

The Eucharist

Sacrament of the Kingdom

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translated from the Russian by
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Foreword

THE LITERARY HISTORY OF A POSTHUMOUS WORK INEVITABLY IS complex. This is certainly true of the present book. Before his death on December 13, 1983, Fr Schmemmann had completed its Russian version, since published by YMCA Press under the title *Evkharistiia* (Paris, 1984). He was also able to supervise the translation into English of the first two chapters. Beyond this, he himself had already prepared a few sections in English. Unfortunately he was not able to write the projected excursi to chapters 5 and 9 or to complete the footnotes or to devote his customary attention to polishing the entire text. The translator and editors of the present edition felt that major additions or modifications would not substantially improve the work but might rather distort its intended sense. For this reason, only a few notes have been supplied. In this, we have been aided by the excellent French translation prepared by Prof. Constantine Andronikof and published by O.E.I.L./YMCA Press under the title *L'Eucharistie: Sacrement du Royaume* (Paris, 1985). While the present text may lack Fr Alexander's remarkable sense of style, we hope that it does faithfully convey his thoughts on a subject perhaps closer to his heart than any other, the eucharist.

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Preface

THIS BOOK IS NEITHER A MANUAL OF LITURGICS NOR A SCHOLARLY investigation. I wrote it during rare moments of leisure, in the midst of many interruptions. Now, putting together these chapters into one book, I do not pretend that they provide a complete or systematic study of the divine liturgy. Rather, this book represents a series of reflections on the eucharist. These reflections, however, do not come from scientific analysis but from my own experience, limited though it may be.

For more than thirty years I have served the Church as a priest and a theologian, as a pastor and a teacher. Never in those thirty years have I ceased to feel called to think about the eucharist and its place in the life of the Church. Thoughts and questions on this subject, which go back to early adolescence, have filled my whole life with joy—but, alas, not only with joy. For the more real became my experience of the eucharistic liturgy, the sacrament of Christ's victory and of his glory, the stronger became my feeling that there is a eucharistic crisis in the Church. In the tradition of the Church, nothing has changed. What has changed is the perception of the eucharist, the perception of its very essence. Essentially, this crisis consists in a lack of connection and cohesion between what is accomplished in the eucharist and how it is perceived, understood and lived. To a certain degree this crisis has always existed in the Church. The life of the Church, or rather of the people in the Church, has never been perfect, ideal. With time, however, this crisis has become chronic. That schizophrenia that poisons the life of the Church and undermines its very foundations has come to be seen as a normal state.

Meanwhile, it can be said without exaggeration that we live in a frightening and spiritually dangerous age. It is frightening not just because of its hatred, division and bloodshed. It is fright-

ening above all because it is characterized by a mounting rebellion against God and his kingdom. Not God, but man has become the measure of all things. Not faith, but ideology and utopian escapism are determining the spiritual state of the world. At a certain point, western Christianity accepted this point of view: almost at once one or another "theology of liberation" was born. Issues relating to economics, politics and psychology have replaced a Christian vision of the world at the service of God. Theologians, clergy and other professional "religious" run busily around the world defending—from God?—this or that "right," however perverse, and all this in the name of peace, unity and brotherhood. Yet in fact, the peace, unity and brotherhood that they invoke are not the peace, unity and brotherhood that has been brought to us by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Perhaps many people will be astonished that, in response to this crisis, I propose that we turn our attention not to its various aspects but rather to the sacrament of the eucharist and to the Church, whose very life flows from that sacrament. Yes, I *do* believe that precisely here, in this holy of holies of the Church, in this ascent to the table of the Lord in his kingdom, is the source of that renewal for which we hope. And I do believe, as the Church has always believed, that this upward journey begins with the "laying aside of all earthly cares," with leaving this adulterous and sinful world. No ideological fuss and bother, but a gift from heaven—such is the vocation of the Church in the world, the source of her service.

I also believe that, by God's mercy, Orthodoxy throughout all ages has kept and guarded this vision, this consciousness of the Church, this knowledge that "where the Church is, there is the Holy Spirit and the fulness of grace" (Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies* 3:24:1). But precisely because this is so, we the Orthodox faithful must find the inner strength to plunge into this eucharistic renewal of the Church. It is not reform, adjustments and modernization that are needed so much as a return to that vision and experience that from the beginning constituted the very life of the Church. To remind us of this is the goal of this book.

