Orthodox theology has explained the progress of the person toward divine similitude. Theanthropic life is the vocation which was given to Adam at Creation and denied at the Fall, but it was followed to perfection by Jesus Christ. In the words of Cabasilas:

The Savior first and alone showed to us the true man, who is perfect on account of both character and life and in all other respects as well.

Since incorruptible life is truly the end of man, God formed him with a view to this goal. . . . But while the former [Adam] fell greatly short of perfection, the latter [Christ, the second or new Adam] was perfect in all respects and imparted perfection to men and adapted the whole race to Himself. . . .

So then . . . man strives for Christ by nature, by his will, by his thoughts, not only because of His Godhead which is the goal of all things, but because of His nature as well. He is the resting place of human desires; He is the food of our thoughts. To love anything besides Him or to meditate on it is a manifest aberration from duty and a turning aside from the first principles of our nature.⁴

Jesus Christ, the express Image of the Father, is also the God-man and forerunner of a redeemed and sanctified humanity. The Second Person of the Trinity became human, even as he remained fully God, thereby deifying his human nature. This does not mean that human beings are able to become God in his essence. But it does mean that they can become “gods” by grace, even as they remain creatures of a human nature.

This soteriological meaning of *theosis* is succinctly stated by St. Maximus the Confessor:

A firm and trustworthy basis for hope of the deification of human nature is God’s Incarnation, which makes of man a god in the same measure as God Himself became man. For it is clear

that He who became man without sin can also deify nature, without transforming it into the Deity, raising it to Himself in the measure that He humbled Himself for man's sake.⁵

The Incarnation also presents this theanthropic vocation as a new moral imperative, that human beings strive to imitate this Jesus Christ who is both archetype and perfect example of a deified humanity. Clement of Alexandria undoubtedly had this in mind when he wrote in the *Proptetikos*, "The Word of God became man that you also may learn from a man how man becomes God."⁶

Thus, Orthodoxy speaks of an *imitatio Christi* but does not accept or express in this a Pelagian rationalism. The old Adam is not capable on his own power to imitate Christ perfectly and fashion himself into a new Adam. Orthodoxy regards seriously the psychology of the old Adam that St. Paul summarized when he confessed, "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Rom. 7:19 RSV). *Theosis* is made a possible potentiality for an otherwise fallen humanity by the power of God's grace in Jesus Christ. *Theosis* is a possibility only because Jesus Christ already has liberated the old Adam from sin and restored within his own person the distorted image of God in human beings. The redemption of our humanity in Jesus Christ enables us to cooperate with God ascetically and mystically toward deification. "We are God's fellow workers [*synergoi*]," writes St. Paul (1 Cor. 3:9 NEB).

IMAGE AND LIKENESS

Morality has to do, ultimately, with the restoration of the image of God in humankind. Conscience is the spring of the moral life. It discerns what is good (and the proper end) for the human being and impels persons toward it.⁷ But conscience is no mere faculty of mind, nor is it limited to practical reason. Rather, it is an intellectual, volitional, and affective movement of the whole person toward perfection. A lively conscience builds up character through the attainment and use of virtues natural and theological. Character adds new definition to the diminished image of God in the person. Corresponding to its relation to virtues natural and theological, character is the product of a cooperation of human and divine energies. It is the unique impress, yet in conformity to the character of Christ, left upon the person in his or her

body-soul unity as a result of the right use of freedom and the action of divine grace.

Traditionally, Orthodox theology has approached this subject through the complementary yet distinct meanings given to the two terms *image*⁸ and *likeness* as they appear in the biblical account of the creation of humanity. “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness’” (Gen. 1:27 RSV). John of Damascus summarizes the Orthodox interpretation of the text, “For the phrase ‘after His image’ clearly refers to the side of [human] nature which consists of mind and free will, whereas ‘after His likeness’ means likeness in virtue so far as that is possible”⁹ *Image* connotes that each individual human being is an integral personality having reason, free will, and moral responsibility. Each person is by God’s own creative act a subject free to affirm and fulfill humanity. *Likeness* connotes vocation, exercise, virtue, and growth. *Theosis* is not achieved in a moment of conversion. Rather it is accomplished through a lifetime of constant striving and maturing.

ETHICS AND SOTERIOLOGY

The moral life in all its conscientious attention to and striving for the good is finally taken up into the spiritual life. For the good is not simply the norm of life; it is the divine life itself. Christ is the archetypal ethical human being but as such he is also the God-man. With this knowledge comes the imperative not only to do good acts but to participate in the divine life.

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that his divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and excellence. For by these he has granted to us his precious and magnificent promises in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature. (2 Pet. 1:2–4 NASB)

In Orthodoxy ethics and soteriology are bound together. For example, ethics cannot be done without particular attention to sacramental and liturgical theology. For through the sacraments of the

Church Christ, who is the Life, enters the person and takes the person into his life. “The Bread of Life Himself changes him who feeds on Him and transforms and assimilates him into Himself,” writes Cabasilas.¹⁰ The spiritual life is both an ascetical striving to do good and a mystical reception of transforming grace. “Those who imitate, as it were by picture, by means of certain signs and symbols, the death of which He [Christ] died for the sake of our life, He renews and recreates by these very acts and makes them partakers of His own life.” Ethical striving or *askesis* has one end only, deification and union with God. But that end is realized only when “Christ is Himself present . . . implant[ing] the very essence of life into our souls.”¹¹

The image of God is restored in a person, the likeness achieved, only when by grace the divine life flows within the person. “Baptism confers being and in short, existence according to Christ,”¹² Cabasilas concludes. The elements of water and oil and the very act of immersion are symbols that, true to the etymological meaning of the word *symbol*, work together the ascetical and the mystical and unite the human and the divine. The imitation of Christ is not merely the striving to attain an external model, it is an event in which *the doing is a happening* and the model is an image which transfigures from within.

LOVE: THE SUPREME VIRTUE

“To love anything besides Him [Christ] . . . is a manifest aberration from duty and a turning aside from the first principle of our nature,”¹³ writes Cabasilas. Thus charity is the supreme virtue and also the summation of all the virtues natural and theological. Gregory of Sinai echoes this persuasion when he states, “Virtues are equal in the sense that they all reduce themselves to one, all leading to the same end and, in their totality, forming one complete image of virtue.” That “image of virtue” is Christ, “the origin and the basis of all virtues, in Whom we stand and by Whom we perform every good action.”¹⁴ The love manifested in Jesus Christ is a love that does not negate but sublimates and transforms all so-called natural or human loves. This explains why Greek writers such as John Chrysostom and Nicholas Cabasilas used *philanthropia* and *agape* (or *caritas*) interchangeably. In the hands of these theologians *philanthropia* transcends its Hellenistic connotation

as a merely human love exchanged between human beings and re-doubling to them. They redefine it as a divine love for humanity manifested in Jesus Christ and returned to God by human acts of love toward the neighbor. This is also how the Greek fathers reinterpreted *eros*. *Eros* no longer is simply a human yearning for the divine. It is a divine-human love, the ascending mode of charity itself, whereby the mind “ravished by divine knowledge”¹⁵ seeks God but in so doing discovers from a divine point of view the infinite value and perfect equality of all human persons. *Agape* is yet another way of speaking of charity. It is the prevailing mode of love since it more properly expresses love from the divine point of view. *Agape* knows the other as subject, as Thou. It is out-flowing and seeks fulfillment in a communion with the other. The human modality of *agape* images the divine life of the triune Godhead. That life is personal, relational, and communicative, and the energy that keeps the three Persons of the Godhead in relation and communion is love. Here we would do well to remember that the divine life remains a mystery. “To say: ‘God is love’, ‘the divine Persons are united by mutual love’, is to think of a common manifestation, the ‘love energy’ possessed by the three hypostases, for the union of the Three is higher even than love,” writes the twentieth-century Russian theologian Vladimir Lossky.¹⁶ We can speak of *agape* as a descending and self-emptying love since it is revealed as such in the condescending and kenotic act of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity whereby he stooped to become “flesh” and humbled and sacrificed himself for our redemption. Yet *agape* is a love which descends in order to elevate, unite, and transfigure. Paradoxically, as self-emptying love *agape* fills all things with the divine life. “Out of love for man,” writes Nicholas Cabasilas, “He [Christ] received all things from us, and out of even greater love He joins what is His to us. The first means that God has come down to earth, the second that He has taken us from earth to heaven.”¹⁷

