FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD

SACRAMENTS AND ORTHODOXY

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1

The Life of the World

"Man is what he eats." With this statement the German materialistic philosopher Feuerbach thought he had put an end to all "idealistic" speculations about human nature. In fact, however, he was expressing, without knowing it, the most religious idea of man. For long before Feuerbach the same definition of man was given by the Bible. In the biblical story of creation man is presented, first of all, as a hungry being, and the whole world as his food. Second only to the direction to propagate and have dominion over the earth, according to the author of the first chapter of Genesis, is God's instruction to men to eat of the earth: "Behold I have given you every herb bearing seed . . . and every tree, which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. . . ." Man must eat in order to live; he must take the world into his body and transform it into himself, into flesh and blood. He is indeed that which he eats, and the whole world is presented as one all-embracing banquet table for man. And this image of the banquet remains, throughout the whole Bible, the central image of life. It is the image of life at its creation and also the image of life at its end and fulfillment: ". . . that you eat and drink at my table in my Kingdom."

I begin with this seemingly secondary theme of food—secondary from the standpoint of the great "religious issues" of our time—because the very purpose of this essay is to answer, if possible, the question: of what life do we

speak, what life do we preach, proclaim and announce when, as Christians, we confess that Christ died for the life of the world? What *life* is both motivation, and the beginning and the goal of Christian *mission?*

The existing answers follow two general patterns. There are those among us for whom life, when discussed in religious terms, means *religious life.* And this religious life is a world in itself, existing apart from the secular world and its life. It is the world of "spirituality," and in our days it seems to gain more and more popularity. Even the airport bookstands are filled with anthologies of mystical writings. *Basic Mysticism* is a title we saw on one of them. Lost and confused in the noise, the rush and the frustrations of "life," man easily accepts the invitation to enter into the inner sanctuary of his soul and to discover there another life, to enjoy a "spiritual banquet" amply supplied with spiritual food. This spiritual food will *help* him. It will help him to restore his peace of mind, to endure the other—the secular—life, to accept its tribulations, to lead a wholesome and more dedicated life, to "keep smiling" in a deep, religious way. And thus *mission* consists here in converting people to this "spiritual" life, in making them "religious."

There exists a great variety of emphases and even theologies within this general pattern, from the popular revival to the sophisticated interest in esoteric mystical doctrines. But the result is the same: "religious" life makes the secular one—the life of eating and drinking—irrelevant, deprives it of any real meaning save that of being an exercise in piety and patience. And the more spiritual is the "religious banquet," the more secular and material become the neon lighted signs EAT, DRINK that we see along our highways.

But there are those also, to whom the affirmation "for the life of the world" seems to mean naturally "for the *better* life of the world." The "spiritualists" are counterbalanced by the activists. To be sure we are far today from the simple optimism and euphoria of the "Social Gospel." All the implications of existentialism with its anxieties, of neo-Orthodoxy with its pessimistic and realistic view of history, have been assimilated and given proper considera-

tion. But the fundamental belief in Christianity as being first of all *action* has remained intact, and in fact has acquired a new strength. From this point of view Christianity has simply lost the world. And the world must be recovered. The Christian mission, therefore, is to catch up with the life that has gone astray. The "eating" and "drinking" man is taken quite seriously, almost too seriously. He constitutes the virtually exclusive object of Christian action, and we are constantly called to repent for having spent too much time in contemplation and adoration, in silence and liturgy, for having not dealt sufficiently with the social, political, economic, racial and all other issues of real life. To books on mysticism and spirituality correspond books on "Religion and *Life*" (or *Society,* or *Urbanism* or *Sex . . .*). And yet the basic question remains unanswered: what is this *life* that we must regain for Christ and make Christian? What is, in other words, the ultimate end of all this doing and action?

Suppose we have reached at least one of these practical goals, have "won"—then what? The question may seem a naive one, but one cannot really act without knowing the meaning not only of action, but of the life itself in the name of which one acts. One eats and drinks, one fights for freedom and justice in order to be *alive,* to have the *fullness of life.* But what is it? What is the life of life itself? What is the content of life eternal? At some ultimate point, within some ultimate analysis, we inescapably discover that in and by itself action has no meaning. When all committees have fulfilled their task, all papers have been distributed and all practical goals achieved, there must come a perfect joy. About what? Unless we know, the same dichotomy between religion and life, which we have observed in the spiritual solution, remains. Whether we "spiritualize" our life or "secularize" our religion, whether we invite men to a spiritual banquet or simply join them at the secular one, the real life of the world, for which we are told God gave his only-begotten Son, remains hopelessly beyond our religious grasp.

2

"Man is what he eats." But what does he eat and why? These questions seem naive and irrelevant not only to Feuerbach. They seemed even more irrelevant to his religious opponents. To them, as to him, eating was a material function, and the only important question was whether in addition to it man possessed a spiritual "superstructure." Religion said yes. Feuerbach said no. But both answers were given within the same fundamental opposition of the spiritual to the material. "Spiritual" *versus* "material," "sacred" *versus* "profane," "supernatural" *versus* "natural"—such were for centuries the only accepted, the only understandable moulds and categories of religious thought and experience. And Feuerbach, for all his materialism, was in fact a natural heir to Christian "idealism" and "spiritualism."

But the Bible, we have seen, also begins with man as a hungry being, with the man who is that which he eats. The perspective, however, is wholly different, for nowhere in the Bible do we find the dichotomies which for us are the self-evident framework of all approaches to religion. In the Bible the food that man eats, the world of which he must partake in order to live, is given to him by God, and it is given as *communion with God.* The world as man's food is not something "material" and limited to material functions, thus different from, and opposed to, the specifically "spiritual" functions by which man is related to God. All that exists is God's gift to man, and it all exists to make God known to man, to make man's life communion with God. It is divine love made food, made life for man. God *blesses* everything He creates, and, in biblical language, this means that He makes all creation the sign and means of His presence and wisdom, love and revelation: "O taste and see that the Lord is good."

Man is a hungry being. But he is hungry for God. Behind all the hunger of our life is God. All desire is finally a desire for Him. To be sure, man is not the only hungry being. All that exists lives by "eating." The whole creation depends on food. But the unique position of man in the universe is that

he alone is to *bless* God for the food and the life he receives from Him. He alone is to respond to God's blessing with his blessing. The significant fact about the life in the Garden is that man is to *name* things. As soon as animals have been created to keep Adam company, God brings them to Adam to see what he will call them. "And whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof." Now, in the Bible a name is infinitely more than a means to distinguish one thing from another. It reveals the very essence of a thing, or rather its essence as God's gift. To name a thing is to manifest the meaning and value God gave it, to know it as coming from God and to know its place and function within the cosmos created by God.

To name a thing, in other words, is to bless God for it and in it. And in the Bible to bless God is not a "religious" or a "cultic" act, but the very *way of life.* God blessed the world, blessed man, blessed the seventh day (that is, time), and this means that He filled all that exists with His love and goodness. made all this "very good." So the only *natural* (and not "supernatural") reaction of man, to whom God gave this blessed and sanctified world, is to bless God in return, to thank Him, to *see* the world as God sees it and—in this act of gratitude and adoration—to know, name and possess the world. All rational, spiritual and other qualities of man, distinguishing him from other creatures, have their focus and ultimate fulfillment in this capacity to bless God, to know, so to speak, the meaning of the thirst and hunger that constitutes his life. *"Homo sapiens," "homo faber"* . . . yes, but, first of all, *"homo adorans."* The first, the basic definition of man is that he is *the priest.* He stands in the center of the world and unifies it in his act of blessing God, of both receiving the world from God and offering it to God—and by filling the world with this eucharist, he transforms his life, the one that he receives from the world, into life in God, into communion with Him. The world was created as the "matter," the material of one all-embracing eucharist, and man was created as the priest of this cosmic sacrament.

Men understand all this instinctively if not rationally.

Centuries of secularism have failed to transform eating into something strictly utilitarian. Food is still treated with reverence. A meal is still a rite—the last "natural sacrament" of family and friendship, of life that is more than "eating" and "drinking." To eat is still something more than to maintain bodily functions. People may not understand what that "something more" is, but they nonetheless desire to celebrate it. They are still hungry and thirsty for sacramental life.

3

It is not accidental, therefore, that the biblical story of the Fall is centered again on food. Man ate the forbidden fruit. The fruit of that one tree, whatever else it may signify, was unlike every other fruit in the Garden: it was not offered as a gift to man. Not given, not blessed by God, it was food whose eating was condemned to be communion with itself alone, and not with God. It is the image of the world loved for itself, and eating it is the image of life understood as an end in itself.

To love is not easy, and mankind has chosen not to return God's love. Man has loved the world, but as an end in itself and not as transparent to God. He has done it so consistently that it has become something that is "in the air." It seems natural for man to experience the world as opaque, and not shot through with the presence of God. It seems natural not to live a life of thanksgiving for God's gift of a world. It seems natural not to be eucharistic.

The world is a fallen world because it has fallen away from the awareness that God is all in all. The accumulation of this disregard for God is the original sin that blights the world. And even the religion of this fallen world cannot heal or redeem it, for it has accepted the reduction of God to an area called "sacred" ("spiritual," "supernatural")—as opposed to the world as "profane." It has accepted the all-embracing secularism which attempts to steal the world away from God.