PROTOPRESBYTER ALEXANDER SCHMEMANN
November 1983

CHAPTER ONE

The Sacrament of the Assembly

"When you assemble as a church..."

I CORINTHIANS 11:18

I

“WHEN YOU ASSEMBLE AS A CHURCH...” WRITES THE apostle Paul to the Corinthians. For him, as for all of early Christianity, these words refer not to a temple but to the nature and purpose of the gathering. As is well known, the very word “church”—ἐκκλησία—means “a gathering” or “an assembly,” and to “assemble as a church” meant, in the minds of the early Christians, to constitute a gathering whose purpose is to reveal, to realize, the Church.¹

This gathering is eucharistic—its end and fulfilment lies in its being the setting wherein the “Lord’s supper” is accomplished, wherein the eucharistic “breaking of bread” takes place. In the same epistle St Paul reproaches the Corinthians for partaking of a meal other than the Lord’s supper in their gathering, or assembling for a purpose other than the eucharistic breaking of bread (11:20-22ff). Thus, from the very beginning we can see an obvious, undoubted triunity of the *assembly*, the *eucharist* and the *Church*, to which the whole early tradition of the Church, following St Paul, unanimously testifies. The fundamental task of litur-

¹Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1945); H. Chirat, *L’assemblée chrétienne à l’âge apostolique* (Paris, 1949).

gical theology consists therefore in uncovering the meaning and essence of this unity.

This task is all the more urgent in that, while this triunity was self-evident to the early Church, it has ceased to be self-evident to the consciousness of contemporary Christianity. What we customarily call "school" theology—which arose after the break with patristic tradition, and chiefly from a western understanding of both the method and the very nature of theology—generally ignores the bond between the assembly, the eucharist and the Church. The eucharist is regarded and defined as one of the sacraments, but not as the "sacrament of the assembly"—as it was defined by the fifth-century author of the *Areopagitica*.² It would be no exaggeration to say that this "scholastic" dogmatics is simply unaware of the ecclesiological meaning of the eucharist, and at the same time it has forgotten the eucharistic dimension of ecclesiology, i.e., the doctrine of the Church.

We shall speak in greater detail of this divorce between theology and the eucharist and its tragic consequences for church consciousness. For now, we should note that the idea of the eucharist as the "sacrament of the assembly" gradually disappeared from *piety* as well. The liturgics textbooks do categorize the eucharist under "public worship" and state that the liturgy is normally served in the presence of a "congregation of worshipers." But this "congregation of worshipers"—i.e., the assembly—has ceased to be apprehended as the primary *form* of the eucharist, and liturgics has ceased to look to the eucharist to both see and feel the primary form of the Church. Liturgical piety has become thoroughly individualistic, and the most eloquent testimony to this is the contemporary practice of receiving communion, which is completely subordinated to the "spiritual needs" of the individual believer. No one—neither among the clergy nor the laity—apprehends it in the spirit of the eucharistic prayer itself: "And unite all of us to one another who become partakers of the one Bread and Cup in the communion of the Holy Spirit."

Thus, we have witnessed in both piety and "churchliness" (*tserkovnost'*) a gradual and distinct "reduction" of the eucharist, a narrowing of its primary and original meaning and place in the

²Ecclesiastical Hierarchy 3. ← get it

life of the Church. Consequently, any explanation of the eucharist in liturgical theology must begin by surmounting this reduction, by returning to the original understanding of the eucharist as the "sacrament of the assembly" and, hence, the "sacrament of the Church."

At this point we need to indicate that both reductions of the eucharist—in piety and in theology—openly contradict the very *ordo* of the eucharist, as it was preserved by the Church from the very beginning. By "*ordo*" we mean here not the various details of the rites and sacraments, which obviously underwent development and change and grew in complexity, but rather the fundamental structure of the eucharist, its *shape*, to use the expression of Dom Gregory Dix, which can be traced back to the fundamental, apostolic principle of Christian worship.

