

The Church, ^{B-13} the Liturgy and the Soul of Man

The *Mystagogia* of
St. Maximus the Confessor

*Translated, with Historical Note
and Commentaries by*

DOM JULIAN STEAD, O.S.B.



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The Church, the Liturgy, and the Soul of Man

*The Mystagogia of Saint Maximus the
Confessor: the meaning of the
things done in the holy Church
during the Liturgy*

*Who now, having become god by the grace of
the Trinity and favored with the glory from
above, from the prime glory, would think that
there is still something more glorious than to
celebrate the Liturgy and to contemplate the
Most-High Nature . . . ?*

St. Symeon the New Theologian¹

Preface

You yourself, my most honored friend, have given clear proof of how the wise man makes the most of his opportunities to become wiser, and the just man when instructed will accept more instruction, as the divine proverb says,² teaching by your example what the wisdom of God's word recommends. For having once heard me telling hastily, as best I could on the spur of the moment, the beautiful spiritual theories of a certain great old man, who was truly wise in the things of God, about the holy Church and her holy liturgy, which he was capable of doing in a most masterly way, you asked me urgently at once to put the story into writing, for you to keep as medicine for forgetfulness and an aid to memory; you were saying that as a matter of course memory is worn out by time; without our noticing it; time can use our forgetfulness to rob us of the beautiful objects stored there, completely erasing their impressions and images; and on this account our

tendency to forgetfulness definitely needs to be counteracted by continual renewing through the power of the written word which, of its nature, preserves the memory unharmed and undiminished.

It is well known, at all events to everyone who cares even a little for the perfection of the mind, and is not totally estranged from reason, that it is much wiser to seek the indelible retention of what one has heard than simply to listen.

For my part, I was reluctant at first; to tell the truth, I begged off the invitation to write this; not, dearly beloved, that I was unwilling to satisfy your desire by any means I could; but because I have not received the grace which initiates worthy men into this sort of thing; nor am I a gifted or experienced speaker; I was brought up without education, completely untrained in that art of speech which has beauty in its mere utterance, to which the public loves to listen, finding enjoyment in the sound alone, even if the speech often contains nothing to admire for the depth of its insight. And for another reason (truer and still more valid), I feared the shabbiness of my speech would bring disgrace on that blessed man's stateliness of expression and great intelligence when speaking about sacred things. However, I gave way in the end to that force of love which is the mightiest of forces, glad to accept the charge, preferring to suffer ridicule for my obedience among the

carping critics, as a presumptuous ignoramus, rather than make you think by my procrastination that I do not want to share in your eagerness to promote all that is beautiful. I cast my care on God³ who alone works marvels, and teaches man knowledge;⁴ He sets the tongue free from impediments,⁵ and finds the way out for those who are lost; He lifts up the poor from the dust, and raises the needy from a dunghill⁶—I mean from a worldly mind and the stinking mud of the emotions; the poor being the poor in spirit, men who deprive themselves of evil, and of the state that derives from it, or perhaps those who are still held fast in the law of the flesh and their passions, and for this reason are deprived of the state of virtue and knowledge, and in need of grace.

But since the symbols in the sacred rite of the holy liturgy have been interpreted in a manner worthy of his largeness of soul by the all-holy Denys the Areopagite (a true revealer of God!), in his treatise on "The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy," let it be known that what is here written does not cover the same ground as he. For it would be audacious, presumptuous, and close to madness for that man's writings to be subjected to criticism by a person unable to understand him, or to claim as one's own the secrets which the Spirit revealed through inspiration to him alone. But we shall undertake whatever the will of God and his love of man made him leave out, thinking

others would be able to understand it on their own and explain, developing their own skill in the things of God, to the degree of their desire; in proportion to their ability, the radiant splendor of the ceremonies is made manifest, when taken to heart, so that it draws to itself those who are gripped by its love; he did not want the men who came after him to be completely idle for the whole daytime of this present life, without the work of teaching for which people are hired to cultivate the Lord's vineyard, or reflection about the tillage of the soul's vineyard, a place which the evil one and his deceit despoiled in its beginnings at the transgression of the commandment; an occupation which pays the spiritual denarius⁷ of being the image and likeness of God, king of kings.

I am not proposing to tell every one of the mystical thoughts the blessed old man had; nor what he said, precisely as it was conceived and related by him. He was a man who was not only a philosopher and a teacher of every discipline; through wealth of virtue, practice, and skillful exertion in the things of God, he had freed himself from the shackles of matter and the fantasies that derive from it, so that his mind was illumined with the radiance of divine light; hence he could straightway see things not visible to the majority of men, and the best way of explaining them; like a mirror stained by no spots of passion, he was able to pick up without interference, and

transmit, things imperceptible to others; so his listeners could see their understanding entirely supported by his reasoning; the whole object of their study became perfectly clear to their whole mind, and they were able to take in what was transmitted to them through his words. However, all that I am telling from memory, I am able to tell as only vaguely understood, and even more obscurely expressed, however reverently, by the grace of the God who gives light in darkness. You know how to judge justly, and I presume that you do not suppose that I can think or speak any other way than I am able, or than grace from on high allows me; God's providence has made my faculties proportionate to me personally, no matter how sublime a man he is who was the chief spokesman of this teaching. I do not see that expecting the same from things that are not the same in goodness and in knowledge differs widely from trying to tell the moon to shine as brightly as the sun, or forcing a key into the wrong lock. It cannot be helped; this cannot be done.

May God guide our every word and thought, He the only sense of those who think or of the objects of their thought, the sole reason for speakers and their subjects, the life of the living and of those who receive life, who is and will become all to all, for the sake of things present or yet to be; on His own account, He neither is nor will become anything in any sense whatever of all things presently existing or still to come, as His

nature is not of the same order at all as the things we say exist. For this reason it could be rather more suitable to say He does not “exist,” because His mode of existence is so superior. It is very important to perceive the true difference between God and creatures; the mode of existence of the Supreme Being must be denied of existing things; and the mode of existence of existing things is not that of transcendent being; the real meaning of both “existence” and “non-existence” must be considered in relation to the Supreme Being, and then neither can strictly be affirmed. Both can be said validly: the term “existing” is apposite to God as the cause of existence; but the term “existence,” as it applies to the transcendent cause of being, is totally to be denied of all creatures. But then, neither term is precisely applicable to God, as neither expresses the really essential mode of existence natural to the essence in question. Nothing existent or non-existent, no existing thing that we know of, or non-existent thing unknown to us, can come reasonably close to that to which nothing at all is linked of its nature as a cause (for He is uncaused, absolutely free and independent). His existence is simple, unknowable, and inaccessible to all, completely inscrutable, beyond description by any of our affirmative or negative language.

But enough of this. Now let us go on to the stated subject of the book.

CHAPTER ONE

The holy Church as an image of God

At the outset of his speculations, that blessed old man began saying that the holy Church presents an image and icon of God through its performance of the same operations, which it copies from Him and reproduces. God brought all things into existence by His infinite power, and now sustains, coordinates, and limits them. With His foreknowledge He links both spiritual and material things to each other and to Himself; as their cause, beginning, and end, He keeps all things in His close control, though they are widely different in nature. Just by the force of their relationship to Him as their beginning, He disposes them to each other; by this force all things are led into a harmony of motion and existence, without opposition⁸ or confusion, tending towards nothing which would clash with or destroy them, through fundamental differences of nature or motion. All things evolve together without confusion through their indissoluble relationship with their sole cause and beginning and His guardianship. That relationship nullifies and eclipses all the observable individual relationships of each nature to everything else, not by their ruin, removal, or destruction, but simply because it is superior and stronger; it appears sort of like the sum of the parts, or the cause of the sum, the natural cause of the appearance and existence of the sum itself and of its parts; being

the cause of their entirety it, as it were, outdoes them; like the sun appears to outshine the stars by its natural heat and power, the cause eclipses its effects. It is natural for effects to receive existence properly speaking, and also to become known, through their cause, just as parts through the whole to which they belong; but their distinctive character disappears whenever things are characterized in reference to a conglomerate rather than to their cause, because of the unique force of the relationship to the latter. God who is everything in all things, though He is infinitely above all things, will be seen simply and solely by those whose minds are pure, whenever thought reckons up contemplatively the reasons for things and ceases at God Himself, the cause, the beginning, and the end of the creation and evolution of the universe, and the eternal foundation of the whole wide world.