The Trinity and the Incarnation provide the only sufficient understanding of the genuine character and meaning of Christian love. Love is revealed through each doctrine as a unitive energy. In the doctrine of the Trinity this is a union of Persons and in the case of the Incarnation a union of natures. On the basis of the trinitarian formula Orthodox theology makes a definite distinction between personality and individuality. Individuality is strictly an attribute of the creature. Personality is ascribed to God and in humankind is an image of the tripersonal life of the Godhead. Personality is spiritual and transcendent

freedom; individuality is material (or physical) and rooted in determinate nature.¹⁸ While careful to recognize that human persons are created as individuals of a species and that the divine Persons are uncreated and unindividuated, Orthodox theology insists that the communion in love, which is the goal of the moral life, is a harmonious relation of human beings in their personhood, not as mere individuals. In nature the individuals of a species are reducible to number. Yet the three Persons of the divine essence are not reducible to number. The Kingdom of God is the fulfillment of personality but transcends individuality and number, i.e., the natural individuation of humanity that sets material and psychological limitations upon personal communion. The Kingdom of God marks an end of that sinful division of our human nature into selves which are endemically at cross purposes with each other.

Our natural individuation is not itself evil. It serves a good according to its created purpose. However, due to the Fall, sin rules the “flesh” and has made from this individuality the “detestable self.” This sinful self is distinguished by self-will. While many ethics have taken this egoism as natural and normative, Orthodoxy considers it unnatural and radically abnormal. This division of our common human nature into selves which assert themselves over and against other selves represents the deprivation of love, the loss of genuine freedom, and the disintegration of personality.

We must not equate the person with the self, the ego whose character is determined by the autonomous will. The doctrine of the Trinity does not attribute autonomy to the respective Persons of the Godhead. And, on the basis of the Church’s Christology, *will* is defined as a property of nature and not person.¹⁹ Persons, therefore, are distinguished not by will but by origin, creative purpose, and free, loving relation with others. A deprivation of love accounts for humanity’s attraction to the polar extremes of either an anarchy of competing autonomous selves or a totalitarian order in which the person is diminished to a mere individual and part of the social organism. Love unites persons; it does not reduce them to parts of a whole. Love is freedom, but it is also the transcendence of autonomy. Love is the very energy or movement in the person which renounces the self. Love seeks a communion of persons who are of one nature and united in will.

The Incarnation leads to an understanding of love as a unitive energy, accomplishing a union of human and divine natures. Through a supreme act of kenotic and agapeic love, the Second Person of the

Trinity—the very Word of God—became “flesh,” atoned for sin, and redeemed human nature, wedding it with the divine nature. This union of the human and divine natures was intended by God even at the Creation. The human person, writes Maximus the Confessor, is called “to reunite by love created with uncreated nature, showing the two in unity and identity through the acquisition of grace.”²⁰ The capacity to communicate with God and grow increasingly more in communion with the divine life was given to human beings at the Creation but was diminished severely by the Fall. Love is finally powerless and meaningless outside of personal relation and reciprocity. The Incarnation was a perfect act of love in its descending and ascending movements. First, while preserving the integrity of the human nature and its distinction from the divine, God in Christ restored by grace the human capacity to reciprocate God’s love. Second, Christ in his humanity completed the human movement toward a full communion with the Godhead.

Trinitarian love is an inner inseparableness and consubstantial unity of three divine Persons. In Jesus Christ love achieves an inner inseparableness and hypostatic union of two natures. In Christian *koinonia* love becomes the inner inseparableness and consubstantial union of two or more persons who in their common human nature are united by grace with the divine life.²¹

LOVE AND LAW

In his study *Byzantine Theology* John Meyendorff observes that “the main characteristic of Eastern Christianity, in its ethical and social attitudes, is to consider man as already redeemed and glorified in Christ.” Such an outlook he contrasts with Western Christianity’s more pessimistic assumption that, “though redeemed and ‘justified’ in the eyes of God by the sacrifice of the cross, man remains a sinner.”²² This difference in perspective between Western and Eastern Christianity does not mean that Orthodox theology assumes that after the Incarnation and Resurrection humankind is no longer in a sinful condition or that original sin no longer afflicts personal existence. But it does indicate a disposition toward anthropology and soteriology that has important ramifications for the Orthodox understanding of the relationship between love and law.

Put very simply, Orthodoxy regards the experience of law as externally imposed rules and commandments peculiar to the psychology of the old Adam. The Incarnation exposes the Law for what it is, a creature of sin. Sin itself is not at root the breaking of an externally imposed command but the contradiction of that inner spiritual law of human nature that impels persons toward a harmony and unity of life with God and fellow human beings. Only as a result of sin do human beings experience law as externally imposed codes and commandments, usually in the form of prohibitions that indicate when the harmony and unity of life are lost, not how they might be restored. An incarnational faith, however, upholds love as the unitive energy that restores that harmonious relationship between God and humankind of which the Law as prohibition takes negative measure.

Ernst Benz has suggested that Orthodoxy's ethic is a love ethic "for which a sense of mystical union of all the redeemed in their participation of the resurrected Lord"²³ is the cardinal intuition. This slant of vision, I would judge, accounts for the relatively underdeveloped state of natural law theory in Orthodox thought. The natural law is counted as an image in human beings of the divine love that draws humanity toward the fulfillment of its nature, i.e., deification and union with the Godhead. Basil reiterates the same:

Instruction in divine law is not from without, but simultaneously with the formation of the creature—man, I mean—a kind of rational force was implanted in us like a seed, which, by an inherent tendency, impels us toward love.²⁴

Eastern fathers such as Clement of Alexandria, John Chrysostom, and Basil of Caesarea agree that the fundamental moral law is expressed in and through the creature in several forms. Besides the special case of Scripture (e.g., the Decalogue), the eternal law is imprinted in the rational creature as the natural law and it is reflected in the customs, codes, and positive laws of nations. But natural law, the law of nations, and civil law are, after all, only creaturely expressions of the one eternal divine law. The natural law does not possess an independent life of its own. Nature is not an autonomous plane of existence. The Logos was present at Creation, and the Incarnation commences an infusion of grace into nature and a transfiguration of it that destroys the wall of separation between God and creature that was built up by sin. A

deified human existence already has begun in the life of the Church. Lastly, Orthodox theologians have not articulated the precise ways in which the various forms of law—divine, natural, and civil—are ordered hierarchically or otherwise correspond with each other, because they have not drawn the sharp distinction between nature and grace that gave rise to such questions in the West.²⁵

In view of Orthodoxy's approach to natural law it is not surprising that love predominates over law in Orthodox ethics. *Oikonomia* is "an imitation of God's love for man' and not simply an 'exception to the rule.'"²⁶ *Oikonomia* preserves the freedom of the person in a synergistic movement toward *theosis*. Rules and commandments are relative to God's plan of salvation. But that plan is not the possession of any one person. It belongs to the mind of Christ which is the mind of the Church.