As I have already pointed out elsewhere,³ the basic defect of school theology consists in that, in its treatment of the sacraments, it proceeds not from the living experience of the Church, not from the concrete liturgical tradition that has been preserved by the Church, but from its own a priori and abstract categories and definitions, which hardly conform to the reality of church life. In early times the Church knew full well that the *lex credendi* (rule of faith) and the *lex orandi* (rule of prayer) were inseparable and that they mutually substantiated each other—that, in the words of St Irenaeus, "our teaching is in harmony with the eucharist, and the eucharist confirms our teaching."⁴ But theology constructed on western scholastic models is completely uninterested in worship as it is performed by the Church and in the logic and "order" proper to it. Proceeding from its own abstract presuppositions, this theology decides a priori what is "important" and what is "secondary." And it turns out, in the final analysis, that what is deemed "secondary," as having no theological interest, is precisely worship itself, the very activity by which the Church actually lives, in all its complexity and diversity. The theologian directs his entire attention to the important "moments" that he artificially singles out: in the eucharist, the "moment" of the

³Introduction to *Liturgical Theology*, 3d ed. (Crestwood, N.Y.: SVS Press, 1986) 16-32, and the chapter on "Theology and Liturgy" in *Church, World, Mission* (Crestwood, N.Y.: SVS Press, 1979) 129-46.

⁴Against Heresies 4:18:5.

change of the holy gifts and then the partaking of communion; in baptism, the "triple immersion"; in marriage, the "consecratory formula"—"crown them with glory and honor..." etc. It has never occurred to the theologian who thinks in these categories that the "importance" of these moments cannot be isolated from their liturgical context.

This is the root of the striking poverty and onesidedness of the explanations of and the very approach to the sacraments that we find in our school dogmatics. It is also the root of the narrowness and onesidedness in our liturgical piety. For, not being nourished and directed, as in the time of the fathers, by a "liturgical catechesis"—a genuine theological explanation—it falls prey to all manner of symbolic and allegorical interpretations of the services, a peculiar liturgical "folklore."

And therefore, as we have already stated, the first principle of liturgical theology is that, in explaining the liturgical tradition of the Church, one must proceed not from abstract, purely intellectual schemata cast randomly over the services, but from the services themselves—and this means, first of all, from their *ordo*.

2

ANY SERIOUS STUDY OF THE EUCHARISTIC ORDO CANNOT BUT convince us that this ordo is entirely, from beginning to end, constructed on the principle of correlation—the mutual dependence of the celebrant of the service and the people. One may even more precisely define this bond as a *co-serving* or *concelebration*, as it was articulated by the late Professor Nicholas Afanasiev in his splendid though not yet fully appreciated work *The Lord's Supper*.⁵

This idea, however, plays no role whatsoever in school theology and the liturgical piety engendered by it, and is for all practical purposes denied. The word "concelebration" is applied only to the clergy taking part in the service, while the participation of the laity is conceived of as entirely passive. For a good example of this we need only consider the "prayers during the Divine Liturgy," which are included in several prayerbooks intended expressly for

⁵*Trapeza Gospodnia* (Paris, 1952).

the laity. Their compilers apparently considered it self-evident that the eucharistic prayers themselves exist solely for the benefit of the clergy. What is even sadder, the ecclesiastical censors who for decades approved these special prayers obviously held the same opinion. When enumerating the necessary conditions for celebrating the liturgy, even the most literate and trustworthy liturgics textbooks (such as Archimandrite Kiprian Kern's *The Eucharist*⁶) usually mention everything—from a canonically ordained priest right down to the quality of the wine—except the “assembly as the Church,” which is evidently not considered a “condition” of the liturgy.

Meanwhile, all early evidence we possess points to the fact that the *gathering* or *assembly* (σύναξις) was always considered the first and basic act of the eucharist. This is also attested to by the ancient liturgical designation of the person who performs the eucharist: the “presider” (προϊστάμενος), whose primary function was to stand at the head of the assembly as the “president of the brethren.” Thus, the assembly is the first liturgical act of the eucharist, its foundation and beginning.

In the early Christian period, in contrast to the current practice, the gathering of the people *preceded* the entrance of the celebrant. “The church,” writes St John Chrysostom, “is a house common to us all, and you are awaiting us when we enter . . . That is why immediately afterward we greet you by giving the peace.”⁷ Further on, when we discuss the so-called “Little Entrance,” we shall speak in greater detail about the place and meaning of the *entrance* in the eucharistic ordo. A few words, however, are in order here about our present practice, in which the entire beginning of the liturgy—the entrance of the celebrants, the vesting, the washing of hands and, finally, the preparation of the gifts—not only has become “private,” concerning only the clergy, but also isolated, transferred into a special “office” of the liturgy, with its own dismissal.