It will be shown that God's holy Church, an image conforming to its archetype, does God's work in us. The men, women, and children coming into the Church, reborn and recreated by her in the spirit, are just about infinite in number; they are very different from each other in race and appearance, they are of all languages, life styles, and ages; there are great differences in their mentalities, customs, and interests, their social station, their skills and their professions; their fortunes, their characters, and their abilities are all very different, but the Church confers one

and the same divine character and title equally on all: that they be, and be called, Christians; the Church bestows unity in that simple, indivisible relationship which comes from faith, and does not allow the many untold differences to stand out, even though they exist in every one; this is effected by the collective elevation into the Church of all the people who assemble in it, so that no one at all is segregated from the community in any respect; all grow up together, united by the simple and indivisible grace and power of one faith: for Scripture says, "they were of one heart, and of one soul" (Acts 4:32), so as to be, and to be seen as, one body made up of different members, and to be truly worthy of Christ Himself, our real head; "in whom," says the divine Apostle, "there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, circumcision nor uncircumcision, there is neither barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all."⁹ He keeps a firm hold on all things by the sheer infinitely wise force of goodness, like the hub with some sort of spokes fastened to it; by one single force He does not permit the elements of things to break their bounds, but contains their impulses, and draws toward Himself the varieties of beings He has made, so that the creatures of the one God will not be wholly foreign or hostile to each other, because of having no basis or place for demonstrating their friendship, peace, and

unity, lest they risk their very existence falling into nothingness by being separated from God.

As we have already said, the holy Church is an image of God; it works the same unity in the faithful as God, even though the people unified in her through the faith vary in their peculiarities and come from different places and different ways of life; it is God's nature to work this unity Himself in the substances of things, without fusing them; He softens down the diversity in them and unifies them as has already been shown, through their relationship and union with Him, their cause, beginning, and end.

CHAPTER TWO

God's holy Church as an image of the whole visible and invisible universe

In his second talk, he spoke of the holy Church of God as a figure and image of the entire visible and invisible universe, with the same sort of unity and differentiation. For a church, although put up as one building, is partitioned in conformity with a definite plan, with one place set aside for priests and servers, which we call the sanctuary, and another open to all the faithful, which we call the nave—and yet, the Church is essentially one, and not divided in kind by the differentiation of its parts. Through the relationship to her own unity which she transmits to them, the Church liberates the parts themselves

from the differences in their vocation, and makes their sameness and unity evident to each, showing that each is made for the other, the nave having the virtue of a sanctuary, for it is sanctified by its dedication to the goal of the liturgy, while the sanctuary (for the clergy) is actually a nave (temple), for the worship in the sanctuary is joined to that in the nave as to its source. The Church is one and the same in and throughout each section. The wise thus glimpse the universe of things brought into existence by God's creation, divided between the spiritual world, containing incorporeal intelligent substances, and this corporeal world, the object of sense (so marvelously woven together from many natures and kinds of things) as if they were all another Church, not built by hands, but suggested by the ones we build; its sanctuary is the world above, allotted to the powers above, its nave the world below, assigned to those whose lot it is to live in the senses.

The universe too is one, not split between its visible and invisible parts; on the contrary, by the force of their reference to its own unity and indivisibility, it circumscribes their difference in character. It shows itself to be the same, in the visible and invisible mutually joined without confusion with each other. Each is wholly fixed in the whole of the other. As parts of the whole, both make up the world, and as parts in the

whole, both are completed and fulfilled in a single form.¹⁰ For the whole intelligible world of thought is visible to those who have eyes to see, spiritually expressed in symbolic form by the whole sensible universe. And the sensible world is mentally present in the whole intelligible universe when it is verbally expressed in the mind. For this visible world is verbally present in the world of thought; the world of thought is present in its visible images. Their end result or work is all one, "as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel," says Ezechiel (1:16), that wonderful spectator of wonders, speaking, I think, about these two worlds. And the divine Apostle says, "The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made" (Romans 1:20). If invisible things can be observed through sense data, as it is written, visible phenomena will often be understood spiritually through the medium of what is sensibly imperceptible, by persons who devote themselves to spiritual contemplation. The contemplation of the objects of thought symbolized through the objects of sight means the spiritual understanding of the seen through the unseen. Things which are significative of each other are bound to contain clear and perfectly true expressions of each other, and a flawless relation to them.

CHAPTER THREE

The Church as an image of the material world

Next he declared that the holy Church of God is an image of just the sensible world by itself; the sanctuary reminds one of the sky, the dignity of the nave reflects the earth. Likewise the world can be thought of as a church: the sky seems like a sanctuary, and the cultivation of the land can make it resemble a temple.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Church of God as a reflection of man, itself symbolized by man

Looking at the subject another way, he began to say that God's holy Church is a symbol of man; its soul is the sanctuary; the sacred altar, the mind; and its body is the nave. A church is thus the image and likeness of man, who was made in the image and likeness of God. The nave is used as the body should be used, for exemplifying practical moral philosophy; from the sanctuary the Church leads the way to natural contemplation spiritually as man does with his soul; and she embarks on mystical theology through the sacred altar, as man does through his mind. Then he said that man is a mystical Church when he uses the temple of his body to do the works of the

commandments in his practical philosophy; for his virtues then brighten the active life of his soul. When he uses the power of reason to contemplate nature, he offers to God purely, as if his soul were a sanctuary, the ideas drawn from sense perception circumcised in the spirit from matter. And he calls through an eloquent and musical silence from the altar of his mind, to that other oft-sung silence in the hidden shrines of the Godhead—so resonant, though imperceptible to us and unintelligible; he joins in it by mystical theology, as far as is possible for man, and becomes the sort of person one ought to be expected to be if he has been thought worthy of the indwelling of God and granted the insignia of the radiant splendor of grace.

CHAPTER FIVE

God's holy Church as an image and model just of the soul

He taught that the holy Church could not be an image only of the whole human being, which subsists as a synthesis of soul and body; it is also an image of the soul considered by itself, he stated that the soul consists, in general, of two forces: intellect and vitality; through acts of the will, the intellectual power is in free, self-determined motion, while it is of the nature of the vital force to remain as it is, involuntarily.

The intellectual is subdivided into the speculative and the practical, the speculative phase being called "mind,"¹¹ the practical, "reason";¹² the mind is what moves intellectual power, while reason watches the vital force. The one, mind, deserves to be called wisdom whenever it keeps its movements absolutely straight towards God. Similarly reason is called prudence, whenever it applies the vital powers temperately to action, controlling them with forethought, to show that they are governed by the wisdom of the mind—and that the soul's vital phase bears the same reflection of the divine as the mind, made similar to it by virtue; he used to say that it is natural for this likeness to be imparted to both mind and reason; so it is evident that the soul is formed principally from intelligence and reason, being both intelligent and rational. The vital force is clearly present equally in both mind and reason; it would be wrong to think of either of them as excluded from life; each possesses life, in which the mind (which, as we have said, can also be termed "wisdom"), stretching out in ineffable silence and knowledge by a habit of contemplation, is led to the truth through unceasing indelible knowledge. Reason (which we named prudence), through a life of virtuous physical work, leads through faith to goodness. The two combine to form the true science of things both divine and human, the truly infallible kind of

knowledge, the goal of all sacred philosophy among Christians.

To sum it all up more clearly, he was saying that one phase of the soul is contemplative (as we have said already) and the other, active; he called the contemplative phase "mind," the active "reason"; these are the soul's primary potentialities; then he called the mind "wisdom," and reason "prudence," with reference to the soul's primary functions, which are being wise and prudent.

In more detail, his doctrine was that the soul's intellectual function is mind, wisdom, contemplation, and knowledge, and unforgettable knowledge; of which the final end is truth. Its rational function is reason, and prudence, action, virtue, and faith, whose final end is goodness. He was saying that truth and goodness reveal God to us; truth, whenever the divine seems to be inferred just from what something *is*; for the truth is simple and unique reality, one and the same, indivisible, unchanging, serene and impassible, inescapable and perfectly eternal. Goodness reveals God, whenever holiness is manifest in action. For goodness is beneficent, farseeing, protective and concerned in all it does; according to etymologists the term "good" (Greek: *agathon*) means either "existing," "set down," or "running," "exceedingly," for on all existing things it bestows existence and permanence and movement.