Rules and commandments are important in Orthodox ethics, but they have taken on a new cast and meaning in the glorious light of Easter morning. The Law is no longer a taskmaster. Christians know not to fix their attention so closely on the letter of the Law that they lose sight of God's salvation plan. "The true fulfillment of the commandments," writes Gregory of Sinai, "does not require merely forbearance from excesses or defects, it also demands an aim acceptable to God, that is the fulfillment in everything of God's will alone."²⁷ Christ fulfilled the Law and having done so made it spiritual. The person in whom Christ abides experiences the Law not as externally imposed rules and commandments but as an inner call to the theanthropic life. Such a person is also one in whom the Spirit is present and sanctifying, and in whom the practice of virtue is being transformed into an essential disposition of the heart. "'The law of the Spirit of life' of which the Apostle speaks (Rom. 8:2) is such as acts and speaks in the heart."²⁸ According to God's plan of salvation all things will be made to work for good. The person of faith knows from within that this is true. Rules and commandments indicate those modes of behavior that are in accord with the Word of Life and appropriate to the sanctifying work of the Spirit both in persons and in the Church.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In Orthodoxy the Kingdom of God is not primarily an ethical ideal.²⁹ It is an eschatological datum and sacramental event of faith. The King-

dom of God is “beyond ethics” because the moral law is fulfilled in a free, loving concert of personality that transcends the experience of duty, right, or obligation. Yet, in a world for which the Kingdom is not fully present, the perfection of persons in their social relations is the appropriate goal of human striving.

All ethics that are even vaguely Christian have affirmed this, and yet Christians have differed over how to go about this striving and what to expect from it. These disagreements derive from varying interpretations of the fundamental Christian experience of the two communities. The new reality into which Christians find themselves born by water and Spirit is the Church. It is a community that while in this world is not of it. And while it is certain that the Church and the world are not the same, the nature of their terrestrial relationship is much less clear. Orthodox theology offers no conclusive explanation for this mystery or final answer to the problem it poses for Christians. In the past some Orthodox mistakenly have thought a final solution was reached in Byzantium or in imperial Russia. But Orthodoxy need not necessarily give rise to theocracy. The Byzantine and Russian political theologies have come and gone without changing significantly Orthodox theology or the Orthodox Church’s understanding of its mission. And there are other relationships that the Orthodox Church has had with the world that bear recalling. For much of its historical journey the Orthodox Church has been a church either under siege or in captivity, first under the Ottoman conquest and empire and then under Soviet rule. Also there is the most recent experience of Orthodoxy in the pluralistic and democratic societies of Western Europe and North America. Yet in all of this it is possible to identify a typically Orthodox response to the mystery and problem of the two communities. That response is fundamentally sacramental and eschatological but not other-worldly. The Church should not be explained in terms of the world; rather, the world is understood, its origin, value, meaning, and end grasped, only from within the life of the Church.

An Orthodox social ethic rests in three fundamental perceptions about the world.³⁰ The first is that the world is God’s creation. Whatever value it has or is given through humankind’s creative action cannot be considered apart from God’s goodness, wisdom, and purpose. Second, the resurrected and sanctified life, which is already present in the Church, exposes the fallen character of the world. But fallen is not confused with evil. The essential goodness of the world is not lost in its fallenness. The Fall has brought about, however, the radical distinction

between this world and the Kingdom of God. Where there should have been immortal life there is decay and death. Where there should have been communion there is conflict amidst coerced order. The fragmenting and disintegrating effects of sin set this world and the Kingdom of God apart and at war with each other. Lastly, from the standpoint of the Incarnation and Resurrection, the Church experiences and intends the world as “the ‘matter’ of the Kingdom of God, called to be fulfilled and transfigured so that ultimately God may be ‘all in all things.’”³¹ It is the mission of the Church as the bearer of the Spirit to sanctify all things, making it known that there is no final polarity of nature and grace, state and church, world and Kingdom of God.

This makes Orthodox social ethics consistently transformationist or conversionist.³² The mission of the Church is to make the Kingdom of God present by redeeming and transfiguring the world. This mission is not reserved solely to priestly and monastic vocations. For example, the monastic vision as it developed in the East did not include any notion of a “grading in the scale of ‘perfection.’”³³ St. Basil and St. Theodore of Studium thought of the monastery as a place in which those standards of the Kingdom that are binding on all Christians might be put into effect. They did not suggest that there were two sets of standards for the Christian life, one for laity and one for the monastics.

Byzantine monasticism was inspired by an ascetical ethos that was both social and transformationist. The initial impetus of this asceticism was exodus from a world fallen terribly short of meeting the requirements of the Kingdom. Yet this exodus was not a contemptuous renunciation of the world. As Georges Florovsky says: “True asceticism is inspired not by contempt, but by the urge of transformation. The world must be re-instated to its original beauty from which it fell into sin. . . . Ascetism [is an] ‘eschatology of transfiguration.’”³⁴ The monastic community is to be a community “founded on love and mutual affection, on a free realization of brotherly love.”³⁵ Love, not law and force, gives life to the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is a social reality, albeit one that transcends any society of this world. “Nothing,” writes Basil in *The Long Rules*, “is so compatible with our nature as living in society and in dependence upon one another and as loving our own kind.” The “seeds of these qualities” God planted within human beings in “anticipation” of their germination and fruition in the Kingdom of God. For this reason, he explains, “[God] says: ‘A new commandment I give unto you: that you love one another’” (1 John 13:34).³⁶

In rejecting the notion of a dual standard for Christian life, Orthodox theology affirms an eschatological continuity of nature and grace and of history and the Kingdom of God. Politics does not belong to the Kingdom, but love does; and without the leavening presence of love in the world freedom and justice, which are the appropriate ends of all political activity, would not be possible. Therefore, the Christian must neither underestimate the value of the imperfect achievements of political life nor equate them with the values of the Kingdom of God. The Bible is not a set of ethical principles or injunctions for political action. Neither, however, are Christianity and the Church irrelevant to political life, especially the constant struggles against oppression and injustice. The relevance of Christianity to political life is guaranteed by the salvation accomplished in Jesus Christ—his life, death, and Resurrection. The perfect love that Christ manifested in his humanity proves that humankind's struggles in history for social justice will be fulfilled and transfigured. A rough and measured equality and harmony, which is all that justice can bring into this world, is but an imperfect image of that *agape* that enlivens the Kingdom of God.

More importantly, to say that Jesus Christ accomplished our salvation is to say that he alone is our true Liberator.³⁷ This puts in right perspective all of our political efforts to overcome tyranny and injustice. We learn that the source of all social, economic, and political injustice is our radical alienation from God and enslavement to sin. Politics is a mark of the Fall because it reflects the efforts of the old Adam to control the disintegrating effects of sin and because, tragically, institutions that were made to free human beings tyrannized over them. The Church, not politics, is salvation. Yet this is not to say that political life and the life in Christ are two autonomous realms with their own separate ends. Christ took on our whole human nature and redeemed it. The political life is a portion of that material of the Kingdom that the Church takes into its own life, sanctifies, and returns to God.

Politics reforms; the Church transfigures. *Metanoia*, the reversal of the psychology of the old Adam and the division, conflict, and suffering that it stamps on the world, is realized in the Church. Politics presupposes the old Adam. The root source of collective injustice, however institutionalized, remains the same, a damaged will turned against its own nature. While institutions can be reshaped, reorganized, "cleaned up," or even abolished and replaced by new ones, the artificer is disoriented and the artifacts are inevitably flawed. Thus, the political

art at its best will practice prudence and do what it can with an imperfect fabric. However, without Christ, statecraft is inherently tragic.

The Church's mission is to transform the lives of *persons*. The Church's primary although not exclusive concern is with persons. It is the responsibility of the Church to follow the example of the perfect love of Christ by giving alms and shelter to the poor. Without charity the Church counts for nothing. Yet a distinction needs to be made between charity and social welfare. Charity is person-directed. Social welfare sees groups and institutions as it looks out upon the common life. It is a creature of politics and requires the coercive power of the state. Social welfare is not the free giving that charity is, and it is no substitute for charity. Nevertheless, it is probably a necessary remedy—not to be confused with a cure—for the inevitable injustices that sin lets loose in the world. Yet the Church's support or opposition to social welfare programs will not depend upon a utilitarian or hedonistic calculus. It will issue, instead, from a judgment about whether such social welfare strengthens or debilitates personality.