Although this practice has been formally legitimized in our service books, it should be examined in the light of another practice, which is more ancient, though still preserved to this day.

⁶*Evkharistia* (Paris, 1947).

⁷*Homily on Matthew* 32 (33), 6, PG 57:384. Cf J. Mateos, “Évolution historique de la Liturgie de S. Jean Chrysostome,” part 1, *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 15 (1965) 333-51.

This is the pontifical celebration of the eucharist. When the liturgy is performed by a bishop, the people gather in the church first and are already there to greet him when he enters, the vesting takes place amidst the congregation, the bishop does not proceed to the altar until the Little Entrance and, finally, the prothesis is, as it were, repeated just before the offertory—i.e., what we now term the “Great Entrance.”

It would be wrong to suppose that all this arose as the result of a special “solemnity” being attached to the pontifical service, which we sometimes hear in the protests of proponents of a “primitive Christian simplicity.” On the contrary, not in all details of course, but on the whole, the pontifical service goes much further in preserving the form and spirit of the early eucharistic practice, because in the early Church it was precisely the bishop who customarily presided over the eucharistic assembly.⁸ Only much later, with the gradual transformation of the local church community into an administrative district (“diocese”) broken up into a multitude of “parishes,” was the position of the priest converted from that of an extraordinary celebrant of the eucharist, as the deputy of the bishop, into that of the “ordinary” celebrant. From the point of view of liturgical theology, it is precisely the pontifical order of the entrance into the assembly that must be considered “normative.” The “priestly” order, which arose “out of expediency,” was perhaps practical and inevitable, but to no extent does it do away with the significance of the *assembly as the Church* as, in actuality, the principle, the first and basic act of the eucharist.

3

THE CORRELATION BETWEEN THE CELEBRANT AND THE PEOPLE—their concelebration—finds further expression in the eucharistic prayers, which are all, without exception, structured as dialogues. Every prayer is “sealed” by the gathering with one of the key words of Christian worship, “amen,” thus binding the cele-

⁸Mateos, “Evolution historique,” 333.

⁹Dix, *op. cit.*; H. Schlier, “Amen,” in Kittel, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* 1:341; A. Baumstark, *Liturgie comparée*, 3d ed. (Chevetogne, 1953) 52, 85.

brant and the people of God at whose head he stands into one organic whole. Every prayer (with the exception of the "prayer of the priest for himself," read during the Cherubic Hymn, which we shall discuss in due time) is spoken on behalf of *us*. All of the constituent parts of the solemn eucharistic ceremony—the reading of the word of God, the anaphora, the partaking of communion—begin with the exchange of *peace*: "Peace be to all . . . And to your spirit." Finally, all of these prayers have as their content *our* praise, *our* repentance, *our* thanksgiving, *our* communion—"unite all of us to one another who become partakers . . . in the communion of the Holy Spirit."

The same may be said of the individual rites of the eucharist: all express to some degree not only the unity of the celebrant and the people but also their "synergy"—collaboration, concelebration in the literal sense of these terms. Thus, the reading of the word of God and its elaboration in the sermon—which according to the unanimous testimony of all early evidence comprises the first part of the eucharistic celebration—self-evidently presupposes listeners, people who receive the preaching. The transferral of the proskomidē to the sanctuary and the appearance of a special "table of oblation" for it did not erase the original practice of offering the gifts in the assembly, from the people—which is accomplished nowadays in the "Great Entrance." Finally, the "kiss of peace," though now performed only among the clergy, is accompanied by the exclamation "Let us love one another," and thus relates to the entire gathering—as does the concluding exclamation, "Let us depart in peace."

What has been said thus far merits attention all the more in that the Byzantine rite of the liturgy gradually and systematically developed in the direction of an ever greater separation of the "laity" from the "clergy," those who "pray" from those who "serve." As we endeavored to show elsewhere, and as was brilliantly elaborated by Professor Afanasiev,¹⁰ Byzantine liturgical piety gradually fell under the grip of a *mysteriological* perception of worship, which was constructed on the contraposition of the "initiated" and the "uninitiated." But this influence proved to be too

¹⁰*Trapeza Gospodnia*. Cf Schmemann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, 103-13, and also the essay on "Sacrament and Symbol," in *For the Life of the World*, rev. ed. (Crestwood, N.Y.: SVS Press, 1973) 135-51.

feeble at its very root to alter the original *order* of the eucharist, for each word and each act continues to express the concelebration of all with each other, with everyone in his proper place and proper ministry in the single *leitourgia* of the Church.