He was saying that the five pairs of correlative ideas seen in the soul are connected with the one pair significative of God. The pairs I mean are: mind and reason, wisdom and prudence, contemplation and action, knowledge and virtue, unforgetting knowledge and faith. The pair significative of God is truth and goodness; when the soul progresses in these, it is united to the God of all; it reflects the eternity and beneficence of what God is and does, through its firm, steadfast, and voluntary maturity in all that is beautiful. And, if I may inject a useful little illustration, perhaps this is what is symbolized by the sacred ten-stringed harp of the psalter (Ps. 144:9); it stands for the soul, whose thoughts respond to the spirit through the other blessed decade of the commandments, on which the perfect, harmonious, tuneful music is played by which God is hymned; this helps me understand what is meant by the decades singing and sung, and how one decade added mystically to another brings Jesus back to Himself, my God and Savior, fulfilled when I am saved, always supremely complete, who can never disown or be separated from Himself; He restores me—man—wonderfully to Himself, or rather to God, from whom I have received and possess my life, and towards whom I am urged by my lifelong yearning after the good life. Anyone who has gained knowledge of that life will know from his experience what we have been trying to say;

through this experience he now recognizes palpably and perfectly his own value, how the image's properties are restored, how glory is given to the archetype, the meaning of the mystery of our salvation, and for whom it was that Christ died; also how we can abide in Him and He in us, as He has said,¹³ and how "the word of the Lord is right: and all his works are done in truth."¹⁴ But let that be enough on the subject; let us get our discourse back to our train of thought.

He said the mind moved by wisdom comes to contemplation; through contemplation to knowledge; through knowledge to unforgettable knowledge, and through unforgettable knowledge to Truth; there the mind receives the consummation of its motion; its essence, its powers, its habits and its actuality are defined by truth.

He was saying that wisdom is a virtue¹⁵ of the mind, the mind itself being a potentiality for wisdom; contemplation is a habit (or acquired skill), and the full actualization¹⁶ of the mind is knowledge; but indelible knowledge is the incessant, habitual, and perpetual motion of wisdom, contemplation, and knowledge (i.e. of the power,¹⁵ the habit, and the activity¹⁶ of the mind) about the object of knowledge which surpasses all knowledge; the goal of this motion is the Truth, the inescapable object of knowledge. This too is remarkable, that what is unforgettable ends up being terminated, as it is evidently

consummated by the Truth as if by God. For God is the Truth about whom the mind's undying, unforgetting motion can never cease; for it finds no end where there is no distance. The marvelous greatness of divine infinity is without quantity or parts, and totally without dimensions. There is no power of perception equal to it, capable of finding out what in the world He is, essentially speaking. Being beyond any kind of dimension or perception it is impenetrable to all minds.

Likewise, when reason moves with prudence it comes to action; through action it comes to virtue, through virtue to faith, which is a truly confident and reliable conviction about the things of God; through prudence, reason has faith potentially at first; but eventually faith comes to actual expression through virtue, because it is made manifest in works. For as it is written, "faith without works is dead."¹⁷ Anything dead is inactive; no sane person would dare to consider something dead a benefit. Through faith, reason comes to the good, where it finds its consummation, and rests from its characteristic functions, with its power, habits, and activity now at their limit.

So prudence is a power or virtue of reason; reason itself is potentially prudence; reason as a habit becomes right action; its full actualization is virtue; then faith is an ingrained and unchanging stability in prudence, action, and virtue (i.e. in one's powers, habits, and activity); faith's

ultimate goal is the Good, in which reason comes to rest and ceases from motion. For God is the Good, in which it is natural for reason's power, and all power, to be consummated. To define how each of these powers is developed and brought into operation, and to what a degree they coincide or conflict with one another, is not to the present purpose, except just enough to know that at the moment when—through the grace of the Holy Spirit and its own industry and pains—a soul becomes able to integrate these powers (mind, I mean, with thought;¹² wisdom with prudence, contemplation with action, knowledge with virtue, and unforgettable knowledge with faith) keeping all in balance, without too much or too little of either in relation to the other equalizing all superfluities and shortcomings—or, to put it concisely, when it is able to make a unity out of its intrinsic decade, *then* will it be made one with the true, good, one and only God. It will be beautiful and majestic, coming to resemble Him as much as is possible through the fulfillment of the four cardinal virtues, which manifest the divine decade in the soul and embrace that other blessed decade, the commandments. For the number four is potentially a decade, added up in a progression starting from one. And the same group of four is a unity, embracing goodness in a single combination, reflecting the simplicity and indivisibility of God's operation, shared indivisibly in the four virtues. By these four virtues the soul

vigorously keeps its own person inviolable, and manfully rejects what is alien as bad for it, possessing a rational mind, prudent wisdom, contemplation turning to productive action, virtuous knowledge made indelible by these virtues; simultaneously most faithful and unchangeable, on the basis of these virtues, which it offers to God as prudent developments and the actualities of its potential; in return for these it receives the deification which brings about its unity and simplicity.

For thought¹² comes from the mind, as an effect from its cause: its actuality and revelation; and prudence comes from wisdom, action from contemplation, virtue from knowledge, and faith from the unforgettable knowledge; from these a deep-seated relationship is wrought to the truth and to goodness, i.e. to God, which he called divine science and infallible knowledge and charity and peace, in and through which comes deification. This relationship is divine science insofar as it is the fulfillment of all knowledge humanly attainable about God and things sacred, and a faultless summary of the virtues; it is knowledge as it genuinely bases itself upon the truth, and affords a lasting experience of the divine; it is charity insofar as the complete disposition it induces is a sharing in all the sweetness of God; it is peace insofar as it gives one the same attitude to things as God and disposes people for it who have been esteemed

worthy to live with this peace. Whereas the divine is absolutely immovable, so that it cannot in any respect be annoyed or wearied—for what can disturb or reach the vantage point of His height?—peace too is an unshaken and immovable firmness, and also an unperturbed joy; indeed does not every soul experience the things of God, if it has been thought worthy of receiving divine peace? So that, if it is all right to say such a thing, the soul not only leaves evil and ignorance, falsehood and malice behind (along with all the evils contrary to virtue or knowledge, to the truth and to the good, arising in consequence of unnatural tendencies in the soul), but it even steps beyond the limits of virtue and knowledge set for us, of truth and even of goodness, and in accordance with God's infallible promise, in an indescribable and mysterious way it calms itself in supremely good, supremely true intercourse with God; then, among all the things which naturally harass it, nothing is left which can reach its hiding place in God. This blessed and immaculate wedlock is a consummation of that awesome mystery of unity, beyond understanding and reason, through which God will become one flesh and one spirit with His Church, the soul; and the soul with God. O Christ, how shall I honor You for Your goodness? I dare not raise my voice in praise, since it is not strong enough to give the honor You are due. "And the two shall be one flesh. This a great mystery: but I speak

concerning Christ and the Church," says the divine Apostle.¹⁸ And again, "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit."¹⁹

There will thus be no more reason for making many distinctions within the soul, since she will have acquired one single form, having been brought both to herself and to God, her head crowned with the first, single, and one Word (Reason)¹² who is God. In Him, in one inconceivable simplicity, all the reasons for existing things subsist in one single form, as He is the Author and Maker of all. Gazing at Him (not outside, but wholly in all of her), the soul with a simple glance will then also see the reasons for things and their causes, in search of which she used perhaps to be drawn into pursuits tending to divide her, before her espousal to the Word who is God; and with their saving and concordant help she is conveyed to God, comprising in Himself every thought¹² and every cause He created.