The natural dependence of man upon the world was intended to be transformed constantly into communion with God in whom is all life. Man was to be the priest of a eucharist, offering the world to God, and in this offering he was to receive the gift of life. But in the fallen world man does not have the priestly power to do this. His dependence on the world becomes a closed circuit, and his love is deviated from its true direction. He still loves, he is still hungry. He knows he is dependent on that which is beyond him. But his love and his dependence refer only to the world in itself. He does not know that breathing can be communion with God. He does not realize that to eat can be to receive life from God in more than its physical sense. He forgets that the world, its air or its food cannot by themselves bring life, but only as they are received and accepted for God's sake, in God and as bearers of the divine gift of life. By themselves they can produce only the appearance of life.

When we see the world as an end in itself, everying becomes itself a value and consequently loses all value, because only in God is found the meaning (value) of everything, and the world is meaningful only when it is the "sacrament" of God's presence. Things treated merely as things in themselves destroy themselves because only in God have they any life. The world of nature, cut off from the source of life, is a dying world. For one who thinks food in itself is the source of life, eating is communion with the dying world, it is communion with death. Food itself is dead, it is life that has died and it must be kept in refrigerators like a corpse.

For "the wages of sin is death." The life man chose was only the appearance of life. God showed him that he himself had decided to eat bread in a way that would simply return him to the ground from which both he and the bread had been taken: "For dust thou art and into dust shalt thou return." Man lost the eucharistic life, he lost the life of life itself, the power to transform it into Life. He ceased to be the priest of the world and became its slave.

In the story of the Garden this took place in the cool of

the day: that is, at night. And Adam, when he left the Garden where life was to have been eucharistic—an offering of the world in thanksgiving to God—Adam led the whole world, as it were, into darkness. In one of the beautiful pieces of Byzantine hymnology Adam is pictured sitting outside, facing Paradise, weeping. It is the figure of man himself.

4

We can interrupt here for a while this theme of food. We began with it only in order to free the terms "sacramental" and "eucharistic" from the connotations they have acquired in the long history of technical theology, where they are applied almost exclusively within the framework of "natural" *versus* "supernatural," and "sacred" *versus* "profane," that is, within the same opposition between religion and life which makes life ultimately unredeemable and religiously meaningless. In our perspective, however, the "original" sin is not primarily that man has "disobeyed" God; the sin is that he ceased to be hungry for Him and for Him alone, ceased to see his whole life depending on the whole world as a sacrament of communion with God. The sin was not that man neglected his religious duties. The sin was that he thought of God in terms of religion, i.e., opposing Him to life. The only real fall of man is his noneucharistic life in a noneucharistic world. The fall is not that he preferred world to God, distorted the balance between the spiritual and material, but that he made the world *material,* whereas he was to have transformed it into "life in God," filled with meaning and spirit.

But it is the Christian gospel that God did not leave man in his exile, in the predicament of confused longing. He had created man "after his own heart" and for Himself, and man has struggled in his freedom to find the answer to the mysterious hunger in him. In this scene of radical unfulfillment God acted decisively: into the darkness where man was groping toward Paradise, He sent light. He did so

not as a rescue operation, to recover lost man: it was rather for the completing of what He had undertaken from the beginning. God acted so that man might understand who He really was and where his hunger had been driving him.

The light God sent was his Son: the same light that had been shining unextinguished in the world's darkness all along, seen now in full brightness.

Before Christ came, God had promised Him to man. He had done so in major fashion, speaking through the prophets of Israel, but also in those many other ways in which He communicates with man. As Christians we believe that He, who is the truth about both God and man, gives foretastes of His incarnation in all more fragmentary truths. We believe as well that Christ is present in any seeker after truth. Simone Weil has said that though a person may run as fast as he can away from Christ, if it is toward what he considers true, he runs in fact straight into the arms of Christ.

Much that is true of God has also been revealed in the long history of religion, and this can be demonstrated for the Christian by reference to the true standard of Christ. In the great religions which have given shape to human aspirations, God plays on an orchestra which is far out of tune, yet there has often been a marvelous, rich music made.

Christianity, however, is in a profound sense the *end of all religion.* In the Gospel story of the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus made this clear. " 'Sir,' the woman said to him, 'I perceive that thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.' Jesus saith unto her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. . . . But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him' " (Jn. 4:19—21, 23). She asked him a question about cult, and in reply Jesus changed the whole perspective of the matter. Nowhere in the New Testament, in fact, is Christianity presented as a cult or as a religion. Religion is needed where there is a wall of separation between God and man. But

Christ who is both God and man has broken down the wall between man and God. He has inaugurated a new life, not a new religion.

It was this freedom of the early church from "religion" in the usual, traditional sense of this word that led the pagans to accuse Christians of *atheism.* Christians had no concern for any sacred geography, no temples, no cult that could be recognized as such by the generations fed with the solemnities of the mystery cults. There was no specific religious interest in the places where Jesus had lived. There were no pilgrimages. The old religion had its thousand sacred places and temples: for the Christians all this was past and gone. There was no need for temples built of stone: Christ's Body, the Church itself, the new people gathered in Him, was the only real temple. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. . . ." (Jn. 2:19).

The Church itself was the new and heavenly Jerusalem: the Church *in* Jerusalem was by contrast unimportant. The fact that Christ *comes* and is *present* was far more significant than the places where He had been. The historical reality of Christ was of course the undisputed ground of the early Christians' faith: yet they did not so much remember Him as know He was with them. And in Him was the end of "religion," because He himself was the Answer to all religion, to all human hunger for God, because in Him the life that was lost by man—and which could only be symbolized, signified, asked for in religion—was restored to man.

5

This is not a treatise of systematic theology. It does not attempt to explore all the aspects and implications of this Answer. Nor does it pretend to add anything—in this small scope—to the wisdom accumulated in innumerable volumes of "theologies" and "dogmatics." The purpose of this book is a humble one. It is to remind its readers that in Christ, life—life in all its totality—was returned to man, given again as sacrament and communion, made Eucharist. And

it is to show—be it only partially and superficially—the meaning of this for our mission in the world. The Western Christian is used to thinking of sacrament as opposed to the Word, and he links the mission with the Word and not the sacrament. He is, moreover, accustomed to consider the sacrament as perhaps an essential and clearly defined part or institution or act *of* the Church and *within* the Church, but not of the Church as being itself the sacrament of Christ's presence and action. And finally he is primarily interested in certain very "formal" questions concerning the sacraments: their number, their "validity," their institution, etc. Our purpose is to show that there exists and always existed a different perspective, a different approach to sacrament, and that this approach may be of crucial importance precisely for the whole burning issue of mission, of our witness to Christ in the world. For the basic question is: *of what are we witnesses?* What have we seen and touched with our hands? Of what have we partaken and been made communicants? Where do we call men? What can we offer them?

This essay is written by an Orthodox and in the perspective of the Orthodox Church. But it is not a book about Orthodoxy, as the books about Orthodoxy are written and understood today. There exists a "Western" approach to the East which the Orthodox themselves have accepted. Orthodoxy is presented usually as specializing in "mysticism" and "spirituality," as the potential home of all those who thirst and hunger for the "spiritual banquet." The Orthodox Church has been assigned the place and the function of the "liturgical" and "sacramental" Church, *therefore* more or less indifferent to mission. But all this is wrong. The Orthodox may have failed much too often to see the real implications of their "sacramentalism," but its fundamental meaning is certainly not that of escaping into a timeless "spirituality" far from the dull world of "action." And it is this true meaning that this writer would like to disclose and share with his readers.

Beautiful churches with "all night vigil services," icons and processions, a liturgy which to be properly performed requires not less than twenty-seven heavy liturgical books—

all this seems to contradict what has been said above about Christianity as the "end of religion." But does it in fact? And if not, what is the *meaning* of all this in the real world in which we live, and for the life of which God has given His Son?

1

*Worship in A Secular Age**

"Tout est ailleurs."
—JULIEN GREEN

To put together—in order to relate them to one another—the terms *worship* and *secular age,* seems to presuppose that we have a clear understanding of both of them, that we know the realities they denote, and that we thus operate on solid and thoroughly explored grounds. But is this really the case? I begin my paper with a question mainly because I am convinced that in spite of today's generalized preoccupation with "semantics," there is a great deal of confusion about the exact meaning of the very terms we use in this discussion.

Not only among Christians in general, but even among the Orthodox themselves there exists in fact no consensus, no commonly accepted frame of reference concerning either *worship* or *secularism,* and thus *a fortiori* the problem of their interrelation. Therefore my paper is an attempt not so much to solve the problem as to clarify it, and to do this if possible within a consistent Orthodox perspective. In my opinion, the Orthodox, when discussing the problems

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stemming from our present "situations," accept them much too easily in their Western formulations. They do not seem to realize that the Orthodox tradition provides above all a possibility, and thus a necessity, of reformulating these very problems, of placing them in a context whose absence or deformation in the Western religious mind may have been the root of so many of our modern "impasses." And as I see it, nowhere is this task more urgently needed than in the range of problems related to *secularism* and proper to our so-called *secular age.*

2

Secularism has been analysed, described, and defined in these recent years in a great variety of ways, but to the best of my knowledge none of these descriptions has stressed a point which I consider to be essential and which reveals indeed better than anything else the true nature of secularism, and thus can give our discussion its proper orientation.