It is quite another matter that the primary, direct and immediate meaning of these words and acts ceased to penetrate the consciousness of both clergy and laity and that in their minds there arose instead a peculiar dichotomy between the “data” of theology and its interpretation. As a result of this dichotomy, all manner of “symbolic” explanations for the most simple words and acts appeared and spread like weeds, while their direct, literal meaning was often hardly considered. We have already spoken and will speak again about the causes and consequences of this new “nominalistic” liturgical piety, which, unfortunately, reigns almost unchallenged in the Church. For now, it is important only to emphasize that this new piety succeeded neither in eclipsing nor distorting beyond recognition the actual *communal* character of the eucharist, which could never be torn away from the Church and, consequently, from the *assembly*.¹¹

Even the most obvious and in all likelihood the saddest result of this new “piety”—the excommunication, for all practical purposes, of the laity, for whom the partaking of communion, having ceased to have its source in their participation in the liturgy, became something exceptional—amounts to nothing before the direct testimony of the eucharistic *ordo* itself: “all of us . . . who become partakers of the one bread and cup”; “In the fear of God and with faith draw near,” etc. All these texts, appeals and words undoubtedly concern the entire assembly and not certain separate or isolated participants in it.

As Professor Afanasiev so aptly put it: “If we discarded everything that was brought into our liturgical life, especially in the last few centuries, we would find no particularly significant divergence between what would be left and the early practice of the Church. The basic defect of our liturgical life consists in that we impart greater significance to the particularities, fortuitous or

¹¹“Now when thou teachest, command and warn the people to be constant in assembling in the Church, and not withdraw themselves, but always to assemble, lest any man diminish the Church by not assembling.” Quoted in *Antenicine Christian Liturgy*, Antenicine Christian Library, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, II:59, p. 124.

not, of our liturgical offices than to their essence. The fundamental principles of doctrine concerning the eucharist are perfectly clear in the services. In them the nature of the eucharist is preserved unsullied. . . . Our task, therefore, consists not so much in making various changes in our liturgical life, but rather in coming to realize the genuine nature of the eucharist."¹²

4

FINALLY, THIS SAME IDEA OF ASSEMBLY AND CONCELEBRATION is expressed and embodied in the very physical setting in which the eucharist is accomplished: the temple. The liturgics textbooks deal at great length with the church building, its layout or plan and the "symbolic" meaning of its various details. Their definitions and descriptions, however, contain virtually no mention of the self-evident link between the Christian temple and the assembly, the conciliar or *sobornal* character of the eucharist.

There is no need to repeat here what we have already said elsewhere about the complex development of the church building and "temple piety" in the Orthodox East. It is enough to recall that the original Christian temple was above all the *domus ecclesiae*, the site of the gathering of the Church together and the eucharistic breaking of bread. And in this subordination to the idea of the assembly lies both the newness of the Christian temple and the principle of its development. Whatever were the complexities of this development, whatever was the impact of what we have earlier termed "mysteriological" piety, it is precisely the idea of the eucharistic assembly that proved to be its unifying and guiding factor. Just as in the earliest Christian era, so also today, in its best Byzantine or Russian incarnation, the temple is experienced and perceived as *sobor*,¹³ as the gathering together of heaven and earth and all creation in Christ—which constitutes the essence and purpose of the Church.

¹²*Trapeza Gospodnia*, 90.

¹³See Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, 105ff. See also *Martyrium*, *Recherches sur le culte des reliques et l'art chrétien antique*, I: Architecture, and II: Iconographie (Paris: Collège de France, 1946); L. Ouspensky, *The Theology of the Icon in the Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: SVS Press, 1978); Y. Congar, *Le mystère du temple* (Paris, 1958). The Russian word *sobor* means both "assembly," or "council," and "cathedral."

The *form* of the church building and its iconography also attest to this. The form—the temple as “organization of space”—essentially expresses that same correlation, that same “dialogic structure” that, as we have seen, is the determining factor in the order of the eucharistic assembly. Here it is a correlation between the altar and the sanctuary, on the one hand, and the “ark” or nave—the place of the assembly—on the other. The nave is directed toward the altar, in which we find its end and purpose; but the “altar” necessarily entails the nave and exists only in relation to it.