Well then, as we have said, these are what belong to the soul; potentially it has wisdom in its mind, and from wisdom it develops contemplation, which leads to knowledge, and out of knowledge comes the unforgettable knowledge, through which it is brought to the Truth, which is the goal and fulfillment of the good qualities of the mind. Through reason it has prudence, which initiates action; by its action it develops virtue, from which grows faith, where it ends up in the

Good, the blessed end of all rational activities; the science of the divine is acquired through the integration and union of these spiritual activities. The theory of the resemblance of God's holy Church to the soul distinctly fits in with all this. The sanctuary signifies all the things which emerge, as we have pointed out, in and through the development of the mind; the nave expresses all that is related to the word¹² and clearly comes from reason corresponding to precept, and it brings them together for the mystery celebrated on the sacred altar. Any person who has been able to learn all this sensibly and wisely through what is done in church, has really made his own soul a church of God, a divine thing. Perhaps the Church made with hands has been given to us wisely for the soul's sake, because by the complexity of the sacred things in it, it is meant to be a symbolic pattern for the soul, for our guidance to the higher state.

CHAPTER SIX

The sense in which the Holy Scriptures also are called man

Just as he was saying in his allegorical speculations that the Church is symbolically a man, and man is symbolically a Church, he stated that, taken generally, the whole of Scripture likewise stands for man, with the Old Testament

as the body, the New as the soul, spirit, and mind. But also the literal narrative of all Scripture, of both the Old Testament and the New, is the body; and its soul is the meaning of the words and the objective at which the meaning is aimed. When I heard this, I greatly admired the accuracy of the comparison, and to the best of my power I gave due praise to Him who distributes spiritual gifts to each man in accordance with his merit. For as everything in man that is visible in this world is mortal, but what is invisible of him is immortal, likewise the visible letter of the Scriptures is perishable, but hidden in the written word is the spirit which will never pass away, and which confirms the truth in any theory. And just as man in this world, using philosophy to control his passionate desires and impulses, represses his flesh, so too Holy Scripture contemplated in its spiritual sense circumcises its own letter. For the divine Apostle says: "as much as our outward man perishes, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."²⁰ This is the approach to take to the figurative sense of Holy Scripture. What its letter loses, its spirit gains—just as, when the shadows of temporal worship recede, the truth of the faith is let in: shadowless, all bright and radiant. It is chiefly in dependence on this truth and in reference to it that Scripture is what it is, was written, and named Scripture, inscribed by supernatural grace in our mind; just as, indeed, man in this world is what he is, and is called human,

principally on account of his rational and intelligent soul, which makes him the image and likeness of God his Maker, and marks off his nature from the rest of the animals leaving no trace of an affinity with them.

CHAPTER SEVEN

*In what senses the world can be called a man; and
man can be called a world*

He put forward another suggestion, along the lines of the same imagery, that the whole world of visible and invisible things can be thought of as a man; and man, made up of body and soul, as a world. He was saying that spiritual things play a soul's role in the world, while the soul has a life as a world of spiritual things; and the objects of sense are a type of body, while the human body stands for the world of sensible things. Spiritual things are the soul of sense objects, sense objects are a sort of embodiment of thoughts. The spiritual world is in the material like the presence of a soul in a body; and the material world is fused with the spiritual like a body with its soul; like soul and body make one man, the two make one world. Neither repudiates or rejects the other, for their union has assimilated them to each other, according to the law of Him who bound them together, which has determined that they be inseminated with an

essentially unitive force, not permitting their natural differences to cause the substantial identity, resulting from their union, to be unrecognized, nor the peculiarity which defines each in itself to appear to be a stronger force for their separation and division than the mysteriously sympathetic kinship instilled into them at their union, by which the singular and universal character of the conserving cause's presence in the universe—immanent in all existing things in various ways, though unnoticed—preserves the whole lot without confusion or division within themselves or among one another. It disposes them, through this unitive relationship, to belong more to each other than to themselves, until He who bound them together decides on their dissolution for the sake of a greater and more sacred order of things, at the time for which we hope: the consummation of all things, when the world of appearances will die like man, but rise new from the old, at the resurrection expected right away. At that time the present-day man will rise with the world, as a part with the whole or the small with the larger, acquiring everlasting incorruptibility; the body will become like the soul and material things like the spiritual in majesty and glory; then a single divine power will be manifest to all, its presence visible and active in proportion to each; by itself, and for infinite ages, it will maintain the bond of unity indissoluble.

If anyone then wishes his life and mind to be filled with the love of God and to be pleasing to

Him, let him respect the better and more noble attributes of these three: the world, the Scriptures, and man as we know him. Let him pay all the attention he can to his soul, for it is immortal, and sacred, and virtues will make it divine; let him despise his flesh; it is bound to decay and die, and unless the soul's honor is kept clean, the flesh can contaminate it. "For the corruptible body presseth down the soul, and the earthy tabernacle weigheth down the mind that museth on many things."²¹ "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh."²² And "he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption."²³ In the life of his spirit, let his thoughts stir his efforts toward incorporeal, intelligent powers, leaving the visible present things behind him; for it is written, "the things which are seen, are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal";²⁴ God abides there among those powers, on account of the great depth and maturity of their peace. Let him raise himself prudently to the Holy Spirit, through thoughtful perusal of Holy Scripture, going beyond its literal sense; all good subsists in that Spirit, "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."²⁵ Anyone found worthy of being let into these treasures, will discover God Himself engraved on the tablets of his heart by the grace in that Spirit; "with open face he will behold as in a glass the glory" of God,²⁶ when he lifts the veil of the literal sense.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The symbolism of the first entrance in the sacred liturgy and of the actions which follow it

Now having summarized the blessed old man's theories about holy Church, we will do our best to present, still more concisely, his exposition of the holy liturgy. He taught that the priest's²⁷ first entrance into the holy church at the sacred liturgy is a figure and image of the first time the Son of God, Christ our Savior, came into this world in the flesh. Human nature had been enslaved to corruption because of its sin and had made itself subject to death; but by His first coming He set it free from the devil's tyrannical rule; and redeeming the whole debt of sin, He who was innocent and sinless paid as if He had been guilty Himself, and then took us back to the original grace of God's kingdom, having given Himself up as our ransom. To our corrupting passions He gave His lifegiving passion as a healing medicine, which can save the whole world. His ascension into heaven and restoration to His throne above the heavens, after His first coming, is symbolically represented by the priest's entrance into the sanctuary and his ascent to the sacerdotal chair.

CHAPTER NINE

The symbolism of the people's entrance into God's holy church

The blessed old man said that the people entering the church with the priest symbolize unbelievers being converted from ignorance and deception to the recognition of God, and believers changing over from evil and ignorance to goodness and knowledge. For entrance into the church suggests not just unbelievers' conversion to the one true God, but also the amendment in penitence of each of us who believe all right, but still despise the Lord's commandments by our undisciplined conduct and unseemly life. For every man, whether he has been a murderer, or an adulterer, or a thief, or a snob, or a show-off, or violent, or greedy, or miserly, or a gossip, or a grudgeholder, or irritable, or insulting, or a backbiter, a whisperer, or prone to envy, or a drunkard, or—not to list every kind of sin and drag out my speech—simply whoever is in the grip of any kind of vice, but stops being entangled in it voluntarily, with aforethought, and on purpose; —whoever really makes a change for the better, choosing goodness rather than evil, such a one could accurately be said truly to accompany Christ, his God and High Priest, into the goodness of which the Church is meant to be a sign.