Secularism, I submit, is above all a *negation of worship.* I stress:—not of God's existence, not of some kind of transcendence and therefore of some kind of religion. If secularism in theological terms is a heresy, it is primarily a heresy about man. It is the negation of man as a worshiping being, as *homo adorans*: the one for whom worship is the essential act which both "posits" his humanity and fulfills it. It is the rejection as ontologically and epistemologically "decisive," of the words which "always, everywhere and for all" were the true "epiphany" of man's relation to God, to the world and to himself: "It is meet and right to sing of Thee, to bless Thee, to praise Thee, to give thanks to Thee, and to worship Thee in every place of Thy dominion. . . ."

This definition of secularism most certainly needs explanation. For obviously it cannot be accepted by those, quite numerous today, who consciously or unconsciously reduce Christianity to either intellectual ("future of belief") or socio-ethical ("Christian service to the world") categories,

and who therefore think that it must be possible to find not only some kind of accommodation, but even a deeper harmony between our "secular age" on the one hand, and worship on the other hand. If the proponents of what basically is nothing else but the Christian acceptance of secularism are right, then of course our whole problem is only that of finding or inventing a worship more acceptable, more "relevant" to the modern man's secular world view. And such indeed is the direction taken today by the great majority of liturgical reformers. What they seek is worship whose forms and content would "reflect" the needs and aspirations of the secular man, or even better, of secularism itself. For once more, secularism is by no means identical with atheism, and paradoxical as it may seem, can be shown to have always had a peculiar longing for a "liturgical" expression. If, however, my definition is right, then this whole search is a hopeless dead end, if not outright nonsense. Then the very formulation of our theme—"worship in a secular age"—reveals, first of all, an inner contradiction in terms, a contradiction which requires a radical reappraisal of the entire problem and its drastic reformulation.

3

To prove that my definition of secularism ("negation of worship") is correct, I must prove two points. One concerning worship: it must be proven that the very notion of worship implies a certain idea of man's relationship not only to God, but also to the world. And one concerning secularism: it must be proven that it is precisely this idea of worship that secularism explicity or implicitly rejects.

First let us consider worship. It is ironic but also quite revealing, it seems to me, of the present state of our theology, that the main "proof" here will be supplied not by theologians but by the *"Religionswissenschaft,"* that history and phenomenology of religions whose scientific study of worship, of both its forms and content, has been indeed virtually ignored by theologians. Yet even in its formative

stage, when it had a strong anti-Christian bias, this *Religionswissenschaft* seems to have known more about the nature and meaning of worship than the theologians who kept reducing sacraments to the categories of "form" and "matter," "causality," and "validity," and who in fact excluded the liturgical tradition from their theological speculations.

There can be no doubt however, that if, in the light of this by now methodologically mature phenomenology of religion, we consider worship in general and the Christian *leitourgia* in particular, we are bound to admit that the very principle on which they are built, and which determined and shaped their development, is that of the *sacramental* character of the world and of man's place in the world.

The term "sacramental" means here that the basic and primordial intuition which not only expresses itself in worship, but of which the entire worship is indeed the "phenomenon"—both effect and experience—is that the world, be it in its totality as cosmos, or in its life and becoming as time and history, is an *epiphany* of God, a means of His revelation, presence, and power. In other words, it not only "posits" the idea of God as a rationally acceptable cause of its existence, but truly "speaks" of Him and is in itself an essential means both of knowledge of God and communion with Him, and to be so is its true nature and its ultimate destiny. But then worship is truly an essential act, and man an essentially worshipping being, for it is *only* in worship that man has the source and the possibility of that knowledge which is communion, and of that communion which fulfills itself as true knowledge: knowledge of God and therefore knowledge of the world—communion with God and therefore communion with all that exists. Thus the very notion of worship is based on an intuition and experience of the world as an "epiphany" of God, thus the world—in worship—is revealed in its true nature and vocation as "sacrament."

And indeed, do I have to remind you of those realities, so humble, so "taken for granted" that they are hardly even mentioned in our highly sophisticated theological epistemologies and totally ignored in discussions about

"hermeneutics," and on which nevertheless simply depends our very existence as Church, as *new creation,* as people of God and temple of the Holy Spirit? We *need* water and oil, bread and wine in order to be in communion with God and to know Him. Yet conversely—and such is the teaching, if not of our modern theological manuals, at least of the liturgy itself—it is this communion with God by means of "matter" that reveals the true meaning of "matter," i.e., of the world itself. We can only worship in time, yet it is worship that ultimately not only reveals the meaning of time, but truly "renews" time itself. There is no worship without the participation of the body, without words and silence, light and darkness, movement and stillness—yet it is in and through worship that all these essential expressions of man in his relation to the world are given their ultimate "term" of reference, revealed in their highest and deepest meaning.

Thus the term "sacramental" means that for the world to be means of worship and means of grace is not accidental, but the revelation of its meaning, the restoration of its essence, the fulfillment of its destiny. It is the "natural sacramentality" of the world that finds its expression in worship and makes the latter the essential ἔργον of man, the foundation and the spring of his life and activities as man. Being the epiphany of God, worship is thus the epiphany of the world; being communion with God, it is the only true communion with the world; being knowledge of God, it is the ultimate fulfillment of all human knowledge.

4

At this point, and before I come to my second point—secularism as negation of worship—one remark is necessary. If earlier I mentioned *Religionswissenschaft,* it is because this discipline establishes at is own level and according to its own methodology that such indeed is the nature and the meaning not only of Christian worship, but of worship "in general," of worship as a primordial and universal

phenomenon. A Christian theologian, however, ought to concede, it seems to me, that this is especially true of the Christian *leitourgia* whose uniqueness lies in its stemming from the faith in the Incarnation, from the great and all-embracing mystery of the "Logos made flesh." It is indeed extremely important for us to remember that the uniqueness, the *newness* of Christian worship is not that it has no *continuity* with worshop "in general," as some overly zealous apologists tried to prove at the time when *Religion-swissenschaf* simply reduced Christianity and its worship to pagan mystery-cults, but that in Christ this very continuity is fulfilled, receives its ultimate and truly new significance so as to truly bring all "natural" worship to an end. Christ is the fulfillment of worship as adoration and prayer, thanksgiving and sacrifice, communion and knowledge, because He is the ultimate "epiphany" of man as worshiping being, the fulness of God's manifestation and presence by means of the world. He is the true and full Sacrament because He is the fulfillment of the world's essential "sacramentality."

If, however, this "continuity" of the Christian *leitourgia* with the whole of man's worship includes in itself an equally essential principle of *discontinuity,* if Christian worship being the fulfillment and the end of all worship is at the same time a *beginning,* a radically *new* worship, it is not because of any ontological impossibility for the world to be the sacrament of Christ. No, it is because the world rejected Christ by killing Him, and by doing so rejected its own destiny and fulfillment. Therefore, if the basis of all Christian worship is the Incarnation, its true content is always the Cross and the Resurrection. Through these events the new life in Christ, the Incarnate Lord, is "hid with Christ in God," and made into a life "not of this world." The world which rejected Christ must itself die in man if it is to become again means of communion, means of participation in the life which shone forth from the grave, in the Kingdom which is not "of this world," and which in terms of this world is still to come.

And thus the bread and wine—the food, the matter,

the very symbol of this world and therefore the very content of our *prosphora* to God, to be changed into the Body and Blood of Christ and become the communion to His Kingdom—must in the *anaphora* be "lifted up," taken out of "this world." And it is only when the Church in the Eucharist leaves this world and ascends to Christ's table at His Kingdom, that she truly sees and proclaims heaven and earth to be full of His glory and God as having "filled all things with Himself." Yet, once more this "discontinuity," this vision of all things as new, is possible only because at first there is continuity and not negation, because the Holy Spirit makes "all things new" and not "new things." It is because all Christian worship is always *remembrance* of Christ "in the flesh" that it can also be remembrance, i.e., expectation and anticipation, of His Kingdom. It is only because the Church's *leitourgia* is always cosmic, i.e., assumes into Christ all creation, and is always historical, i.e. assumes into Christ all time, that it can therefore also be eschatological, i.e., make us true participants of the Kingdom to come.

Such then is the idea of man's relation to the world implied in the very notion of worship. Worship is by definition and act a reality with cosmic, historical, and eschatological dimensions, the expression thus not merely of "piety," but of an all-embracing "world view." And those few who have taken upon themselves the pain of studying worship in general, and Christian worship in particular, would certainly agree that on the levels of history and phenomenology at least, this notion of worship is objectively verifiable. Therefore, if today what people call worship are activities, projects, and undertakings having in reality nothing to do with this notion of worship, the responsibility for this lies with the deep semantic confusion typical of our confused time.

5

We can now come to my second point. Secularism, I said, is

above all a negation of worship. And indeed, if what we have said about worship is true, is it not equally true that secularism consists in the rejection, explicit or implicit, of precisely that idea of man and world which it is the very purpose of worship to express and communicate?