Certainly, the Church is summoned to voice prophetic criticisms of collective injustices, calling the world back to its divinely ordained end. Within its sacramental life the Church proclaims and pursues this vocation. It must not forget that the world, including its political life, is truly the "matter" of its sacraments. If need be, this prophetic witness and work includes martyrdom. The world, which is the object of the Church's mission, hates the Church precisely because the Church puts its faith in Christ rather than in the world's claim to being an end in itself. The highest expression of the Church's affirmation of the noblest goals of political life is when members of its body endure even death at the hands of political authorities, as did Christ. When the Church suffers with all the suffering children of God, politics may yet be redeemed by love and humankind can hope with assurance for the coming of the Kingdom of God.

CONCLUSION: ORTHODOX THEOLOGY AND ETHICS

My underlying thesis in this chapter is that the distinctiveness of Orthodox ethics is derived from Orthodox theology. Orthodox theology has never been rigorously systematic. It does not have systematians like Calvin or Aquinas in the West. Indeed, Vladimir Lossky

argues that theology that “constitutes itself into a system is always dangerous. It imprisons in the enclosed sphere of thought the reality to which it must open thought.” In other words, theology that properly begins with the word of God in Scripture, and proceeds from prayer and worship, must remain true to the living experience of faith and not replace or close itself off from this experience through the construction of “mental schemata.”³⁸ The symbols of faith should not be mistaken for the life of faith from which these symbols arise and to which they continually must remain open.

Orthodoxy has understood theology as a coherent worded expression of the life of faith in its responsiveness to God, that life comprising a catholic unity in revelation, prayer, worship, and loving acts. Orthodox ethics has to be done in a similar fashion. Therefore, it is fair to say that even as Orthodox theologians do ethics as a deliberate activity, their ethical reflection is not likely to be formally systematic. Yet ethics done in an Orthodox mode is, nevertheless, guided by some well-defined theological concepts.

The theological concepts of *theosis*, image and likeness, and love lie at the heart of the ethic outlined here. And these cardinal concepts of Orthodox theology in turn rest upon a distinctive Orthodox spirituality. Orthodoxy experiences the world as creature, mystery to itself, and epiphany of God. The world is valued as sacrament of communion with God. This way of experiencing the world is also a special way of intending the world. The world is intended as God intends it, not as an end in itself but as a milieu in which and through which human persons translate natural dependency and determinacy into creative and free communion among themselves and between themselves and God. Orthodox theology rejects all forms of utilitarian, deontological, or teleological ethics that intend the world as either utility, law, or unfolding rationality. An Orthodox ethic does not rely on a utilitarian calculus or on a formal or conscientious adherence to rules and a dispensing of duties. Rather, it is concerned primarily with the realization of love, righteousness, and divine similitude in persons and social institutions. In this aim, I think, Orthodox theologians and ethicists will remain steadfast, believing that the goal of Christian morality is, after all, salvation.

Love in Orthodox Ethics

Trinitarian and Christological Reflections

Ernst Benz describes Orthodox ethics as a love ethic,¹ and Sergius Bulgakov argues on one occasion that “humility and love are the supreme characteristics”² of Orthodoxy. While one rightly might question the capacity of such rubrics as love ethic or virtue ethic to describe adequately a living ethos, there is little doubt that serious reflection on the meaning and activity of love in the Christian life is a fundamental concern of Orthodox spirituality and theology. Orthodoxy regards the Trinity and Incarnation as the only realities in which complete knowledge of love is revealed. Two important points emerge: (1) love has its source and end in the very being of God who is personal and triune; and (2) the Incarnation is the concrete proof of the meaning and possibility of Christian love.

THE TRINITARIAN STRUCTURE OF LOVE

“The Trinity,” writes the contemporary Roumanian Orthodox theologian, Dumitru Staniloae, “is the culmination of the humility and sacrifice of love.”³ The Father, who is the causality⁴ of the Godhead, surmounts both monad and dyad by “a total gift of His divinity to the Son and to the Spirit.”⁵ Vladimir Lossky adds, “The Father would not be a true person if He were not this: *pros*, towards, entirely turned towards other persons, entirely communicated to those whom He makes persons, therefore equals, by the wholeness of His love.”⁶ God’s love transcends the philosophical distinction between love as a virtue and love as relation. The love that is of God does not in the creaturely

sense empower God to accomplish fullness of being. “Love is the ‘being of God’; it is his ‘substantial act,’” Staniloae reminds us.⁷ Neither is God’s transcendent love a cooperative relation of individuals who are otherwise not so disposed or situated. Within the Godhead three utterly distinct divine Persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—dwell as one in nature, will, and energy; they thereby form what Gregory of Nyssa describes as “a sort of continuous and indivisible community.”⁸ The God who is love is an inexhaustible, dynamic self-communication of being.

The structure of perfect love, says Orthodox theology, is trinitarian.⁹ Even the love shared between two is incomplete and imperfect. Even the most self-giving and self-communicating relation between two is inherently egocentric and limited in its horizons, always subject to the erotic fixation of one upon the other and the “absorption of two ‘I’s’ into a mutual love that is indifferent towards the presence of any other.”¹⁰ But with the presence of a third subject conditions arise in which the two need not fall into the selfish subjectivity of a self-contained mutual love. There comes an invitation for the two to participate in a truly intersubjective and pleromic communion.

In the Armenian Rite of Holy Matrimony the priest prays over the couple:

We beseech Thee, O Lord, bless this marriage, as Thou didst bless the marriage of the holy patriarchs, and keep them spotless in spiritual love and in one accord during their lives in this world.

Bless, O Lord, and make their marriage fruitful with offspring, if it be Thy will, so that they may inherit a life of virtuous behavior for the glory of Thy all-holy name. Grant them a peaceful life and lengthen their time in this world to a ripe old age, and make them worthy to attain the undespoilable joys of the heavenly nuptials, together with all Thy saints, by the grace of the loving-kindness of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, with whom Thou art blessed. O Father Almighty, together with the life-giving and liberating Holy Spirit, now and forever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.¹¹

This ordering of the goods of marriage is entirely consistent with the Orthodox understanding of love in its trinitarian form. Spiritual love is unitive love, making the two “of one accord.” But this love is also overflowing, self-emptying, and creative, bringing into existence an

other toward whom this love might be directed and in whom might be engendered a loving response. More important, the child, who is a third for the two in their mutual love, becomes the second for each spouse in his or her personal relation with the child. In this relation each spouse experiences the other as a third whose love is born and reflected in the child. When the spouses return to one another in love, that love for one another as well as their love for the child has been “rekindled.”¹² The child as completion of a trinity corresponds to the Holy Spirit, both as the subject who bears the love of the Father to the Son and the love of the Son to the Father and as the “object” in whom Father and Son transcend duality and opposition and the self-containment of common subjectivity. The third born of conjugal love is not an obligation of the nuptial union but a felicitous outcome of it. The presence of the third is the occasion in which those virtues can be exercised that enable and make persons worthy to enjoy “the heavenly nuptials” of the communion of all the saints in the divine life of the Trinity. This is the proper trinitarian sense in which Orthodox faith speaks of marriage as the beginning “of a small kingdom which *can* be something like the true Kingdom.”¹³