CHAPTER TEN

The symbolism of the sacred readings

My teacher declared the divine readings of the all-sacred books confer some understanding of the happy plans and blessed intentions of the all-holy God Himself. In proportion to the potential within our control, each of us receives practical counsel; and we learn the laws of the divine and joyful contests; by competing in these legitimately and honestly, we earn the prizes of Christ's kingdom.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The significance of religious hymns

He asserted that the spiritual attraction of sacred song expresses the intense pleasure to be found in divine things, which stirs souls to the undiluted and happy desire of God, and awakens them to an intensified hatred of sin.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The invocations of peace

The wise man pronounced that the cries of peace, sung at the bidding of the priest from within the sanctuary at each reading, express the

approbation of God conveyed by holy angels. God arranges the contests of honest contenders for truth against hostile powers through the angels; He foils the invisible plots of the enemy, and grants peace through the destruction of the body of sin; He rewards the saints' struggles after virtue with the grace of freedom, so that they may give up warfare and transfer their soul's energies to development of the spirit, or the gaining of virtue; thereby they have dispelled crowds of evil spirits, under the generalship of God the Word, bringing the acute and almost insuperable cunning of the devil to nought.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The special symbolism of the reading of the Gospel—over and above its reading in private—and of each symbolical action which follows

And so the sacred regulation of holy Church appointed the²⁸ reading of the holy Gospel immediately after these invocations, especially to encourage the zealous to suffer for the word; after this, through the closing of the doors, and the Great Entrance of the holy sacraments (of bread and wine), the Word of spiritual contemplation, visiting them like a High Priest from heaven, as though shutting out the visible world, cuts off their thoughts from nature, and gets rid of thoughts which still incline towards the earth, turning the mind to a vision of spiritual things,

after shutting out the sight and sound of words and objects. When they have been taken out of the flesh and the world, He teaches them His secrets; by the kiss of peace they have been reconciled both to each other and to Him, and in return for His copious kindness they gladly bring Him simply a thankful acknowledgment of their salvation, which is implied by reciting the Symbol of Faith.²⁹ Then, with the "Holy, Holy, Holy," He gives them a place among the angels, and grants them nothing less than knowledge of sanctifying theology, bringing them to God the Father, now that the Holy Spirit has made them adopted sons, as shown by the prayer where they have been found worthy to call God, "Our Father." And then as if they had now penetrated all categories of reality with understanding, unified in grace, by an inseparable identity, as far as they are capable, they are assimilated to His unity by participation, as He brings them mysteriously to the mysterious Unity through the hymn "One only is holy . . ." and the prayers which follow.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The symbolism and generic meaning of the sacred reading of the holy Gospel

In a general way the sacred reading of the holy Gospel suggests the last stage of this world. For at the end, the priest descends from his throne.

Then the sacred ministers send out the catechumens and everyone else not yet qualified for the heavenly sight of the sacraments. Of itself this exclusion signifies and prefigures, and through these sacred ministers cries out, as it were, the truth that after the preaching of the Gospel of the kingdom as a witness to all nations throughout the world, then will come the end, as it is written. Our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will come for the second time, this time from heaven, of course, and with much glory—"for the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God" says the divine Apostle³⁰—He will vindicate Himself against His opponents, and He will use the holy angels to separate the faithful from unbelievers, the just from the unjust, the sinful from the saints, or to put it concisely and simply: those who conform to the Spirit of God from those who walk after the flesh;³¹ in infinite and endless ages, as it says in the truth of God's word, He will pay everyone a just return, each according to the worthiness of his conduct.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The closing of the doors of the holy church after the reading of the Gospel

The closing of the doors of the holy church of God after the reverent reading of the holy Gospel

and the catechumens' dismissal, expresses first the passing away of material things; then the future entrance of the worthy into the spiritual world (or bridal chamber of Christ) after that dread banishment and even more formidable final reckoning; and lastly the total repudiation of the illusions in the senses.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

What the great entrance of the holy sacraments signifies

The entrance of the holy and venerable sacraments is the preface and beginning—as that great elder stated—to the new teaching that will be given in heaven concerning God's provision for us, and the revelation of the mystery of our salvation, hidden in the center of the divine secrecy. "I will not drink henceforth," says God the Word to His own disciples, "of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."³²

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

What is symbolized by the divine greeting ("Peace be with you all.... Let us love one another in order to make our profession of faith in unity."³³)

The time will come for the revelation of indescribable blessings, resulting from both faith

and love; people will be all of one thought, one will, and one mind; by reason of this, those who deserve it will acquire a kinship to God the Word. This is what the spiritual greeting addressed to the whole congregation prefigures and prepares. Our speech formulates our thought; of all gifts, the mind is the greatest help (to those creatures who being rational are partakers in reason) towards becoming united to everyone else and to the first and only Word, Creator of all thought.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The significance of the divine creed

When all make their profession of the divine faith together, they anticipate the mystical thanksgiving they will offer in the next world for the wonderful words and ways by which God saved us through His all-wise providence in our favor; in making that thanksgiving, the worthy confirm their gratitude for God's kindness, having no other way to reciprocate God's infinite blessings.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The hymn of the "thrice-holy" doxology

The threefold acclamation of holiness, which all the faithful sing in praise of God, is an intimation of future unity and equality with

incorporeal and spiritual powers; in this unity, mankind will learn to join with one voice in the unchanging perpetual motion about God, of the higher powers praising the glory of the one God in Three Persons with the three acclamations of holiness.

CHAPTER TWENTY

The implications of the holy prayer: "Our Father, Who art in heaven"

But the all-holy, reverend invocation of our great and blessed God and Father is a sign of that substantive personal adoption as His sons, to be bestowed on us by the gift and grace of the Holy Spirit, so that every human property will be surpassed and overshadowed by the visitation of grace, and all the saints will be called and will be the sons of God, if they have now already started to brighten themselves gloriously through the virtues, with the divine beauty of goodness.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The meaning of the hymns sung at the end of the mysteries, namely the "One is Holy, One is Lord, etc."

At the end of the sacrificial action, the whole congregation in common confess the "One is

Holy, etc.," and this expresses the deep union (beyond understanding or description) to be effected in people made perfect for God by wisdom and the sacraments, in the incorruptible world of spiritual beings, gathering them into the mysterious unity of divine simplicity. In that world, gazing upon the light of the invisible glory, utterly beyond description, with the high angelic powers they too become capable of blessed purity. As the final end, the imparting of the sacrament comes: transforming into itself those who receive it worthily, it makes them, by grace and participation, similar to Him who is good essentially, in no way inferior to Him, as far as that is humanly possible and attainable for man. Consequently, by adoption and grace, it is possible for them to be and to be called gods, because all of God completely fills them, leaving nothing in them empty of His presence.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO³⁴

How the inner peace of the soul especially helps to deify and sanctify, in the case of each of the things which have been our theme

Let us now retrace the same material in an orderly way; let us reexamine the same subjects, but in reference to the cognitive soul. And—if you agree—let us not hold back our mind from something it so longs for and wishes, as to rise a little in thought, with godly fear, as far as it can,

towards the higher study and contemplation of how the Church's holy customs lead the soul towards its perfection, through true and effective knowledge, under the guidance of God.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

The First Entrance in the Liturgy as a pattern of the virtues in the soul

So, at the First Entrance in the holy Liturgy, turn the eyes of your mind away from all the delusions and confusion outside in material things, whoever you are who have become an authentic lover of the blessed wisdom of Christ, as it is written: "Come hither ye women that come from a show."³⁵ Come away, I say, from wandering around gazing at the outward appearance and show of sense objects. For, according to the wisdomless people who are known as the wise among pagan Greeks—far be it from us to call people wise, who were either unable or unwilling to recognize God in His works—it is not true to give the name "contemplation" to the exposure of sense objects, where there is a continual state of war between the objects, working the ruin of each through the others, as they mutually destroy one another and are destroyed in each other, with nothing stable about them but instability and decay, and an inability to join each other permanently without conflict or strife. And the soul comes fleeing headlong; her

spirit enters natural contemplation, peaceful, and free from all tumult, as if going into a church or an inviolate sanctuary of peace, following the Word, and under the guidance of the Word, our great and true God and High Priest; through the figures, as it were, of the sacred readings which occur, she learns the meanings of present things and the great and wonderful mystery of divine providence revealed in the law and prophets. Angelic powers spiritually communicate pacifying interpretations coming from God to each person in his thoughts, for his good education in the law and the prophets, along with the gift of the strengthening and sustaining enchantment of a divine and fiery yearning for God, engendered in Him through the pleasant awareness of his thought being accompanied silently and spiritually by heavenly canticles.

Again the soul passes on to meet the one and only source comprising all this learning in itself, I speak of the holy Gospel. In the single, all-embracing potentiality of the Gospel, as in a single form, every truth is preexistent, concerning not only divine providence but all creation. The next step is that the God-loving, fearless eyes of the mind can be allowed to see God the Word Himself again, by supernatural perception, coming to the soul from heaven (symbolized by the descent of the priest from his throne) and making an examination of the soul's perfection (the way it is done with catechumens), to judge its thoughts which still imagine sensations and

their elements. Then again the soul gets away from sense objects, as the closing of the doors of the holy church of God is assumed to mean, moving to the knowledge of spiritual things, suggested by the entrance of the ineffable sacraments, knowledge which is immaterial, simple, unchanging, and Godlike, and detached from all outward shape and show, in which the soul rallies her own powers to herself and brings herself back to the Word; in her spiritual embrace³⁶ she has integrated the ineffable teachings of salvation and its way of life as it affects her; she teaches fair-spoken thanksgiving with the formula of the profession of faith.