This rejection, moreover, is at the very foundation of secularism and constitutes its inner criterion, but as I have already said, secularism is by no means identical to atheism. A modern secularist quite often accepts the idea of God. What, however, he emphatically negates is precisely the sacramentality of man and world. A secularist views the world as containing within itself its meaning and the principles of knowledge and action. He may deduce meaning from God and ascribe to God the origin of the world and the laws which govern it. He may even admit without difficulty the possibility of God's intervention in the world's existence. He may believe in survival after death and the immortality of the soul. He may relate to God his ultimate aspirations, such as a just society and the freedom and equality of all men. In other words, he may "refer" his secularism to God and make it "religious"—the object of ecclesiastical programs and ecumenical projects, the theme of Church assemblies and the subject matter of "theology." All this changes nothing in the fundamental "secularity" of his vision of man and world, in the world being understood, experienced, and acted upon in its own immanent terms and for its own immanent sake. All this changes nothing in his fundamental rejection of "epiphany": the primordial intuition that everything in this world and the world itself not only have *elsewhere* the cause and principle of their existence, but are *themselves* the manifestation and presence of that *elsewhere,* and that this is indeed the life of their life, so that disconnected from that "epiphany" all is only darkness, absurdity, and death.

And nowhere is this essence of secularism as negation of worship better revealed than in the secularist's dealing with worship. For paradoxical as it may sound, the secularist in a way is truly obsessed with worship. The "acme" of religious secularism in the West—Masonry—is made up

almost entirely of highly elaborated ceremonies saturated with "symbolism." The recent prophet of the "secular city," Harvey Cox, felt the need to follow up his first best-seller with a book on "celebration." Celebration is in fact very fashionable today. The reasons for this seemingly peculiar phenomenon are in reality quite simple. They not only do not invalidate, but on the contrary confirm my point. For on the one hand, this phenomenon proves that whatever the degree of his secularism or even atheism, man remains essentially a "worshiping being," forever nostalgic for rites and rituals no matter how empty and artificial is the ersatz offered to him. And on the other hand, by proving the inability of secularism to create genuine worship, this phenomenon reveals secularism's ultimate and tragic incompatibility with the essential Christian world view.

Such inability can be seen, in the first place, in the secularist's very approach to worship, in his naive conviction that worship, as everything else in the world, can be a rational construction, the result of planning, "exchange of views," and discussions. Quite typical of this are the very fashionable discussions of new symbols, as if symbols could be, so to speak, "manufactured," brought into existence through committee deliberations. But the whole point here is that the secularist is constitutionally unable to see in symbols anything but "audio-visual aids" for communicating ideas. Last winter a group of students and teachers of a well-known seminary spent a semester "working" on a "liturgy" centered on the following "themes": the S.S.T., ecology, and the flood in Pakistan. No doubt they "meant well." It is their presuppositions which are wrong: that the traditional worship can have no "relevance" to these themes and has nothing to reveal about them, and that unless a "theme" is somehow clearly spelled out in the liturgy, or made into its "focus," it is obviously outside the spiritual reach of liturgical experience. The secularist is very fond today of terms such as "symbolism," "sacrament," "transformation," "celebration," and of the entire panoply of cultic terminology. What he does not realize, however, is that the use he makes of them reveals, in fact, the death

of symbols and the decomposition of the sacrament. And he does not realize this because in his rejection of the world's and man's sacramentality he is reduced to viewing symbols as indeed mere illustrations of ideas and concepts, which they emphatically are not. There can be no celebration of ideas and concepts, be they "peace," "justice," or even "God." The Eucharist is not a symbol of friendship, togetherness, or any other state of activity however desirable. A vigil or a fast are, to be sure, "symbolic": they always express, manifest, fulfill the Church as expectation, they are themselves that expectation and preparation. To make them into "symbols" of political protest or ideological affirmation, to use them as means to that which is not their "end," to think that the liturgical symbols can be used arbitrarily—is to signify the death of worship, and this in spite of the obvious success and popularity of all these "experiments."

To anyone who has had, be it only once, the true experience of worship, all this is revealed immediately as the ersatz it is. He knows that the secularist's worship of relevance is simply incompatible with the true relevance of worship. And it is here, in this miserable liturgical failure, whose appalling results we are only beginning to see, that secularism reveals its ultimate religious emptiness and, I will not hesitate to say, its utterly anti-Christian essence.

6

Does all this mean a simple dismissal of our very theme: "worship in a secular age"? Does this mean that there is nothing we, as Orthodox, can do in this secular age except to perform on Sunday our "ancient and colorful" rites, and to live from Monday until Saturday a perfectly "secularized" life, sharing in a world view which is in no way related to these rites?

To this question my answer is an emphatic *No.* I am

convinced that to accept this "coexistence,"[1] as is advocated today by many seemingly well-intentioned Christians, would not only mean a betrayal of our own faith, but that sooner or later, and probably sooner than later, it would lead to the disintegration of precisely that which we want to preserve and perpetuate. I am convinced, moreover, that such a disintegration has already begun and is concealed only by the grace-proof walls of our ecclesiastical "establishments" (busy as they are in defending their ancient rights and privileges and primacies and condemning one another as "noncanonical"), peaceful rectories, and self-righteous pieties. To this latter we shall return a little later.

What we have to understand first of all, is that the problem under discussion is complicated by something our well-intentioned "conservatives" do not comprehend, in spite of all their denouncing and condemning of secularism. It is the fact of the very real connection between secularism —its origin and its development—and Christianity. Secularism —we must again and again stress this—is a "stepchild" of Christianity, as are, in the last analysis, all secular ideologies which today dominate the world—not, as it is claimed by the Western apostles of a Christian acceptance of secularism, a legitimate child, but a *heresy.* Heresy, however, is always the distortion, the exaggeration, and therefore the mutilation of something true, the affirmation of one "choice" (*aizesis* means choice in Greek), one element at the expence of the others, the breaking up of the catholicity of Truth. But then heresy is also always a question addressed to the Church, and which requires, in order to be answered, an effort of Christian thought and conscience. To condemn a heresy is relatively easy. What is much more difficult

[1]Nowhere better seen than in the classical argument of the partisans of the "old calendar": on December 25th we can fully share in the "secularized" Western Christmas with its Christmas trees, family reunions, and exchange of gifts, and then on January 7th we have the "true"—religious—Christmas. The tenants of this view do not realize, of course, that had the early Church shared in such an understanding of her relation to the world, she would have never instituted Christmas, whose purpose was precisely to "exorcize," transform, and Christianize an existing pagan festival.

is to *detect* the question it implies, and to give this question an adequate answer. Such, however, was always the Church's dealing with "heresies"—they always provoked an effort of creativity within the Church so that the condemnation became ultimately a widening and deepening of Christian faith itself. To fight Arianism St. Athanasius advocated the term *consubstantial,* which earlier, and within a different theological context, was condemned as heretical. Because of this he was violently opposed, not only by Arians but by "conservatives," who saw in him an innovator and a "modernist." Ultimately, however, it became clear that it was he who saved Orthodoxy, and that the blind "conservatives" consciously or unconsciously helped the Arians. Thus, if secularism is, as I am convinced, the great *heresy* of our own time, it requires from the Church not mere anathemas, and certainly not compromises, but above all an effort of understanding so it may ultimately be overcome by truth.

The uniqueness of secularism, its difference from the great heresies of the patristic age, is that the latter were provoked by the encounter of Christianity with Hellenism, whereas the former is the result of a "breakdown" within Christianity itself, of its own deep metamorphosis. The lack of time prevents me from dealing with this point in detail. I shall limit myself therefore to one "symbolic" example directly related to our theme.[2] At the end of the twelfth century a Latin theologian, Berengarius of Tours, was condemned for his teaching on the Eucharist. He maintained that because the presence of Christ in the eucharistic elements is "mystical" or "symbolic," it is not *real.* The Lateran Council which condemned him—and here is for me the crux of the matter—simply reversed the formula. It proclaimed that since Christ's presence in the Eucharist is *real,* it is not "mystical." What is truly decisive here is precisely the disconnection and the opposition of the two terms *verum* and *mystice,* the acceptance, on both sides,

[2]For a fuller treatment of this point see Appendix II: "Sacrament and Symbol."

that they are mutually exclusive. Western theology thus declared that that which is "mystical" or "symbolic" is not real, whereas that which is "real" is not symbolic. This was, in fact, the collapse of the fundamental Christian *mysterion,* the antinomical "holding together" of the reality of the symbol, and of the symbolism of reality. It was the collapse of the fundamental Christian understanding of creation in terms of its ontological *sacramentality.* And since then, Christian thought, in Scholasticism and beyond it, never ceased to oppose these terms, to reject, implicitly or explicitly, the "symbolic realism" and the "realistic symbolism" of the Christian world view. "As if God did not exist"—this formula originated not with Bonhoeffer or any modern apostle of "religionless Christianity." It is indeed implied already in Thomism, with its basic epistemological distinction between *causa prima* and *causae secundae.* Here is the real cause of *secularism,* which is ultimately nothing else but the affirmation of the world's autonomy, of its self-sufficiency in terms of reason, knowledge, and action. The downfall of Christian symbolism led to the dichotomy of the "natural" and the "supernatural" as the only framework of Christian thought and experience. And whether the "natural" and the "supernatural" are somehow related to one another by *analogia entis,* as in Latin theology, or whether this analogy is totally rejected, as in Barthianism, ultimately makes no difference. In both views the world ceases to be the "natural" sacrament of God, and the supernatural sacrament to have any "continuity" with the world.