The Trinity is the archetype and goal of the “We” of I-Thou-He/She in Christian marriage and family, as well as human society. Christian marriage as a loving relation of three is a symbol of entrance and means of participation in the eternal “We” of the divine life. Such love is perfectly unitive in its total self-giving. The eternal love that God is is the reciprocal gift of personal divinity between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father, in an eternal act of self-giving and self-communication, begets the Son and “breathes” forth the Spirit. It is the Father, observes Vladimir Lossky, “who distinguishes the hypostases ‘in an eternal movement of love.’”¹⁴ The Son, in whom the Father eternally forgets himself as his very Image, offers himself back to the Father in a loving act of perfect self-sacrifice through which the Father is glorified and the Spirit shines forth. The Spirit, who eternally proceeds as the life-giving “breath” of the Father, allows himself to be sent by the Son in a perfectly hidden and self-eclipsing manner in order to impart the gifts of knowledge of the Father and Son that liberate the world for participation in the divine life of the three Persons.¹⁵

The divine essence, Staniloae emphasizes, is “a relation-unity, or conversely, . . . a unity-relation.”¹⁶ This is to say that the perfect love of the Godhead is a complete reciprocal interiority (*perichoresis*) of the

three. “For the subsistences,” writes John of Damascus, “dwell in one another in no wise confused, . . . For as we said, they are made one not so as to commingle, but so as to cleave to each other, and they have their being in each other without any coalescence.”¹⁷ Love in the Trinity is the inner inseparableness and consubstantial unity of three Persons. Quoting John of Damascus once again: “For each one of them [divine Persons] is related as closely to the other as to itself: that is to say that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one in all respects, save those of not being begotten, of birth and of procession. . . . For we recognize one God: but only in the attributes of Fatherhood, Sonship and Procession, both in respect of cause and effect and perfection of subsistence, that is, manner of existence, do we perceive difference.”¹⁸

Unlike the divine persons, human beings are naturally individuated and do not attain by reason of material and psychological attributes of their common nature a complete coinherence or interiority to one another like that of the Trinity. Yet, if the archetype and goal of humanity is the life of the Trinity, are these human attributes, is this individuality, an evil? The Orthodox answer is that there is nothing evil in these things. Human individuality serves a good according to its ordained purpose. The material and psychological attributes of our common human nature that individuate us serve the limited autonomy that befits a creature made to have, as Gregory of Nyssa said, “a self-ruling and independent principle, such as to enable the participation of good to be the reward of its virtue.”¹⁹ As a result of the Fall, however, the “flesh” is ruled by sin. Our individuality becomes the instrument and *expressivity* of a sinful self determined by its so-called self-will or autonomous will.

Adam’s first act was the object of divine condemnation not because he acted in a self-determining manner but because he chose to make himself (i.e., self-gratification) the sole end of his self-determination. “Although all things are made in their individuality,” observes George A. Tavard, “they are not autonomous but theonomous. God is all in all. His relationship to his creature is analogous to the inner relationship by which God is one and three. Divine love sustains the world in being. This being is itself love” (Eph. 1:10, Col. 1:11).²⁰ Adam’s sin, inherited by all his heirs, was one of self-love to the very denial of divine love. It was a refusal of his (Adam’s) priestly vocation of taking into his own life the whole of creation, material and spiritual, and returning

it to God transfigured by his loving knowledge of it (not self-gratifying possession and use of it). “Self-love . . . separate[s] men from one another . . . and split[s] the single nature (of those endowed with a single nature) into many parts.” Self-love, said Maximus the Confessor, is “the origin of that hardness of heart which possesses everyone and through this quality . . . set[s] nature against itself.”²¹ Thus, human beings originally created in the image of the triune God are moved by an egocentric (self-possessive and self-assertive) principle that separates persons from one another in an atmosphere charged with conflicting purposes.

Orthodox theology maintains that humanity is created with the liberty (self-mastery and self-determinancy), virtue (capacity to participate in the good), and dispassionate (selfless and pure-hearted) disposition suited for a loving union of human and divine natures. “Personhood,” Lossky writes, “is freedom in relation to nature.”²² Personality does not divide up the nature and possess a part of it for itself (concupiscence), nor does it define itself in opposition to other persons (irascibility). Rather, it contains within it all of what that nature is and by directing that nature to its proper end attains its own distinctive identity. Personality is distinguished by its origin, creative purpose, and free, loving relation with others. Humanity created in the image of God is a multiplicity of hypostases of a common nature in loving relation with one another. The deprivation of personality is a weakening of this image of God and the *graced* capacity of the human being to translate natural determinancy into a transcendental and free communion of human and divine persons. The weakening of the image of God is accompanied by the diminishment of that capacity to love which God bestowed upon humanity at Creation. This leads to what Athanasius called a corruptible death—the complete disintegration of the human person into its constituent elements of body and soul. The evidence that death rather than love rules over human life is that human beings are drawn universally to the polar extremes of an anarchy of competing autonomous selves and a totalitarian order in which the human being is reduced to a mere individual and part of the social organism. In both cases love is overruled; in the former by an autocratic and unnatural *self-will* and in the latter by the tyranny of a *collective will*. “That which is the result of compulsion and force cannot be virtue,” said Gregory of Nyssa.²³ And love is the supreme virtue.

INCARNATE LOVE

“Sacrifice is the most natural act of man,” writes Alexander Schmemmann.²⁴ Adam’s vocation at his creation was to act as priest of creation, receiving it from God as the “food” of communion with God and returning it to God with thanksgiving as his very “body.” Adam freely rejected that vocation. He refused to locate his identity and that of creation in the life of God. Instead, he became disposed to use and consume creation for himself alone. His will was characterized by a self-love which was in contradiction to *agape*—the “inner law” of his being. Sin is at root the contradiction of this “inner law” of love rather than the breaking of an externally imposed command. It is making the world an end in itself instead of the matter of the sacrament of the Kingdom. Personal sin is making one’s own life the absolute center of one’s existence, loving it and valuing it above all other human beings and thus setting oneself at enmity with God and others.

As a result of the Fall, love as sacrifice became *self*-sacrifice, with *self* understood as an ego characterized by a self-will and claiming to be its own law (autonomous). Thus, sacrifice in a fallen world becomes “the rejection of all selfishness as the very form of sin.” But such sacrifice cannot be the same perfect and free sacrifice of which Adam was capable at Creation. For “wherever sin exists there no pure sacrifice can be found.”²⁵ It remained for the sinless One, Jesus Christ, to make the pure sacrifice and fulfill that vocation given to humanity at Creation.

Jesus Christ is the complete revelation that love is sacrificial (is sacrifice) and is the “inner law” of human nature. “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children,” wrote St. Paul (Eph. 5:1–2 RSV). “And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Christ is God’s total gift of himself to the creature. While the initiative is God’s, this act of perfect love in Jesus Christ is both human and divine because it is a perfectly reciprocal love of God for the creature and of the creature for God. In Jesus Christ, God and humanity are reconciled, not by some substitutionary formula or measure of infinite satisfaction in the mind of God or the human being, but by the *metanoia* of the creature—a total conversion or turning toward God. Thus, in Jesus Christ both God and humanity are glorified—as it was meant to be at the creation of humankind—in the intimacy of their good will toward one another. Such is the perfection of Christian love. It is Emmanuel, God-with-us.

This is celebrated exquisitely in the Hymn of the Kiss of Peace of the Armenian liturgy sung at the beginning of the Great Entrance, immediately after the bread and wine—symbolizing Jesus Christ and the whole world—have been placed on the altar.

Christ in our midst hath been revealed,
 He-who-is God is here seated.
 The voice of peace hath resounded,
 Holy greeting hath been enjoined.
 Here the church is become one soul,
 The kiss given for bond of fullness.