Then the soul, now possessing simple and undivided strength, embraces the concepts of both sense objects and spiritual realities by being a good disciple, and penetrates further beyond everything to the radiant knowledge of God and to understanding as equal to angels' as it may be granted her to be able to attain; she teaches wisely the knowledge that God is One: one essence, three hypostases or substances; One Alone; as a substance of Three Hypostases, a consubstantial Trinity of Persons; only One in Trinity, and a Trinity in Unity; not one unit plus another, nor one beside another, nor one through or in another, or one out of another, but the same Unity in Itself, in relation to, and for Itself; identical with Itself, both a Unity and a Trinity, unconfused, holding to Its unity without confusion yet preserving Its distinctions undivided and

inseparable; a Unity with reference to what we call His Essence, that is to say His being, not through a synthesis, contraction, or confusion of any kind; but still a Trinity in reference to the expression of His manner of existing, or subsistence, not however by division or alienation or separation of any kind. For the Persons cause no division in the Only One, nor is their Unity present, or considered to be present in them, in an incidental or merely relative way; neither are the Persons formed into a compound Unit, nor do they make it up by a process of contraction; the same Unity is identical with Itself, but in a variety of ways. The Holy Trinity of hypostases or Persons is an unconfused Unity in essence and when considered simply in relation to Itself; in Its hypostases and the manner of Its existence the Holy Unity is a Trinity; the whole of the same One is both this Unity and that Trinity, as it may be considered differently in relation to one or another point of reference, as we have said; one only Godhead, both indivisible and unconfused, simple, inviolate and unchanging; existing in the Unity of His complete essence, the very same essence being, in its subsistences, all of it a Trinity, one ray of threefold Light shining down uniformly; in this Light the soul, on a par with the holy angels, receives the radiant words accessible to creation on the subject of the Godhead, and learns a threefold manner of singing ceaselessly in harmony with them to the one Godhead, in gratitude for the gift of adoption by grace,

coming through His resembling likeness; with prayer, this grace has given us God as our mystical and only Father; the soul will be brought to His mysterious and secret union in a separation of mind from all things; and, rather than just know about the things of God she will experience them, enough to wish not to belong to herself, nor to be able to be known for herself—by herself or by anyone else, except only by God who has been so good as to accept her completely with His whole Self, divinely and calmly injecting Himself entirely into all of her, to completely deify her; so that she has become, as says the all-holy Denys the Areopagite, an image and manifestation of the invisible light: a pure mirror, intensely transparent, flawless, immaculate, spotless, receiving—if it is seemly to say so—all the beauty of the exemplar of goodness, and reflecting in itself like God without diminution, as far as is possible, the goodness of the silence enshrined within it.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

What secret purpose the persistent grace of the Holy Spirit serves, and is able to put into effect in the faithful and those who join the congregation with faith, through the ceremonies of sacred worship

So the blessed Elder deemed it necessary for every Christian (and this is something he did not

cease to urge) to spend time in the holy church of God, and never to miss the celebration of the sacred service there, on account of the holy angels who have care of it; they register the people going in each time and offer them to God's view, making intercessory prayers on their behalf; but also for the sake of the grace of the Holy Spirit, which is always invisibly present, but in a distinctly special way during the hours of the holy Liturgy; each person who is found present there grace transforms, remolds, and truly remodels into a more divine image, conformed to the Spirit Himself; it guides him into the meaning of the mysteries celebrated, even if he himself may not notice it (if indeed he still belongs among the infants in Christ, and has not grown enough to see deeply into what is happening); grace also effects the particular grace in him signified by each of the divine symbols of salvation enacted, leading in regular sequence and order from what is immediately present on to the final consummation of everything.

Symbolized in the First Entrance are the rejection of unbelief, the increase of faith, diminution of wickedness, bestowal of virtue, the disappearance of ignorance, and the advance of knowledge. Listening to the words of God symbolizes a steadfast and firm state of mind and character with reference to the qualities just mentioned, namely faith, virtue, and knowledge. Through the sacred songs added to the readings,

comes a willing acquiescence in the virtues of the soul, with the soul's intrinsic delight and spiritual pleasure in them. The sacred reading of the holy Gospel stands for the end of an earthy type of mind, like leaving the world of only the senses. This is followed by the shutting of the doors, standing for the soul's change of inclination, transferring herself from this perishable world to the intelligent world of the mind, when she shuts her senses like doors and completes their cleansing from the idols of sin. Through the entrance³⁷ of the holy sacraments is suggested the new, more perfect, more intuitive teaching and knowledge concerning God's plan in our regard. Through the divine greeting: harmony in unanimity and agreement, and love on the part of all towards everyone and above all towards oneself and God. But through the confession of the Creed, proper gratitude for the miraculous ways of our salvation. The thrice-holy hymn expresses our union, and equality too, with the holy angels, as well as the unceasing perseverance in unison of the praise ascribing sanctity to God. But through the prayer which grants us the right to address God as "Father," we learn of our very genuine adoption through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Through the hymn, "One only is holy" and what immediately follows, we express the grace and affinity which make us one with God Himself. The holy reception of the immaculate and

life-giving sacraments brings about a resemblance to Him, which effects a communion and identity with Him by participation, after which the human person is deemed fit to be changed out of a man into God. For we believe ourselves to have had a share in the gifts of the Holy Spirit here in this present life through the grace embraced in faith; and we believe that, having kept His commandments as well as we are able, we shall, in the next world, really in fact gain possession of those gifts in the reality of a Divine Person;³⁸ this is what we believe, in accordance with the unfailing hope proper to our faith, and the firm, unimpeachable guarantee of Him who made the promise; we pass over from the grace of faith to the grace of vision, Jesus Christ our God and Savior clearly transforming us into Himself. He rids us of the symptoms of corruption, and grants us the original, archetypal mysteries represented here to the senses under symbols.

To help to remember it, if you like, let us now sum up what we have tried to say: the holy Church is a figure and an image of God; through her He builds a union between the multiform elements of reality, without fusion, in accordance with His infinite power and wisdom; as their Creator He subjects them at their summit to Himself, and joins the faithful to one another in a single form by the single grace and calling of faith: the active and virtuous in a harmony of one will, but also the contemplative and enlightened,

in an unbroken and indissoluble agreement of mind.

It is a figure of both worlds, the spiritual and the sensible: having the sanctuary as a symbol of the spiritual, and the nave as the sensible.

Again it is man's likeness, the sanctuary serving to represent the soul, and the nave the body. It is also a figure and image of the soul by itself, as the sanctuary points to the glory of the contemplative life, and the way the active life decorates it is expressed in the nave.

At the holy ceremony performed in church, the First Entrance stands in a general way for our God's first coming; but in particular for the conversion of the people entering through and with Him into faith from unbelief, from evil into virtue, and out of ignorance into knowledge.

Next come the readings, which in general reveal the will of God and His wishes, things about which every man ought to be educated and concerned. More specifically, they instill the teaching of the faith, and how the faithful can make progress; they teach the stable attitude in virtue befitting active Christians, making them take an unwavering and manly stand on the divine law of the commandments against the wiles of the devil, so they escape from the enemy forces; the readings also teach the contemplatives' skill in meditation, in which they are borne to the truth straight as an arrow, while they discover as best they can the supernatural laws at

the heart of the objects of sense and of the providence which governs them.

The celestial melodies of hymns remind one of the heavenly pleasure and joy granted sometimes³⁹ to the souls of all men, strengthening them inwardly so much that they forget about the toils they undertook for virtue in the past, and feel a vigorous and youthful longing for the pure divine blessings still to come.

Broadly speaking, the holy Gospel is a reminder of the end of this world, but more particularly it declares the believers' utter rejection of the primordial error: the death and extermination of the law and mind of the flesh in active souls; and in the wise, who have completed the more detailed and complex study of natural philosophy, their association and transference of the many different causes of things to the most comprehensive of all.