Let us not be mistaken, however. This Western theological framework was in fact accepted by the Orthodox East also, and since the end of the patristic age our theology has been indeed much more "Western" than "Eastern." If secularism can be properly termed a Western heresy, the very fruit of the basic Western "deviation," our own scholastic theology has also been permeated with it for centuries, and this in spite of violent denunciations of Rome and papism. And it is indeed ironic, but not at all accidental, that psychologically the most "Western" among the Orthodox today are precisely the ultra-conservative "Super-

Orthodox," whose whole frame of mind is legalistic and syllogistic on the one hand, and is made up, on the other hand, of those very "dichotomies" whose introduction into Christian thought is the "original sin" of the West. Once these dichotomies are accepted, it does not matter, theologically speaking, whether one "accepts" the world, as in the case of the Western enthusiast of "secular Christianity," or "rejects" it, as in the case of the "Super-Orthodox" prophet of apocalyptic doom. The optimistic positivism of the one, and the pessimistic negativism of the other are, in fact, two sides of the same coin. Both, by denying the world its natural "sacramentality" and radically opposing the "natural" to the "supernatural," make the world *grace-proof,* and ultimately lead to *secularism.* And it is here, within this spiritual and psychological context, that the problem of worship in relation to modern secularism acquires its real significance.

7

For it is clear that this deeply "Westernized" theology has had a very serious impact on worship, or rather, on the experience and comprehension of worship, on that which elsewhere I have defined as liturgical piety.[3] And it has had this impact because it satisfied a deep desire of man for a legalistic religion that would fulfill his need for both the "sacred"—a divine sanction and guarantee—and the "profane," i.e., a natural and secular life protected, as it were, from the constant challenge and absolute demands of God. It was a relapse into that religion which assures, by means of orderly transactions with the "sacred," security and clean conscience in this life, as well as reasonable rights to the "other world," a religion which Christ denounced by every word of His teaching, and which ultimately crucified Him. It is indeed much easier to live and to breathe within neat distinctions between the sacred and the profane, the

[3]See my *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (London: Faith Press, 1966).

natural and the supernatural, the pure and the impure, to understand religion in terms of sacred "taboos," legal prescriptions and obligations, of ritual rectitude and canonical "validity." It is much more difficut to realize that such a religion not only does not constitute any threat to "secularism," but on the contrary, is its paradoxical ally.

And yet this is exactly what happened to our "liturgical piety," and not to worship as such—to its forms and structures, which were too traditional, too much a part of the Church's life to be altered in any substantial degree —but to our "comprehension" of these forms, to what *we* expect and therefore receive from worship. If worship as shaped by the liturgical tradition, the *lex orandi* of the Church, remained the same, its "comprehension" by the faithful became more and more determined by those very categories which the Orthodox liturgical tradition explicity and implicitly rejects by its every word, by its entire "ethos." And the deep tragedy here is that the imposition of these categories is accepted today to such an extent that any attempt to denounce them, to show their incompatibility with the true spirit and meaning of the *leitourgia,* is met by accusations of *modernism* and other mortal sins. And yet this is not a superficial verbal quarrel, not one of those academic storms which more often than not leave the Church undisturbed. This is truly a matter of life and death, because it is here and only here that the fightening heresy of secularism can find its proper Christian diagnosis and be defeated.

Lack of time compels me to limit myself to one example to show that the "dichotomies" mentioned above, which without any doubt have determined the deep metamorphosis of our liturgical piety, not only do not "connect" and relate one to another God, man, and the world, uniting them in one consistent world view, but on the contrary, abolish all "communications" and "correspondences" between them.

Thus, for example, to bless water, making it "holy water," may have two entirely different meanings. It may mean, on the one hand, the transformation of something *profane,* and thus religiously void or neutral, into something *sacred,*

in which case the main religious meaning of "holy water" is precisely that it is no longer "mere" water, and is in fact opposed to it—as the sacred is to the profane. Here the act of blessing reveals nothing about water, and thus about matter or world, but on the contrary makes them irrelevant to the new function of water as "holy water." The sacred posits the profane as precisely profane, i.e., religiously meaningless.

On the other hand, the same act of blessing may mean the revelation of the true "nature" and "destiny" of water, and thus of the world—it may be the epiphany and the fulfillment of their "sacramentality." By being restored through the blessing to its proper function, the "holy water" is revealed as the true, full, adequate water, and matter becomes again means of communion with and knowledge of God.

Now anyone who is acquainted with the content and the text of the great prayer of blessing of water—at Baptism and Epiphany—knows without any doubt that they belong to the second of the two meanings mentioned above, that their term of reference is not the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane, but the "sacramental" potentiality of creation in its totality, as well as in each of its elements. Yet anyone who is acquainted with our liturgical piety—in this case the "comprehension" by the immense majority of the faithful of the meaning of "holy water"—knows equally well that it is the first meaning which triumphs here to the virtual exclusion of the second one. And the same analysis can be applied, with the same results, to practically every aspect of worship: to sacraments, to the liturgy of time, to heortology, etc. "Sacramentality" has been replaced everywhere by "sacrality," "epiphany" by an almost magical incrustation into time and matter (the "natural"), by the "supernatural."

What is truly disturbing here is that such liturgical piety, such understanding and experience of worship, not only is in no way a challenge to secularism, but is in fact one of its very sources. For it leaves the world profane, i.e., precisely *secular,* in the deepest sense of this term: as totally incapable

of any real communication with the Divine, of any real transformation and transfiguration. Having nothing to reveal about world and matter, about time and nature, this idea and this experience of worship "disturb" nothing, question nothing, challenge nothing, are indeed "applicable" to nothing. They can therefore peacefully "coexist" with any secular ideology, any form of secularism. And there is virtually no difference here between liturgical "rigorists," i.e., those who stress long services, compliance with rubrics and the Typicon, and liturgical "liberals," always ready and anxious to shorten, adapt, and adjust. For in both cases what is denied is simply the *continuity* between "religion" and "life," the very function of worship as power of transformation, judgment, and change. Again, paradoxically and tragically, this type of approach towards worship and this kind of liturgical experience are indeed the source and the support of secularism.

8

And this at a time when secularism begins to "crack" from inside! If my reading of the great confusion of our time is correct, this confusion is, first of all, a deep crisis of secularism. And it is truly ironic, in my opinion, that so many Christians are seeking some accommodation with secularism precisely at the moment when it is revealing itself to be an untenable spiritual position. More and more signs point toward one fact of paramount importance: the famous "modern man" is already looking for a path beyond secularism, is again thirsty and hungry for "something else." Much too often this thirst and hunger are satisfied not only by food of doubtful quality, but by artificial substitutes of all kinds. The spiritual confusion is at its peak. But is it not because the Church, because Christians themselves, have given up so easily that unique gift which they alone—and no one else!—could have given to the spiritually thirsty and hungry world of ours? Is it not because Christians, more than any others today, defend secularism and adjust to it

their very faith? Is it not because, having access to the true *mysterion* of Christ, we prefer to offer to the world vague and second-rate "social" and "political" advice? The world is desperate in its need for Sacrament and Epiphany, while Christians embrace empty and foolish worldly utopias.

My conclusions are simple. No, we do not need any *new* worship that would somehow be more adequate to our new secular world. What we need is a rediscovery of the true meaning and power of worship, and this means of its cosmic, ecclesiological, and eschatological dimensions and content. This, to be sure, implies much work, much "cleaning up." It implies study, education and effort. It implies giving up much of that dead wood which we carry with us, seeing in it much too often the very essence of our "traditions" and "customs." But once we discover the true *lex orandi,* the genuine meaning and power of our *leitourgia,* once it becomes again the source of an all-embracing world view and the power of living up to it—then and only then the unique antidote to "secularism" shall be found. And there is nothing more urgent today than this rediscovery, and this return—not to the past—but to the light and life, to the truth and grace that are eternally fulfilled by the Church when she becomes—in her *leitourgia*—that which she is.

2

Sacrament and Symbol[1]

The initial difficulty encountered by an Orthodox when he speaks of sacraments lies in the necessity to choose between the various "strata" of his own theological tradition. If he opts for the more recent and official "theology of manuals" which developed in Orthodox theological schools since the sixteenth century, his presentation will undoubtedly be quite similar, in terminology as well as in content, to any Latin *De Sacramentis.* From a general definition of sacraments as "visible means of the invisible grace" he will proceed to the distinction in them between "form" and "matter," their institution by Christ, their numbering and classification and, finally, their proper administration as condition of their validity and efficacy[2]. It is a fact, however, which is recognized today by a growing number of Orthodox theologians, that this approach to sacraments, although accepted and taught for several centuries, has very little to do with the genuine tradition of the Eastern Church. It is seen rather as one of the most unfortunate results and expressions of the "pseudomorphosis" suffered by Orthodox theology after the breakdown of the patristic

[1]Published first in *Evangelium und Sacrament* (Strasburg: Oecumenica, 1970).