While it is true that contemporary liturgical piety perceives the sanctuary as something self-contained, accessible only to the “initiated”—a particularly “holy” place with its own brand of “sanctity,” as if to emphasize the “profane” category to which the laity standing outside it belong—it is also not difficult to show that this perception is relatively recent, false and, most importantly, profoundly harmful for the Church. It serves only to continually nourish that “clericalism”—so utterly alien to Orthodoxy—that reduces the laity to the status of second-class citizens, defined primarily in negative terms as those who “do not have the right” to enter certain places, to touch certain things or to take part in certain activities. And because of this there has, alas, arisen among us the type of priest who sees virtually the essence of his priesthood in the unyielding “defense” of the holy things from contact with the laity, and who finds a peculiar, almost voluptuous gratification in this “defense.”

But let us repeat once more: such a perception of the altar is not the original one and is false. It owes much, of course, to the corresponding understanding of the iconostasis as primarily a *wall* that separates the altar from the laity and places an impassable barrier between them. Yet, as strange as it may seem to the majority of Orthodox today, the iconostasis originated from a completely opposite purpose: not to separate but to unite. The icon is a witness, or, better still, a consequence of the unification of the divine and the human, of heaven and earth, that has been accomplished in Jesus Christ. All icons are in essence icons of the incarnation. Thus, the iconostasis originated from the experience of the temple as “heaven on earth,” as testimony to the fact that “the kingdom of heaven has drawn near.” Like all the rest of the iconography in the church building, it is an incarnation of the vision

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Transfiguration = manifestation of the new creation
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of the Church as *sobor*, as the union of the visible and invisible worlds, as the manifestation and presence of the new and transfigured creation.

What is tragic is that the authentic tradition of Orthodox iconography experienced a prolonged process of alienation, in which the perception of the correlation between the icons and the temple disappeared almost entirely from church consciousness. Our churches today are no longer painted over with icons: either we hang a large number of icons that often have no relation whatsoever to the temple as a whole, or we "decorate" the church with all-sorts of "ornaments," and not only do the details invariably predominate over the whole, but the icon itself becomes a "detail" in some decorative ensemble. Another aspect of this same tragedy is the gradual degeneration first of the form and then of the meaning of the iconostasis. From an *ordo*, a "framework" or harmonic system of icons, which naturally required a standing support (στάσις), it was transformed into a wall adorned with icons—in other words, the opposite of its original function. At first the icons demanded a wall form, but now the wall demands the icons, and in this manner inherently subordinates them to itself.

One can only hope that the interest that is awakening everywhere in iconography—which embraces both the understanding of icons and the iconographic art itself—will bring about a rebirth of the genuine significance of the iconostasis to the church building, as well as a return to the experience that we sense in a number of ancient churches: the icons seem to take part in the assembly of the Church, they express its meaning, they provide its eternal movement and rhythm. The entire Church, the entire assembly, with all the "ranks"—prophets, apostles, martyrs and saints—seems to ascend to heaven, elevated and lifted up by Christ to his table in his kingdom.

We must point out here that this new attitude toward the sanctuary and toward the iconostasis as entailing a division is also false in that it obviously contradicts the Church's liturgical tradition itself. This tradition knows only the consecration of a temple and an altar table, and does not know any consecration of a sanctuary separate from the nave. Like the altar table, the entire temple is anointed with the holy chrism; the *whole* church is thus

"sealed" as a sanctuary, a holy place. We see this clearly in the complex, truly "Byzantine" office of the consecration of a temple, when the relics are about to be brought in and placed inside the altar table. It is not at the royal doors of the sanctuary but at the outside doors of the church that the celebrant exclaims: "Receive your princes, O ye gates... Who is this king of glory?... The Lord of Hosts, he is the King of Glory!" In expounding on this rite, Symeon of Thessalonica—himself one of the most eminent representatives of the "symbolical" and "mysteriological" interpretation of the services—writes: "The martyrs, in the form of the holy relics, and the hierarch himself represent Christ, and the church represents heaven.... The bishop reads the *prayer of the entrance*, summoning the concelebrants and the accompanying angels. Then, pointing to the doors of the temple and opening them, the celebrants enter the temple as in heaven, the witnesses of Jesus Christ through the majestic Father, at the time of the opening for us of the heavenly abode."¹⁴

It is quite clear, as a great number of other documents confirm, that this rite developed in a period when the "royal doors" referred not to the doors of the sanctuary but to the doors of the church itself, when the temple itself was experienced and perceived as heaven on earth, as the place in which, through the eucharistic assembly of the Church, the Lord enters "the doors being shut," and with him and in him enters his kingdom.