The enmity hath been removed,
 And love is spread over all.
 Now, ministers, raising your voice,
 Give ye blessing with one accord
 To the consubstantial Godhead,
 To whom seraphs hagiologize.²⁶

Self-sacrifice is neither the sufficient reason for a moral act nor an end in itself. To be sure, it is correct to say that belonging to the character of Christian love is the disposition to do good toward the other without thought of reward. But this is not the full account of Christian love, even if the parable of the good Samaritan has suggested to some that it is. On this parable Protestant writers, especially, have rested their case for Christian love as self-sacrifice exclusive of all regard for reciprocity or mutuality. The Orthodox understanding of *agape* conflicts with such an interpretation. The Armenian hymn cited above testifies to this. An alternative reading of the good Samaritan parable might help show what is at stake.

Gilbert Meilaender is a friendly sparring partner for this purpose precisely because, while he argues in his book *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics* that Christian love is also inclusive of reciprocity and mutuality, he takes the lead of Anders Nygren and Reinhold Niebuhr when interpreting the parable of the good Samaritan. Thus he derives from the story the lesson that the love which the Samaritan shows for the stranger is an unqualified and more or less complete specification of *agape* understood as pure benevolence. Meilaender strains to join together this interpretation of *agape* with a view of love as reciprocity

and mutuality, because he adopts a Niebuhrian interpretation of *agape* as a love “which seeks simply to affirm and serve the well-being of the neighbor without any thought of fellowship or communion with the other as the fruition of that service.”²⁷

Meilaender’s discussion of the Samaritan story first runs amuck in two respects: his definition of *agape*, and second, his use of the Samaritan story as a specification of that definition. Certainly it is right to say that the Samaritan, by helping the wounded traveler, acts out of a profoundly disinterested love for the other as a person *qua human existent*. But it is a mistake to describe this as *agape*. St. Luke, in fact, says the Samaritan “had compassion” (*splanchnizomai*) (Luke 10:33). This compassion is a fundamentally human response, even viscerally human response, of pity or mercy toward another who is suffering and quite helpless. The priest and the Levite show no such compassion and for that they can be held morally accountable.

Meilaender also describes the Samaritan’s action as “Franciscan Love”: he means a love “not . . . fitted for society.”²⁸ He says that this interpretation is supported by the fact that the Samaritan writes a “blank check” for the innkeeper—hardly a prudent thing to do for someone whose goal it is to live in society with responsibility for self, friends, or relations. Yet the “blank check” may not be the heart of this story. Indeed, we can assume that the Samaritan likely knows the innkeeper.

I want to argue that the compassion that the Samaritan shows toward the traveler is a necessary prerequisite for human community. This compassion is the basis upon which truly agapeic relations between persons come to be. To act with compassion toward another human being is to recognize the human worth of the other on the affective level of empathy. It is the first step toward befriending and knowing that person in God.

The story is introduced by the query of the young Pharisee who wishes to know what he must do to inherit eternal life. The right answer is to “love the lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27 RSV). The question arises as to who is one’s neighbor. The answer is not as simple as some interpreters, including Meilaender, have it: that the wounded traveler is the neighbor. In fact, the traveler is a stranger, a Jew, not a neighbor of the Samaritan, at least not yet. Rather the Samaritan, in his willingness to help the

wounded traveler, defines himself as a neighbor to this stranger (Luke 10:36–37 RSV). Having responded compassionately toward this man whom he does not know and obviously does not assist out of preferential love, the Samaritan also makes it possible for the stranger to respond with gratitude as neighbor to the Samaritan. Such mutuality even between two strangers is the love to which Christ calls human beings. That such a reconciliation of enemies is also part of this process of *agape* is confirmed by the identities of traveler as Jew and helper as Samaritan. Compassion and self-sacrifice are on the “road” to *agape*, are related to the dynamics of *agape*, but they are not fully *agape* and should not be mistaken for it. The relation of bonded fullness that is perfect love is just hinted at, not fully described, by the parable. *Agape* has not so much the character of a noun proper as of a gerund. *Agape* is a relationship in process rather than a state of being.

The story of the good Samaritan is not the whole story of Christian love. It is not shorthand for *agape*. The story does not tell us whether the traveler ultimately befriends the Samaritan and opens up the possibility for a shared love in God. However, in the life of the teller of the story, Jesus Christ, the Christian knows that this has to be so.²⁹ The work of Incarnate Love is not ended on the Cross. It is finished only when all who are of good will toward God and humanity are gathered together in the resurrected life. Its work is completed only when the sin that has brought mortality and desolateness to life is defeated and replaced by everlasting life and the unity of fellowship in Jesus Christ. As St. Paul writes:

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 RSV)

In Orthodox worship, baptism is followed immediately by chrismation and presentation before the altar for first communion. The new life in Christ of which St. Paul spoke is one in which human beings have been set free from the Law as condemnation to death to enter into communion with God. This freedom is the gift of the Spirit. For “the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:17 RSV). And this liberty is the indwelling of love in the creature “because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us” (Rom. 5:5 RSV). This freedom is the “law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2 RSV) come alive by the action of the Spirit dwelling within the human being. It is the image of God restored in the person. It is the person once again “rooted and grounded in love” (Eph. 3:17 RSV) and *graced* with the self-determining capacity to attain “to mature manhood, to the measure of the statute of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13 RSV).

That same love which defeats sin frees persons for communion. Love, writes St. Paul, “binds everything together in perfect harmony . . . in the one body” (Col. 3:14–15 RSV) which is Christ. Jesus is the *autobasileia*—the “Kingdom in Person”—said Origen.³⁰ In Christ all opposition or contradiction between love as self-sacrifice and love as mutuality or reciprocity is overcome.³¹ And since Christ is the archetype and perfection of our humanity, the same is true of perfect human love. The Cross leads to the Resurrection and Pentecost. The three are, indeed, one act of divinity made human in Jesus Christ. Christian *koinonia* (1 John 4:7–12) is the revelation of that love through which persons are joined together in communion by grace with divine life.

Christian love is a disposition of character toward all human beings which, though not shared by all, always belongs to more than one. Such love is established in the character of one Person recognized, by those who know him, as their nearest neighbor in whom they are reconciled with God and their fellows and in whom also they are called into loving company (fellowship) such that they are “being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor. 3:18 RSV).³²

THE DIVINITY OF HUMAN LOVE

“God is love,” wrote St. John (1 John 4:8 RSV). So the question arises: “What then is man?” Perhaps we need not look to the theologians alone for the answer. Was it not the argument of Fyodor Dostoevsky, speaking out of the spiritual riches of Russian Orthodoxy, and Flannery O’Connor, calling out from the heart of a transplanted Roman Catholicism, that the human being is defined by his or her *eros*? “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:21 RSV). Dostoevsky and O’Connor went on to argue that the fulfillment or goal of our humanity is divine love—*agape*. *Agape* and *eros* are, as Martin D’Arcy skillfully points out, both united and distinct.³³ This conclusion is based upon the Incarnation. In the words of Augustine: “The very same person is at once God and man, God our end, man our way.”³⁴ *Eros* without *agape* degenerates into carnal desire and finally a God- and man-denying narcissism. *Agape* absent *eros* is itself replaced by a benevolent self-interestedness and finally a God- and man-denying egotism.

Two characters of modern literature in whom one finds a radical disjunction of *agape* and *eros* are Flannery O’Connor’s Rayber in *The Violent Bear It Away* and Fyodor Dostoevsky’s Ivan Karamazov. They suffer from similar spiritual maladies. Both are haunted by the yearning for a transfigured world against which their reason rebels. Both, persuaded that an active present concern for the improvement of this world is threatened by this yearning for a transfigured world, reject their irrational desire and decide for the immediate good that might be accomplished by the complete rationalization of human affairs.