[2]See for example F. Gavin, *Some Aspects of Contemporary Greek Thought*: (London: SPCK, 1923), pp. 269—354, or Bishop Sylvester, *Opyit Pravoslavnogo Dogmaticheskogo Bogoslovia* (Orthodox Dogmatical Theology), Vol. IV, pp. 350—577, Vol. V, pp. 1—65 (Kiev: 1897).

age when tragic conditions of ecclesiastical life forced upon Orthodox "intellectuals" a non-critical adoption of Western theological categories and thought forms. The result was a deeply "westernized" theology, whose tradition was maintained (and to some extent is still maintained) by theological schools. In Russia, for example, theology was taught in Latin until the forties of the nineteenth century! The "Western captivity" of Orthodox theology has been vigorously denounced by the best theologians of the last hundred years and there exists today a significant movement aimed at the recovery by our theology of its own genuine perspective and method.[3] The return to the Fathers, to the liturgical and spiritual traditions which were virtually ignored by the "theology of manuals," is beginning to bear fruit. The process, however, is still in its initial stage, and as to sacramental theology very little has been achieved, which means that any effort of "recovery" and "reconstruction" here is of necessity a tentative and preliminary one. The urgent task is precisely to recover a perspective, to raise questions which within the antiquated framework of "manuals" not only were not answered but could not even be formulated.

2

What is "sacrament"? In answering this question the post-patristic Western and "westernizing" theology places itself within a mental context deeply, if not radically, different from that of the early Church. I say *mental* and not intellectual because the difference belongs here to a level much deeper than that of intellectual presuppositions or theological terminology. Patristic theology, to be sure, was not less "intellectual" than scholasticism, and as to terminology it is precisely its unbroken continuity, the use of the same words, however altered in their meaning, that may have

[3]On the history of that movement see G. Florovsky, *Puti Russkogo Bogoslovija* (Ways of Russian Theology), (Paris: 1937).

concealed from too many historians of theology the discontinuity between the two types of sacramental theology.

Externally or formally this change consisted, first of all, in a new approach by sacramental theology to the very object of its study. In the early Church, in the writings of the Fathers, sacraments, inasmuch as they are given any systematic interpretation, are always explained in the context of their actual *liturgical* celebration, the explanation being, in fact, an exegesis of the liturgy itself in all its ritual complexity and concreteness. The medieval *De Sacramentis,* however, tends from its very inception to isolate the "sacrament" from its liturgical context, to find and to define in terms as precise as possible its *essence,* i. e., that which distinguishes it from the "non-sacrament." Sacrament in a way begins to be opposed to liturgy. It has, of course, its ritual expression, its "signum," which belongs to its essence, but this sign is viewed now as ontologically different from all other signs, symbols, and rites of the Church. And because of this difference, the precise sacramental sign alone is considered, to the exclusion of all other "liturgy," the proper object of theological attention. One can, for example, read and reread the elaborate treatment given in St. Thomas' *Summa* to sacraments without still knowing much about their liturgical celebration. And one can scrutinize virtually all Catholic and Orthodox treatises of Holy Orders without seeing mentioned, be it only once, the traditional and organic connection between ordination and Eucharist.[4] To historians of theology this change is due to what they describe as the progress of "scientific theology" and the growth of a "more precise" theological method.[5] In reality, however, this change, far from being a mere

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[4]See Gavin, *ibid.,* pp. 370—378; Bishop Sylvester, *ibid.,* pp. 353—388.

[5]"The concept of sacrament-mysterion after having dominated for a long time sacramental theology had to fade away . . . It is certain that it made *a priori* impossible any precise analysis of the notion of sacrament . . . In fact, sacramental theology could make no progress as long as that notion was at its center"—A.M. Roguet, O.P., in St. Thomas d'Aquin, *Somme Theologique,* Les Sacrements (3a, Questions 60—65), (Paris: Desclee, 1945), p. 258.

"external" one, has its roots in a deep transformation of theological vision, indeed of the entire theological "world view." And it is the nature of that transformation that we must try to understand in the first place if we want to reach the initial meaning of the sacrament.

3

To simplify our task we can take as the starting point of this study the long and well-known debate which dominates from beginning to end the development in the West of sacramental and, more especially, eucharistic theology. It is the debate on the *real presence.* Nowhere indeed is better revealed the line dividing from one another the two approaches to the sacrament, as well as the reasons which led to the transformation of one into another. Within the context of that debate the term "real" clearly implies the possibility of another type of presence which therefore is *not* real. The term for that other presence in the Western intellectual and theological idiom is, we know, *symbolical.* We need not go here into the very complex and in many ways confused history of that term in Western thought.[6] It is clear that in the common theological language as it takes shape between the Carolingian renaissance and the Reformation, and in spite of all controversies between rival theological schools, the "incompatibility between symbol and reality," between "figura et veritas"[7] is consistently affirmed and accepted. "To the 'mystice, non vere' corresponds not less exclusively 'vere, non mystice.' "[8] The Fathers and the whole early tradition, however—and

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[6]See W. Weidle, "Znak i Symbol" (Sign and Symbol), in *Bogoslovskaya Misl'* (Theological Thought), Essays published by the Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris (Paris: 1942), pp. 25—40, and E. Cassirer, *Philosophie der Symbolischen Formen,* I—III (1923 to 1929).

[7]B. Neunheuser, *Histoire des Dogmes: L'Eucharistie,* II. Au Moyen Age et a l'epoque moderne (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1966), p. 42.

[8]H. de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: L'Eucharistie et l'Eglise au Moyen Age* (Paris: Aubier, 1944), p. 258.

we reach here the crux of the matter—not only do not know this distinction and opposition, but to them symbolism is the essential dimension of the sacrament, the proper key to its understanding. St. Maximus the Confessor, the sacramental theologian *par excellence* of the patristic age, calls the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist *symbols* ("symbola"), *images* ("apeikonismata") and *mysteries* ("mysteria").[9] "Symbolical" here is not only not opposed to "real," but embodies it as its very expression and mode of manifestation. Historians of theology, in their ardent desire to maintain the myth of theological continuity and orderly "evolution," here again find their explanation in the "imprecision" of patristic terminology. They do not seem to realize that the Fathers' use of "symbolon" (and related terms) is not "vague" or "imprecise" but simply different from that of the later theologians, and that the subsequent transformation of these terms constitutes indeed the source of one of the greatest theological tragedies.

4

The difference here is primarily a difference in the apprehension of reality itself or, as we said above, a difference of "world view." If, for the Fathers, symbol is a key to sacrament it is because sacrament is in continuity with the symbolical structure of the world in which "omnes . . . creaturae sensibiles sunt signa rerum sacrum." And the world is symbolical—"signum rei sacrae"—in virtue of its being created by God; to be "symbolical" belongs thus to its ontology, the symbol being not only the way to perceive and understand reality, a means of cognition, but also a means of *participation.* It is then the "natural" symbolism of the world—one can almost say its "sacra-

[9]See R. Bornert, O.S.B., *Les Commentaires Byzantins de la Liturgie Byzantine du VII au XV siecle,* Archives de l'Orient Chretien, 9 (Paris: Institut Francais d'Etudes Byzantines), pp. 117f., and H. de Lubac, *Liturgie Cosmique* (Paris: Aubier, 1947), pp. 242f.

mentality"—that makes the sacrament *possible* and constitutes the key to its understanding and apprehension. If the Christian sacrament is *unique,* it is not in the sense of being a miraculous exception to the natural order of things created by God and "proclaiming His glory." Its absolute newness is not in its ontology as sacrament but in the specific "res" which it "symbolizes," i. e., reveals, manifests, and communicates—which is Christ and His Kingdom. But even this absolute newness is to be understood in terms not of total discontinuity but in those of fulfillment. The "mysterion" of Christ reveals and fulfills the ultimate meaning and destiny of the world itself. Therefore, the institution of sacraments by Christ (a theme which will obsess the later theology) is not the creation *ex nihilo* of the "sacramentality" itself, of the sacrament as means of cognition and participation. In the words of Christ, "do *this* in remembrance of me," the *this* (meal, thanksgiving, breaking of bread) is already "sacramental."[10] The institution means that by being referred to Christ, "filled" with Christ, the symbol is fulfilled and becomes *sacrament.*

5

It is this continuity of the sacrament with symbol that the post-patristic theology begins, first, to minimize and then simply to reject, and it does it because of a progressive "dissolution" of the symbol, conditioned in turn by a new concept of theology in its relation to faith. The ultimate problem of all theology is that of *knowledge* and, more precisely, of the possibility and nature of the knowledge of God. If the Fathers hold together in a living and truly

[10]See for example F. L. Leenhardt on the pascal meal in Judaism: "... it appears as the sacrament of salvation. It evokes that which God did and which He will achieve, the historical salvation and the eschatological salvation. The notion of *zikkaron* . . . gives already a real basis to the idea of sacrament"—*Le Sacrement de la Sainte Cene* (Neuchised Delachaux et Nestle, 1948), p. 21, and also L. Bouyer, *Rite and Man: Natural Sacredness and Christian Liturgy* (Notre Dame: University Press, 1967), pp. 63f.