The priest's descent from his special seat, and the dismissal of the catechumens, stands in general for the second coming from heaven of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, followed by the separation of the sinners from the saints, with just retribution for the merits of each; but in particular it reminds one of the complete conviction of the faithful in their beliefs, caused by God the Word when He becomes invisibly present, such conviction that all arguments against the faith, still stumbling and hesitating like a catechumen, are dismissed. In active people

this is a sign of perfect self-mastery and freedom, by which every emotional and unenlightened notion departs from the soul; and it represents the comprehensive knowledge contemplatives have of what they have come to recognize more fully, whereby all the images of material things are banished from the soul.

The closing of the doors, entrance of the holy mysteries, the divine greeting, and the proclamation of the Creed express in a general way the discarding of the sensuous world and the manifestation of the spiritual; the new doctrine on God's plan for us, and the harmony of every man with every one, in the future, with each other, that is, and with God, in concord, unanimity, and love, plus gratitude for the ways we have been saved. In particular, these rituals symbolize the progress of the faithful from a fickle, simple⁴⁰ faith to doctrine, initiation, unison and devotion, with orthodoxy in dogma. The teaching of believers, first, is expressed by the shutting of the doors; the second, their initiation, by the entrance of the holy things; the third, their unison, by the greeting with peace; and the fourth, devotion in orthodoxy, by the proclamation of the Creed. Regarding active souls, we are reminded of their change from virtuous activity to contemplation, closing their eyes and senses, leaving the world and the flesh by dropping worldly and carnal activities, and of their ascent from the life of the commandments to the

understanding of their essential meaning; this brings to mind too the natural affinity and coherence of the commandments themselves, understood properly, with the soul's own potentialities; these rituals also suggest the fitting disposition for giving thanks to God. In contemplative⁴¹ souls it signifies their progress from natural contemplation to the simple comprehension of the spiritual world; this means they do not pursue the inexpressible concept of God any longer through the senses or any external phenomena whatsoever; this represents the integration of the soul's proper powers with itself, and the singleness of mind which grasps the meaning of providence intuitively.

Joining the holy angels worshipping the holiness of God in the ceaseless thrice-holy hymn signifies in general the equality of heavenly and earthly powers in citizenship, life style, and harmony, in the glorifying of God to be enjoyed together in the future age; then will the human body become immortal in resurrection, no longer oppressing the soul by its decay, nor growing heavy; through the change to incorruptibility, it will gain potential and aptitude for the reception of God's coming. The hymn's particular significance refers to the theological contest of the faithful in behalf of faith against angelic power; in active souls, it is a reminder both of their beauty of life and of their perseverance in the praise of God, as equal to the angels as is humanly

attainable; in contemplatives, it calls to mind their thoughts and paeans and ceaseless circulation about the divinity, as equal to the angels as man can have.

The blessed invocation of the great God and Father, and the pronunciation of the "One only is Holy," etc., and the reception of the holy, life-giving sacraments, proclaim our future adoption as sons through the goodness of our God, the union, the kinship, the similarity to God, and the deification which will come without exception to all the worthy; thus God Himself likewise will be all things in all for the saved, being archetypal beauty in its cause, salient among those who through the gift of grace, by their virtue and knowledge, are in their turn suited to Him.

He called those who are getting an introduction, "believers"; those who are making progress, "the virtuous"; and those who are perfect, "gnostics"; they could also be called: "slaves," "hired men," and "sons"; these are the three classes of the saved. The slaves are believers who fulfill the master's orders out of fear of threats, and work loyally at the jobs entrusted to them. The hired men are those who, out of desire for promised rewards, bear patiently the burden and heat of the day, which means both the trouble inherent to the present life since original sin, and the trials virtue must undergo in the course of it; of their own self-determined choice, they wisely give one life in return for another, renouncing

the present for the sake of the life to come. Sons are the ones who neither under fear of threats nor out of desire for the promises, but through the character and habit of the soul's voluntary tendency and disposition towards goodness, are never cut off from God: like that son, to whom it was said, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine."⁴² For by their state in grace⁴³ they may really be what God is believed to be and is both as the author of goodness, and by His nature.

Therefore let us not forsake the holy Church of God. By the sacred arrangement of the religious rites it contains such great mysteries filled with meaning for our salvation; through these mysteries she fashions each of us living, each in his own way, as much as possible like Christ, and brings into open manifestation through Christ-like behavior the gift in the Holy Spirit given once by holy baptism, of adoption as sons. No, with all our strength and zeal, let us present ourselves worthy of these divine gifts, pleasing God with good deeds, and not behaving like "the Gentiles which know not God, in the lust of concupiscence";⁴⁴ but, in the words of the holy Apostle, "mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake, the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience. . . ." ⁴⁵ All anger and wrath, filthy

communication and lying, and to say it briefly, all "the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, put off with his deeds"⁴⁶ and his concupiscences; let us "walk worthy of God, who hath called us unto his kingdom and glory";⁴⁷ "put on therefore bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another" in love, "and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness, and . . . peace . . . to the which also we are called in one body."⁴⁸ In a word: "put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him."⁴⁹ For living this way, we could come to the fulfillment of God's promises with good hope, "filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding . . . being fruitful . . . , and increasing in the knowledge of God: strengthened with all might according to his glorious power, unto all" edification "and long-suffering with joyfulness: Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the Saints in light."⁵⁰

A clear proof of this grace is sympathetic, voluntary affection for our kindred. This results in identifying one's self as far as in one lies, as God has done, with the man who is in want of any kind of help from us, not letting him go uncared for and destitute, but taking the trouble to show

by our deeds that our affection for both God and neighbor is alive. For the proof of a disposition is in action. Nothing is so conducive to our justification, nor disposes us so well towards so-called deification and closeness to God,⁵¹ as pleasure and joy in offering heartfelt generosity to those in want. Did not the Word teach that a man in need of kindness is God, "For inasmuch as you have done it," He says, "unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."⁵² But still more will God, who said this, be sure to give evidence that he who does the good he can is truly divine by grace and participation, since he has adopted the character and activity of God's own well-doing with successful imitation. And if God has identified Himself with the needy, through the divine condescension of making Himself poor for our sakes, and in taking upon Himself sympathetically the sufferings of every man, and always mystically suffering through His goodness until the consummation of the world, proportionately to the suffering in each person; then all the more will he deserve to be considered divine, who imitates God's love for people by healing the pains of the suffering himself in a way that reminds one of God, and shows the same kind of attitude as God to the degree of his concern for saving others.

So then, who is there so sluggish and slow when it comes to virtue, as not to long for divinity, when the possession of it is so cheap, so

easy to get, so ready at hand? A safe and inviolable protection of these benefits, and a convenient way to salvation, without which, I think, really no blessings will be preserved unharmed, is self-governing individual practice, which means learning how to look after our own lives and examine just them, so that we are set free from suffering needless damage from others. For if we would learn to look at and examine ourselves only, we will never meddle with the lives of others, whatever they may be like, knowing God to be the one and only wise and just judge, judging everything that happens wisely and justly; He considers the reason why a thing was done, not just how it looks, which is the way perhaps that it could be judged by men, who see imperfectly its outward appearance, which is not the truth of the matter at all, nor the reason for it. But God sees the secret movement of the soul, its invisible desire, the reason why it is roused, and the purpose in its mind; in other words, looking at the premeditated end of every deed, He judges justly (as I have said) everything men do. If we earnestly rectify our intention and mind our own business, not getting mixed up with strangers, we will neither let our eye see nor our ear hear, nor our tongue talk about, other people's affairs, if possible at all; but if this should not be possible, we will let ourselves act preferably out of sympathy for other people and not out of passion, we will turn to see and hear and

speak for our own profit, only as much as seems good to the divine word⁵³ which controls us in this. For nothing slips more easily into sin than these organs, if they are not controlled by the mind;⁵³ but then again, nothing is more useful than they for salvation, when they are under the control of the word⁵³ keeping them in order, and directing them to what it wants and what they ought to be doing.

Therefore let us try our best not to neglect to listen to God's voice inviting us to eternal life and a happy end by doing His sacred and salvific commandments, in order to receive mercy finding the grace needed at each moment; for the divine Apostle says, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruption";⁵⁴ that is, who love the Lord with the immortality that comes with virtue and with a life of pure and unfeigned dignity, doing His wishes, and not disobeying any of His divine injunctions.