Rayber, the schoolteacher and secular humanist, is distraught and terrified by the “outrageous” love aroused within him by his idiot son, Bishop. “He was not afraid of love in general. He knew the value of it and how it could be used.” But this love was not a controllable and reasonable benevolence. “It could not be used for the child’s improvement or his own.” It has no reason to be, no utility or predictable end. “It was completely irrational and abnormal. . . . It appeared to exist only to be itself, imperious and all demanding.”³⁵ Rayber senses that this love has no limits. “He could control his terrifying love as long as it had its focus in Bishop, but if anything happened to the child, he would have to face it in itself. Then the whole world would become his idiot child.”³⁶ Rayber’s love culminates in a yearning for his great-uncle,

Mason Tarwater, with his hunger for the Bread of Life and his “vision of a world transfigured.” “The longing was like an undertow in his blood dragging him backwards to what he knew to be madness.” Rayber practices “a rigid ascetic discipline,” vigilantly guarding his reason against this love and keeping “himself upright on a very narrow line between madness and emptiness, and when the time came for him to lose his balance, he intended to lurch toward emptiness and fall on the side of his choice.”³⁷

Ivan Karamazov is a more complex character than Rayber. More acutely than Rayber, Ivan senses that the way beyond this present tragic human lot is a “love” which defies “the rules of logic” of his “earthly Euclidean brain.” During a conversation with his younger brother, Alyosha, Ivan exclaims:

Alyosha, my boy, so I want to live and go on living, even if it’s contrary to the rules of logic. Even if I do not believe in the divine order of things, the sticky young leaves emerging from their buds in the spring are dear to my heart; so is the blue sky and so are some human beings, even though I often don’t know why I like them. . . . I’ll get drunk on my own emotion. I love those sticky little leaves and the blue sky, that’s what! You don’t love those things with reason, with logic, you love them with your innards, with your belly.³⁸

This *eros* is the source of Ivan’s intuitive non-Euclidean sensibility and his recognition of the transcendent worth of every human being. Ivan’s “rebellion” originates in a heart mortified by the offense of human suffering and ends in an intellectual hubris that refuses to trust in the mystery of divine love and its promise of universal reconciliation. Speaking to Alyosha in the chapter entitled “Rebellion,” Ivan states:

I believe in justice and I want to see justice done with my own eyes; if I should be dead by that time, I want to be brought back to life, because the idea that, when justice finally does triumph, I won’t even be there to witness it is too abhorrent to me. Why, I certainly haven’t borne it all so that my crimes and my sufferings would be used as manure to nurture the harmony that will appear in some remote future to be enjoyed by some unknown

creatures. . . . I can imagine what a universal upheaval there will be when everything up in heaven and down in the entrails of the earth come together to sing one single hymn of praise and when every creature who has lived joins in, intoning, "You were right, O Lord, for Your way has now been revealed to us!" The day the mother embraces the man who had her son torn to pieces by the hounds, the day those three stand side by side and say "You were right, O Lord," that day we will at last have attained the supreme knowledge and everything will be explained and accounted for. But that's just the hurdle I can't get over, because I can't agree that it makes everything right. And while I am on this earth, I must act in my own way. . . . No, I want no part of any harmony; I don't want it out of love for mankind. I prefer to remain with my unavenged suffering and my unappeased anger—even if I happen to be wrong. I feel, moreover, that such harmony is rather overpriced. We cannot afford to pay so much for a ticket. And so I hasten to return the ticket I've been sent.³⁹

Ivan's refusal of a transcendent world transfigured by *agape* and the ticket to that world has the unhappy consequence of also leaving him incapable of believing that *agape* is possible in this world. "In my opinion," says Ivan to Alyosha, "Christ's love for human beings was an impossible miracle on earth. But he was God. And we are no gods. . . . The idea of loving one's neighbor is possible only as an abstraction: it may be conceivable to love one's fellow man at a distance, but it is almost never possible to love him at close quarters."⁴⁰

Both Rayber and Ivan are unable to accept the God-man who is the coincidence of *agape* and *eros*. Rayber mocks the faith of old Tarwater even in his thoughts about Bishop, whom he looks upon "as an *x* signifying the general hideousness of fate. He did not believe that he himself was formed in the image and likeness of God, but that Bishop was he had no doubt. The little boy was part of a simple equation that required no further solution, except at the moments when with little or no warning he would feel himself overwhelmed by the horrifying love."⁴¹ Yet this very love that Rayber resists is the key that would unlock for him the legitimate status of Bishop's humanity. It is this love that testifies to the true image and likeness of God not only in Bishop but in Rayber as well. Through this love Rayber, if he would allow himself, could affirm Bishop in his personhood and eternal value. Through it Rayber could discover within himself and others a poten-

tiality for good uncharted by any of the psychological theories he has learned and beyond the measure of any of the educational tests he has contrived or administered in his job at the high school.⁴²

Eros united with *agape* belongs to the original image of God in humanity. “God,” wrote the Byzantine theologian Nicholas Cabasilas, “has implanted the desire into our souls by which every need should lead to the attainment of that which is good, every thought to the attainment of truth. . . . For those who have tasted of the Savior, the Object of desire is present. From the beginning human desire was made to be gauged and measured by the desire for Him, and is a treasury so great, so ample, that it is able to encompass God.” *Eros*’ repose is Christ, in whom it is translated into a universal love. “Those, therefore, who attain to Him are hindered by nothing from loving to the extent that love was implanted into our souls from the beginning.”⁴³ In Christ the creature’s inner “movement” toward the Godhead is completed and humankind’s capacity to reciprocate God’s love is perfected. The christic human being is characterized by a “burning love of his charity for God” and, in Christ, for fellow human beings—even all creation.⁴⁴ Such love is not a grace infused from *without*. Rather it is the original image of God restored from *within* by the express Image of God himself, Jesus Christ.

THE CHARACTER OF LOVE

In Orthodox theology *agape* is not simply a principle of the moral life. It is a total disposition toward life. John Chrysostom writes that love is “the mother of every good, and the badge of His [Christ’s] disciples, and the bond which holds together our whole condition.”⁴⁵ Due to human finitude and sin, however, the one divine *agape* is experienced and expressed in a variety of temporal modes (e.g., commandments, rules, virtues) and does not attain a complete hypostatic embodiment or wholeness of character in human beings. Yet *agape* is the “inner law” of our humanity, even though it is experienced by sinful humankind as commands or laws, imposed from without, which are disagreeable and even threatening to well-being and happiness. Those who trust in Christ, however, have the knowledge and experience of this “law” of human nature as the Life of life. For the person of faith the requirements of love are experienced as the qualities of a near and particular Person. “It is possible,” wrote Cabasilas, “to discern in the character

of the only Savior the whole of righteousness. . . . He alone has exhibited a character totally pure from all that is contrary to virtue, for 'He committed no sin' (1 Pet. 2:22)."⁴⁶ Christ is divine love (*agape*) hypostatistically incarnate. Thus is he not only the perfect model of our humanity but its goal as well. By becoming our human neighbor in love, the Word has acted consistently with the intentions of the Father, who created within humankind not only a capacity for self-determination but a self-transcendent "movement" toward him who is the good of human existence. The Incarnation is the ultimate strategy of divine love precisely because by having become a human being the Word was able to replace the Law as external command with a personal invitation for human beings to achieve the full potentialities of their nature and fulfill their theanthropic vocation. When the Word established himself as our neighbor by becoming "flesh," it was inevitable that he also would be our nearest neighbor, since he, the express Image of the Father, is the archetype of the image of God in us. Thus it is that he is able to evoke from within persons those virtues by which they can attain their full stature as human beings. As John of Damascus comments:

Now, the virtues are natural, and they are also naturally inherent in all men, even though all of us do not act naturally. For, because of the fall, we went from what is according to nature to what is against it. But the Lord brought us back from what is against nature to what is according to it—for this last is what is meant by "according to his image and likeness" (Gen. 1:27). Now, asceticism and the labors connected with it were not intended for the acquisition of virtue as of something to be introduced from outside, but for the expulsion of evil, which has been introduced and is against nature—just as the steel's rust, which is not natural but due to neglect, we remove with hard toil to bring out the natural brightness of the steel.⁴⁷

However, the restoration of the image of God in human beings by the exercise of virtues natural and theological is also growth into freedom, "a coming up to a state which owns no master and is self-regulating," says Gregory of Nyssa. "It is that," he goes on to observe, "with which we were gifted by God at the beginning" but which was obscured by sin.⁴⁸ For it is the good of a human being to become by the practice of virtue a free being in possession of herself. This is to

become in the likeness of God—for God is a perfectly free subject—by a grace which does not compel from without but transfigures from within.