"existential" synthesis, on the one hand, the absolute "otherness" of God, the impossibility for creatures to know Him in His essence, and, on the other hand, the reality of man's communion with God, knowledge of God and "theosis," this synthesis is rooted primarily in their idea or rather intuition of the "mysterion" and of its mode of presence and operation—the symbol. For it is the very nature of symbol that it reveals and communicates the "other" *as* precisely the "other," the visibility of the invisible *as* invisible, the knowledge of the unknowable *as* unknowable, the presence of the future *as* future. The symbol is means of knowledge of that which cannot be known otherwise, for knowledge here depends on participation—the living encounter with and entrance into that "epiphany" of reality which the symbol is. But then theology is not only related to the "mysterion" but has in it its source, the condition of its very possibility. Theology as proper words and knowledge *about* God is the result of the knowledge *of* God—and in Him of all reality. The "original sin" of post-patristic theology consists therefore in the reduction of the concept of knowledge to rational or discursive knowledge or, in other terms, in the separation of knowledge from "mysterion". This theology does not reject the "symbolical world view" of the earlier tradition: the sentence quoted above—"omnes . . . sensibiles creaturae sunt signa rerum sacrum"—is from St. Thomas.[11] But it radically changes the understanding of that "signum." In the early tradition, and this is of paramount importance, the relationship between the sign in the symbol (A) and that which it "signifies" (B) is neither a merely semantic one (A *means* B), nor causal (A *is the cause of* B), nor representative (A *represents* B). We called this relationship an *epiphany*. "A *is* B" means that the whole of A expresses, communicates, reveals, manifests the "reality" of B (although not necessarily the whole of it) without, however, losing its own ontological reality, without being dissolved in another "res."[12]

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[11] *Summa Theologica,* Quest. 60, Art. 2,1.
[12] See Weidle, *ibid.*

But it was precisely this relationship between the A and the B, between the sign and the signified, that was changed. Because of the reduction of knowledge to rational or discursive knowledge there appears between A and B a *hiatus.* The symbol may still be means of knowledge but, as all knowledge, it is knowledge *about* and not knowledge *of.* It can be a revelation about the "res," but not the epiphany of the "res" itself. A can mean B, or represent it, or even, in certain instances, be the "cause" of its presence; but A is no longer viewed as the very means of "participation" *in* B. Knowledge and participation are now two different realities, two different orders.

6

For sacramental theology this "dissolution" of symbol had truly disastrous consequences. By changing the very notion of sacrament it radically transformed also that of theology, provoking finally a crisis whose real scope and depth we are beginning to realize only today. It must be clear by now, we hope, that the theme of "real presence" which we mentioned above and whose appearance in a way inaugurated the post-patristic period in sacramental theology was born out of theological doubt about the "reality" of symbol, i. e., its ability to contain and to communicate reality. We have briefly explained the reasons for that doubt: the identification, on the one hand, of symbol with means of knowledge, the reduction, on the other hand, of knowledge to rational and discursive knowledge *about,* rather than *of,* reality. And since tradition was unanimous in affirming the sacrament as *verum,* i. e., real, the question was bound to arise: how can the symbol be the vehicle or the mode of sacrament? Since, however, the patristic use of symbolical terminology in reference to sacraments was an equally obvious "datum" of the same tradition, the doubt was resolved at first by a mere reinforcement of one terminology—the "symbolical"—by another one—the "realistic." The sacrament is both "figura et res, veritas et figura,"

it is "non solum mystice sed etiam vere." But soon and in virtue of a progressive devaluation of symbol made inevitable by its dissolution, the two terms had to be viewed as not only different but, in fact, opposed to each other.[13] In the famous case of Berenger of Tours, the remarkable fact is the complete identity in the understanding of symbol between Berenger himself and those who condemned him. If for him the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist are not real because they are symbolical, for the Council of Lateran of 1059 they are real precisely because they are not symbolical. The distinction having inevitably led to opposition, the latter has remained the fundamental framework of all subsequent theological development.[14]

7

There remained, however, the problem of the *signum* whose relation to the "res" of the sacrament had to be defined in a new way. For if it is not a symbol what is it? Post-patristic theology answered this question by defining *signum* as *cause*[15] and it is here that the notion and probably the experience of the sacrament suffered its deepest transformation. In the early tradition, the causality inherent in the sacrament, the sanctification it procures for those who partake of it, is inseparable from its symbolism for it is rooted in it. This in no way limits or contradicts the unique cause of all sacraments—their *institution* by Christ—for, as we have said already, the institution is precisely the fulfillment of a symbol by Christ and, therefore, its transformation into a sacrament. It is thus an act, not of discontinuity, but of fulfillment and actualization. It is the epiphany—in and through Christ—of the "new creation," not the creation of

[13]See H. de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum,* Ch. 10 "Du Symbole a la Dialectique," pp. 255ff.

[14]Neunheuser, *ibid.,* pp. 46—55.

[15]E. Hugon, *La causalite instrumentale en theologie,* 2nd ed. (Paris: 1907).

something "new." And if it reveals the "continuity" between creation and Christ, it is because there exists, at first, a continuity between Christ and creation whose *logos,* life, and light He is. It is precisely this aspect of both the institution and sacrament that virtually disappear in post-patristic theology. The causality linking the institution to "signum" to "res" is viewed as extrinsic and formal, not as *intrinsic* and revealing. Rather than revealing through fulfillment, it guarantees the reality of the sacrament's *effect.* Even if, as in the case of the Eucharist, the sign is completely identified with reality, it is experienced in terms of the sign's annihilation rather than in those of fulfillment. In this sense the doctrine of transubstantiation, in its Tridentine form, is truly the collapse, or rather the suicide, of sacramental theology. If this new understanding of causality—as an extrinsic and formal guarantee—breaks the ontological continuity between the sign and the "res," it also rejects, *de facto,* all continuity between "institution" and the normal order of things. It is indeed *discontinuity* that is now being stressed and affirmed. Considered as the "causa principalis" of the "signum" as "causa secunda," institution becomes now an absolute starting point of a sacramental system entirely *sui generis.* And the efforts by some recent theologians to bring back into the notion of "signum" the "richness of traditional symbolism" concern the "accidents," not the "substance" in the doctrine and understanding of sacraments.

For doctrine and understanding are now very different from those of the early Church. In the latter, sacrament was not only "open" to, it truly "held together" the three dimensions or levels of the Christian vision of reality: those of the Church, the world, and the Kingdom. And "holding" them together it made them *known*—in the deepest patristic sense of the word knowledge—as both understanding and participation. It was the source of theology—knowledge *about* God in His relation to the world, the Church, and the Kingdom—because it was knowledge *of* God and, in Him, of all reality. Having its beginning, content and end in Christ, it at the same time revealed Christ as the beginning, the content and the end of all that which exists,

as its Creator, Redeemer, and fulfillment. The transformation of the sacrament in post-patristic theology consisted, therefore, in its isolation within a self-contained and self-sufficient sacramental "organism." That external isolation of the sacrament from the liturgy which we mentioned before was, indeed, "symbolical" of a much deeper change. "The notion of the sacraments"—writes enthusiastically a contemporary theologian—"is something completely *sui generis* and the less anthropomorphism or even 'angelism' we introduce in it the better for theology . . . The sacraments have a mode of existence of their own, a psychology of their own, a grace of their own . . . In heaven and earth there is nothing comparable to sacraments."[16] It is when they were exalted and glorified as supreme *reality* that began the progressive alienation from them of theology, ecclesiology, and eschatology, an alienation which—whether it is understood or not—is at the origin of today's crisis, the source and the poison of "secularism" . . . As means of individual piety and sanctification they preserved all their "value." As catholic acts of the Church fulfilling herself, as symbols in "this world" of "the world to come," of the consummation in God of all things—they were simply forgotten.

8

We can return now to the Orthodox "perspective." The preceding analysis is meant to prove one thing: if that perspective is to be recovered it can only be through the rediscovery of those dimensions of *sacrament* which have been either obscured or simply ignored during the long dependence of Orthodox theology on Western, mainly Latin, systems and thought forms. How is this rediscovery to be made? It certainly cannot be a merely "intellectual" one. A mere reading of the Fathers, useful and essential as it is,

[16]Dom Vonier, *La Clef de la Doctrine Eucharistique,* trans. P. Roguet (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf [no date]).

will not suffice. For even patristic texts can be made, and are often made, into "proofs" of theological systems deeply alien to the real "mind" of the Fathers. The "patristic revival" of our time would miss completely its purpose if it were to result in a rigid "patristic system" which in reality never existed. It is indeed the eternal merit of the Fathers that they showed the dynamic and not static nature of Christian theology, its power always to be "contemporary" without reduction to any "contemporaneousness," open to all human aspirations without being determined by any of them. If the return to the Fathers were to mean a purely formal repetition of their terms and formulations, it would be as wrong and as useless as the discarding of the Fathers by "modern" theology because of their presumably "antiquated" world view.