I have quoted all this, as best I could, and following what I was taught, for the rewards of obedience. I have not undertaken to handle more mystical subjects of a more sublime nature. Any lover of learning, who desires to know such things, may peruse the works which St. Denys the Areopagite produced with inspired labor in this field. There he will discover a real revelation of ineffable mysteries through that man's divine intelligence and speech, bestowed upon the human race for the sake of those who are to

inherit salvation. And if this book has not fallen far short of your expectation, thanks be to Christ the giver of all that is beautiful, and to you who forced me to write it. But if it falls perhaps very far below what you had hoped, why should I suffer for it or what should I do, being a rotten speaker? Weakness calls for leniency not punishment. It is better to accept but not criticize what is all that was possible and feasible, especially for you who have dedicated yourselves to charity for God's love. For even though it may seem really small in comparison with great works, anything sincerely offered from the heart according to one's resources is precious to God, who did not despise the widow offering her two mites.⁵⁵

Whatever do this widow and her two mites stand for? Either perhaps a soul bereaved of wickedness, having lost the old law like a husband, without yet being worthy of the highest union with God the Word; in the meantime she presents Him nonetheless with the token, like two mites, of fitting speech and behavior, or of faith and a good conscience, or her ability and accomplishment in deeds of goodness, or theory and practice contributing to such, or corresponding knowledge and virtue; or ideas a little beyond those, I mean those in the natural and written law, which the soul offers if she acquires them (in a kind of loss and separation from her whole means of subsistence and former life) wishing to be linked with no one but God the Word; and she

accepts being deprived of the compulsory ways and rules and customs of nature and the law, as though these had been husbands. Or else, through the literal sense of what happened in history, the story hints at some more spiritual meaning understandable only to those whose minds are pure. For compared to a mind enjoying the knowledge of God by contemplation, everything that seems great among men in terms of virtue is found to be small. Except that even if small, of frugal and not very valuable material, still no less than the gold coins of more precious substance, which the well-to-do offer, these acts too bear the imperial stamp. And they may be the expression of an even more complete self-offering.

In imitation of this widow, I have offered to God and to you, dearly beloved, these simple little ideas and words, poor and simple mites of thought and speech. I beg your holy and blessed soul, first of all, to seek no further written comments from me on any of these subjects, for two reasons: one is, that I have not yet acquired the chaste and constant fear of God, nor a firm habit of virtue with the steady, unshaken stability of true justice, which would be the best kind of evidence for the reliability of my words; secondly, because I am still being whirled about by a great flood, like a raging sea of passions, and I am a long way from that divine harbor of detachment; I am not sure when I may meet my end, and I do not

want to have the written word then accursing against me in addition to my deeds and actions. I beg you, then, if it is deserving, to accept this, just as the homage of my obedience, and commend me through your prayers to Christ, the great and only God and Savior of our souls, to whom be glory and power, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen.

Notes

¹St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Hymns of Divine Love*, translated by George A. Maloney, S.J. Dimension Books, p. 86.

²Proverbs 9:9.

³1 Peter 5:7.

⁴Psalms 94:10.

⁵Wisdom 10:21.

⁶Psalms 113:7.

⁷cf. Matthew 20:2-10.

⁸The word translated as "without opposition" *adiáphoros*, literally "undifferentiated, not different," is given in Migne as the reading of two versions, including Franciscus Oehler, the first of St. Maximus' editors. Combéfis, in Migne, prefers the reading *adiáphthoros* (incorruptible), a reading also accepted by Cantarella, though in his opinion (cf. page xxvii) Combéfis' edition was produced without any scientific method, on the basis of a few codices chosen at random and of very uneven value. I prefer the reading *adiáphoros* because it fits in better with Maximus' thought; it would not be like him to say that all things are led into a harmony (literally "sameness") of existence and motion which is "imperishable but not confused"; he does not think of created things, at least the objects of sense, as "imperishable." What he seems to be saying is that God has made things not so different that they come into opposition with each other, nor so much the same that they become confused with each other.

⁹Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11.

¹⁰Here, and *passim*, the same antithetic Greek terms may be translated as invisible/visible, spiritual/material, intelligible/sensible, or object of thought/object of sense. My translation here is very free, but I believe I have caught St. Maximus' meaning.

¹¹*noûs*.

¹²*lôgos*.

¹³John 15:4.

¹⁴Psalms 33:4.

¹⁵*dýnamis*.

¹⁶*enérgeia*. The footnotes numbered 15 and 16 occur twice, to show that in each case a slightly different English term seems to render St. Maximus' thought better, where he is using the same antithetical Greek terms.

¹⁷James 2:20.

¹⁸Ephesians 5:32.

¹⁹1 Corinthians 6:17.

²⁰2 Corinthians 4:16.

²¹Wisdom 9:15.

²²Galatians 5:17.

²³Galatians 6:8.

²⁴2 Corinthians 4:18.

²⁵Colossians 2:3.

²⁶2 Corinthians 3:18.

²⁷The text says, literally, "high priest's."

²⁸The Greek text has "divine" reading. This is one of many instances where the translator thinks it would be one adjective too many in English.

²⁹The Creed, Credo.

³⁰1 Thessalonians 4:16.

³¹cf. 2 Peter 2:10.

³²Matthew 26:29.

³³cf. John 20:19, 21, 26-29.

³⁴In this and the following chapter, the author adopts a somewhat rhetorical tone. Is it the same author? (I think so.) Why the change?

³⁵Isaiah 27:11 in the Septuagint. The Authorized Version has "the women come and set them on fire." The Revised Standard Version has essentially the same. The Jerusalem Bible: "women come and use them for firewood." Bible de Jérusalem: "Quand sèchent les branches on les brisent, des femmes viennent et y

mettent le feu. Or . . . " The New American Bible: "and women shall come to build a fire with them." There are two other "groups" of translations or readings of this line:

a) the Hebrew: "women shall be broken who come bringing light (cheer) to her, for it is not an understanding people."

The Syriac: "the women were broken (or destroyed) who come giving light."

b) Vulgate: "mulieres venientes et docentes eam." Douai: "women shall come and teach it."

So this line is an example of an obscure reading, of a type to which the Fathers sometimes felt challenged to give a fanciful interpretation.

³⁶at the symbolic "kiss of peace" or greeting, cf. Chapters 17 and 18.

³⁷The Great Entrance

³⁸Cantarella has *anupostatôs* here, which must be a misprint for Migne's reading (*enupostatôs*), since "to gain possession of these gifts irresistibly," or "in a manner without foundation" or "without existence" is inconceivable.

³⁹"Sometimes" seems to be required by the sense, though it is not literally in the text.

⁴⁰There are two readings here in the Greek text: Cantarella has *planês* (wandering, fickle); Migne has *haplês* (simple). It seems to me, in the light of what follows, that Maximus' thought is best reproduced by translating the phrase not just as "simple faith" nor "fickle faith," but by both "fickle" and "simple" together, to express the instability of faith in an early, superficial stage, easily seduced from the path of solid orthodoxy.

⁴¹Literally, "gnostics."

⁴²Luke 15:31.

⁴³Some mss. have "deification in grace."

⁴⁴1 Thessalonians 4:5.

⁴⁵Col. 3:5f.

⁴⁶Eph. 4:22.

⁴⁷1 Thess. 2:12.

⁴⁸Col. 3:12-15.

⁴⁹Col. 3:10.

⁵⁰Col. 1:9-12.

⁵¹*kathesfêken* being intransitive, it is better to follow Migne and read the *kaî* before *tên prôs Theòn engufêta*, rather than omit it with Cantarella. If *kathesfêken* had a transitive meaning (and it has not), and the *kaî* were omitted, the sense would be "nor has made closeness to God (so) adaptable to deification."

⁵²Matt. 25:40.

⁵³*lógos*.

⁵⁴"with incorruption" is a variant reading in some Greek mss., evidently including the text Maximus had at hand, for "in sincerity" which the Authorized Version prefers. The New American Bible prefers Maximus' reading, and translates it well (I think) by "with unfailing love."

⁵⁵Luke 21:2.

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