“Christ,” states Gregory of Sinai, is he “Whom we have as the origin and the basis of all virtues, in Whom we stand and by Whom we perform every good action.”⁴⁹ Blessedness (or perfection) in all virtue is attained only when one makes the life and character of Christ one’s own. This cannot be a solitary achievement; it is possible only within the body of Christ. *Unus Christianus—nullus Christianus* (“One Christian—no Christian”). “Be imitators of me as I am of Christ,” wrote St. Paul to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 11:1 RSV). The imitation of Christ is a corporate remembrance of one Person. This Person is in those who remember, and in him they remember all who have lived faithfully in him. Thus, in the Divine Liturgies of the Eastern churches, Christ is petitioned “to direct their will [the will of those living and at rest] . . . as well as our will [the will of those present] to what is right and is abounding in salvation, and reward . . . all with thy blessed bounties that pass not away.”⁵⁰ The remembrance *must* be eucharistic because the imitation is not possible or complete “unless grace transforms” all the virtues “into an essential disposition of the heart.”⁵¹

Christ, having fulfilled the Law, showed for all who would follow him a way to eternal life. So we are told in the Gospel of St. Matthew:

And behold, one came up to him saying, “Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?” And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? One there is who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.” He said to him, “Which?” And Jesus said, “You shall not kill, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” The young man said to him, “All these I have observed; what do I still lack?” Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.” (Matt. 19:16–22 RSV)

“One there is who is good. . . . Follow me.” So says Christ to the young man. Yet, like Pharisees of every age, the young man mistakes the law for the good and is unable to recognize the good as One who-is-with-us.

Orthodox theology has understood divine commandments, especially those of the Sermon on the Mount, not as counsels of perfection reserved for monastics,⁵² nor as impossible ideals relevant as symbols which point to the Kingdom of God, nor as a literal blueprint (or set of laws) for a new Christian society. The beatitudes have been interpreted as traits of character, the whole disposition of a Person who perfects humanity-in-relation-to-God.

Thus the first and final act of the conscientious Christian is to “Remember the Lord thy God.” By prayer, worship, and all forms of loving acts Christians are to remember Christ and invite him into their hearts. In this sense the beatitudes are themselves “reminders of the kind of people we must be”⁵³ in order to make the Kingdom present. Yes, the beatitudes are a glimpse into the Kingdom—but in the form of a Person in whom it is already present. They are the details of a living icon which is a Person. Together the beatitudes form the image of One whose mind and heart are perfectly disposed toward God and humanity. It is in this sense, particularly, that the double love commandment—“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. . . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” (Matt. 22:37–40 RSV)—sums up the Law and all the commandments. Indeed, in all the beatitudes we find the character of the one praised in the ancient hymn of Philippians, “who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” Christ is the one who, being perfect in all virtue, represents in his person all the promises of the beatitudes as well. He in whom poverty, humility, gentleness, mercy, and purity of heart reigned and who was himself reconciler and peacemaker, suffering “even death on the cross” for righteousness’ sake, is also he whom God “has highly exalted” “and on whom God has bestowed . . . the name which is above every name, [so] that . . . every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:5–11 RSV).

Thus, in Christ the virtues are enacted as kenotic and agapeic love. Through this christic disposition of love that intends all things for God, and through the refinement and perfection of the image of God in the neighbor, persons achieve blessedness. Absent this character and intentionality of love all virtues are what Augustine called splendid vices, or even worse. Or, in Maximus the Confessor’s words:

The world has many poor in spirit, but not as they should be; many that mourn, but for bad bargains, or for loss of children; many meek, but in the face of impure passions; many hungering and thirsting, but to seize others' goods and to gain unjustly. And there are many merciful, but to the body and its comforts; many clean of heart, but for vanity's sake; many peacemakers, but they subject the soul to the flesh. The world has many that suffer persecution, but undisciplined; many that are reviled, but for shameful sins. Only those are blessed who do and suffer all these things for Christ and after His example. Why? Because *theirs is the kingdom of heaven, and they shall see God*, and what follows. So then, not because they do and suffer such things are they blessed (for the men just mentioned do the same), but because they do and suffer them for Christ and after His example.⁵⁴

According to Orthodox ethics, Christ's rules and commandments are obligatory not because he is an authority whose reason and purpose are external to us, but because they belong as virtue to the total character of him who shares the same ontological status with us as a human being in whom that humanity has reached full maturity. The great emphasis upon obedience to these commandments in Orthodox theology is not a commitment to a myriad of rules for the sake of duty to some objective, extrapersonal, moral order. Rather, it reflects a faithfulness to the theanthropic vocation of human persons and to the one Person who fulfilled that vocation—the one in whom was revealed in the fullness of time God's plan of salvation (Eph. 1:9–10 RSV).

Love “supplies perfect discernment,” writes Simeon the New Theologian, “and by itself is a good guide . . . which carries us across the spiritual sea (cf. Wisd. 10:18). It is this that I pray may be granted you by God, . . . that you may discern your affairs in a manner pleasing to God.”⁵⁵ Simeon points out that this discernment is not guaranteed by a formalistic adherence to rules and commandments. Obedience to Christ's commandments are a *spiritual* observance that disciplines the mind and purifies the heart so that the Word is “acquired . . . as our indweller and teacher.” He gives us reasons to act that no single commandment or rule, person or authority, alone is able to provide. “One should abide in the commandments of our Lord and God and await His command (to undertake one service or another).”⁵⁶

All rules and commandments are relative to Jesus Christ in whom God's salvific work is completed. As such, rules and commandments

indicate those modes of behavior that are consistent with Christ, the model of our salvation, and the sanctifying work of the Spirit. That which is the good is God and, therefore, unchanging and absolute. That which is right and good conduct shares the mutability and contingency of the creature, even when serving God's eternal plan of salvation. Discernment of God's will and the knowledge of that which is right and good for each occasion is revealed only when a person puts to death his sinful self and responds in total obedience to God.

St. Paul writes:

Therefore, my brothers, I implore you by God's mercy to offer your very selves to him: a living sacrifice, dedicated and fit for his acceptance, the worship offered of mind and heart. Adapt yourselves no longer to the pattern of this present world, but let your minds be remade and your whole nature thus transformed. Then you will be able to discern the will of God, and to know what is good, acceptable, and perfect. (Rom. 12:1–2 NEB)

The mark of a loving, christic disposition is a power of discernment that has reasons of mind and heart which already belong to eternal life. This power of discernment is the gift of the Spirit obtained in worship by which persons render themselves totally dedicated to God's purpose. The true hermeneutic and discipline of Orthodox morality is that catholic mind of the church which is the *telos* of every person who offers himself "a living sacrifice" to God. In this activity the person "*widens the scope of . . . his personality*" and begins to include within himself the many who are the fullness of Christ's body, the Church.⁵⁷ This vision of Orthodox ethics makes no sharp distinction between the activity of worship and morality. They are the same in loving service toward and union with one's brothers and sisters. Orthodox ethics does not embrace one single universalizable principle of right conduct as the criterion that determines how and when this loving service and union are rendered. It looks rather to the Spirit himself "communicating to each member of the Body of Christ the faculty of hearing, of receiving, of knowing the Truth in the Light which belongs to it, and not [simply] according to the natural light of human reason." This, Vladimir Lossky says, is "the pure notion of Tradition."⁵⁸