All this applies, first of all, to our use of the term "symbol." If it is deliberately posited here as the center of sacramental theology and as a key to its "reconstruction," it is not simply because we find it in patristic texts. For we find in these texts many other terms equally, if not more, important for their understanding. And it would be easy, on the one hand, to prove that, from a purely terminological point of view, the term symbol is neither the most frequent, nor the most essential one, and, on the other hand, that no word in patristic texts is "absolute" in itself, but each receives its meaning, its theological "semantics" only within a wider theological and spiritual context. What proves then that the selection of this term, in preference to all others, is justified and that our understanding of it is correct? Was it not interpreted already by scholastic theology and in a sense which is held here to be erroneous?

To all these questions the answer is that, even if the Fathers had not used this word as such at all, it would have still been for us today the most adequate means to rediscover the meaning of that fundamental experience to which their writings bear testimony, to which all of them—explicitly or implicitly—refer, and which alone ultimately interests us in the Fathers. For it is this word, or rather the meaning which it acquires today more and more, that constitutes the

best if not the unique bridge between, on the one hand, the experience and the world view of the Fathers and, on the other hand, the deepest aspirations, doubts, and confusions of our age, whether it is labeled "modern," "secular," or "technological." It is indeed this term *symbol* that emerges today as the "focus," the central preoccupation of both religious and secular thought, as the preliminary question on which all other questions depend, as the very "symbol" of man's confusion and search. If today one so often hears about the need for "new symbols," if symbol and symbolism are the objects of study and curiosity in circles which otherwise have nothing in common, it is because the basic experience behind all this is that of a complete disruption and breakdown in "communication," of the tragic lack of a "unitive principle" which would have the power to bring together and to hold together again the broken and atomized facets of human existence and knowledge. And it is this unitive principle, whose absence is felt so strongly and the search for which dominates modern thought, that is given the name *symbol.* Its connotations are both cognitive and participatory, for its function is to reunify knowledge as well as existence by reuniting them one with another. One does not know *what* this symbol is, but that which one *hopes for* from it is indeed much closer to the patristic idea and experience of symbol than those of the post-patristic age, and this is why we call it a bridge.[17]

9

The Christian, however, by definition ought to *know.* Does he not confess Christ to be both the *light* and the *life* of the world, the fulfillment of all knowledge and the redeemer

[17]See for further observations such books as: R. C. Zachner, *Matter and Spirit* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963); M. Eliade, *Mephistopheles and the Androgyne: Studies in Religious Myth and Symbol* (New York, Sheed and Ward, 1965); T. J. J. Altizer, *Mircea Eliade and the Dialectic of the Sacred* (Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1963); K. Jaspers, *Truth and Symbol* (New York, Twayne Publ., 1959).

of all existence? In terms just described and which are the very terms of the world's search for "symbol"—is He not indeed the Symbol of all symbols? Was it not said by Christ Himself that the one who sees Him sees the Father, the one who is in Him has the communion of the Holy Spirit, the one who believes in Him has already—here and now—eternal life? But why then does not the Christian faith seem to be either seen or accepted by the world as the fulfillment of its search for the symbol, and seems so "irrelevant" to it? It is at this point, in this agonizing "focus" of the actual Christian situation, that the preceding analysis acquires, we hope, its true significance. For it shows that if Christianity fails to fulfill its symbolic function—to be that "unitive principle"—it is because "symbol" was broken, at first, by Christians themselves. As a result of this breakdown Christianity has come to look today, in the eyes of the world at least, like, on the one hand, a mere intellectual doctrine which moreover "cracks" under the pressure of an entirely different intellectual context, or, on the other hand, a mere religious institution which also "cracks" under the pressure of its own institutionalism. And it is certainly not the adjective "holy" apposed to that doctrine and to that institution that will by itself overcome the "credibility gap" and make Christianity the symbol it ceased to be. For the whole point is that *holy* is not and can never be a mere adjective, a definition sufficient to quarantee the divine authority and origin of anything. If it defines anything it is from inside, not outside. It reveals and manifests, *vide* Rudolf Otto, the "mysterium tremendum," i.e., an inherent power which in a doctrine transcends its intellectualism and in an institution its institutionalism. It is this "holy"—the power of an epiphany—that is hopelessly missing today in both doctrine and institution, and this, not because of human sins and limitations, but precisely because of a deliberate choice: the rejection and the dissolution of *symbol* as the fundamental structure of Christian "doctrine" and Christian "institution."

The situation is not relieved in the least by the many "modern" Christians, even theologians, who join the others

in crying for "new symbols" and who think that Christianity will recover its "relevance" for the world if only Christ could be shown to be the "symbol" of this or of that, the "illustration" of an ideology, the "image" and the "personification" of an attitude. They hopelessly remain prisoners of that same—extrinsic and illustrative—notion of the symbol which their predecessors invented and which serves today as a *postfactum* justification for their surrender to ideologies and attitudes whose connection to Christ is, to say the least, debatable. They hopelessly do not understand that for Christ to be "symbol" of anything in the world, the world itself must, in the first place, be known, viewed and experienced as the "symbol" of God, as the epiphany of His holiness, power and glory—that, in other terms, it is not "Christ" or "God" that have to be explained in terms of this world and of its passing needs so as to become their "symbols" but, on the contrary, it is God and God alone that has made this world His symbol, has then fulfilled this symbol in Christ and will consummate it in His eternal Kingdom. When deprived of this symbol the world becomes chaos and destruction, idol and error, and it is condemned to disappear, for the very nature of its "schema" (image, fashion) is to "pass away" (I Cor. 7:31). To make Christ the symbol of this passing world is the ultimate in foolishness and blindness, for He came to perform exactly the opposite—to save the world by restoring it as the "symbol" of God, as thirst and hunger for fulfillment in God, as "signum" of and passage into His Kingdom. And He saved it by destroying its self-sufficiency and opaqueness, by revealing in "this world" the Church—the symbol of the "new creation" and the sacrament of the "world to come."

And if Christians want, as they claim and as indeed they must, to serve the world, to supply it again with the "symbol" which it so desperately seeks, they can achieve it only if they themselves rediscover that symbol and rediscover it there where it has always been—by divine will and institution—in the Church. The Fathers or tradition can help them in this rediscovery, can purify their vision, "explain" in a way how it is to be made; they cannot be that

rediscovery itself. And thus the last question remains: where and how can it be achieved?

10

The answer of Orthodox theology once it recovers from its "Western captivity" ought to be: in the unbroken liturgical life of the Church, in that sacramental tradition which in the East, at least, has not been significantly altered by the wanderings of an alienated theology. We have pointed out already that the fatal error of post-patristic rationalism was the isolation of the sacrament from the liturgy as total expression of the Church's life and faith. It meant, in fact, the isolation of the sacrament from the symbol, i.e., from that connection and communication with the whole of reality which are fulfilled in the sacrament. By becoming a closed and self-contained "means of grace," a drop of reality in a sea of symbols, the sacrament deprived the liturgy of its proper function—to connect the sacrament with the Church, the world, and the Kingdom, or, in other terms, with its ecclesiological, cosmical and eschatological content and dimension. The liturgy was left to "piety" which adorned it with thousands of explanations and interpretations, "symbolical" this time in the new "illustrative" and nominal meaning of that word. Whether viewed "archeologically"—as a collection of "ancient and colorful" rites, or "pictorially"—as a kind of audio-visual support for prayer, it indeed became *irrelevant*—to theology, to mission, and, in brief, to the total life of the Church. It keeps and probably will always keep its faithful—the "liturgically minded" Christians. But to the Church at large, to the "activists" as well as "gnostics," it seems to offer nothing.

To rediscover the initial and organic unity between the liturgy and the sacrament, the liturgy through the sacrament and the sacrament through the liturgy, as one dynamic reality in which *symbol*—the liturgy—is always fulfilled in the *sacrament*—such then is the condition for the recovery of that perspective which alone can lead us beyond the dead-

ends of our present situation. And it is indeed the liturgical nature of the sacrament as well as the sacramental nature of liturgy and, through it, of the Church herself that are the living sources of that dynamic synthesis of which the Fathers remain the eternal witness. But that synthesis is not only in the past and in the books. It is with us—here and now—if we have eyes to see and ears to hear, if putting aside the wrong problems accumulated throughout centuries we can reach the reality of the Church and understand again the "lex orandi" as the source of her "lex credendi."

It is at this point that the real task, implied in the theme of this article, ought to begin. For it consists in *showing,* on the basis of a detailed study of the "leitourgia," the liturgical tradition and experience of the Church, the true content of that *Symbol* which the Church is and which she fulfills in the *Sacrament,* thus fulfilling herself. To show and to prove this is obviously impossible within the scope of this essay which remains therefore a very general introduction, a preliminary indication of a possible perspective. In concluding, we can only say that if such a task were undertaken, it would show that the proper function of the "leitourgia" has always been to *bring together,* within one symbol, the three levels of the Christian faith and life: the Church, the world, and the Kingdom; that the Church herself is thus the sacrament in which the broken, yet still "symbolical," life of "this world" is brought, in Christ and by Christ, into the dimension of the Kingdom of God, becoming itself the sacrament of the "world to come," or that which God has from all eternity prepared for those who love Him, and where all that which is human can be transfigured by grace so that all things may be consummated in God; that finally it is here and only here—in the "mysterion" of God's presence and action—that the Church always becomes that which she is: the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the unique *Symbol* "bringing together"—by bringing to God the world for the life of which He gave His Son.