We shall speak more fully about the meaning of the altar in the eucharist in connection with the so-called "Little Entrance." For now, it is sufficient to stress not only the fundamental connection between the temple and the assembly, but also the meaning of the temple itself as precisely *sobor*, as the "assembly as the Church," incarnate in architectural forms, colors and images.

5

THE LITURGY IS THE "SACRAMENT OF THE ASSEMBLY." CHRIST came to "gather into one the children of God who were scattered abroad" (Jn 11:52), and from the very beginning the eucharist

¹⁴On the Holy Temple, PG 155:321D.

was a manifestation and realization of the unity of the new people of God, gathered by Christ and in Christ. We need to be thoroughly aware that we come to the temple not for individual prayer but to *assemble together as the Church*, and the visible temple itself signifies and is but an image of the temple not made by hands. Therefore, the "assembly as the Church" is in reality the first liturgical act, the foundation of the entire liturgy; and unless one understands this, one cannot understand the rest of the celebration. When I say that I am going to church, it means I am going into the assembly of the faithful in order, together with them, to *constitute the Church*, in order to be what I became on the day of my baptism—a *member*, in the fullest, absolute meaning of the term, of the body of Christ. "You are the body of Christ and individually members of it," says the apostle (1 Co 12:27). I go to manifest and realize my membership, to manifest and witness before God and the world the mystery of the kingdom of God, which already "has come in power."

It has come and is coming in power—in the Church. This is the mystery of the Church, the mystery of the body of Christ: "where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20). The miracle of the church assembly lies in that it is not the "sum" of the sinful and unworthy people who comprise it, but the body of Christ. How often do we say we are going to church to obtain help, strength or consolation? We forget, meanwhile, that we are the Church, we make it up, that Christ abides in his members and that the Church does not exist outside us or above us, but *we are in Christ and Christ is in us*. Christianity consists not in bestowing on each the possibility of "personal perfection" but first of all in calling and commanding Christians to be the Church—"a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a chosen race" (1 Pt 2:9)—to manifest and confess the presence of Christ and his kingdom in the world.

And the holiness of the Church is not our holiness, but Christ's, who loved the Church and gave himself for her "that he might sanctify her... that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:25-27). Likewise, the holiness of the saints as well is but the revelation and realization of that sanctification, that holiness that each of us received on the day of baptism and in which we are all called to increase. But we could not grow in it if we did

not already possess it as a gift of God, as his presence in us through the Holy Spirit. This is why in early times all Christians were called *saints*; this is why "assembling as the Church" is our task, our chief trust and duty. We have been consecrated to this task, and it will remain with us until such time as we cut ourselves off from it.

In antiquity, those who did not take part in the eucharistic assembly without due cause excommunicated themselves from the Church, since they had severed themselves from the organic unity of the body of Christ, which is manifested in the liturgy. ✓ The eucharist, we repeat, is not "one of the sacraments" or one of the services, but the very manifestation and *fulfilment* of the Church in all her power, sanctity and fulness. Only by taking part in it can we increase in holiness and fulfil all that we have been commanded to be and do. The Church, gathered in the eucharist, even when limited to "two or three," is the image and realization of the body of Christ, and only those who are gathered will be able to *partake*, i.e., be communicants of the body and blood of Christ, because they manifest him by their very assembly. No one could ever partake, no one could ever be of proper and "sufficient" holiness for this, unless it were given and commanded in the Church, in the assembly, in that mystical unity in which we, who constitute the body of Christ, are able to blamelessly call God Father and be partakers and communicants of the divine life.

It should now be obvious to what degree our contemporary "individual" entries into the temple, at any moment during the service, violate the essence of the eucharist. One who maintains his "individuality" and "freedom" in such manner does not know, has not discovered the mystery of the Church; he does not take part in the sacrament of the assembly, in this miracle of the reunification of the splintered and sinful human nature in the divine-human unity of Jesus Christ.

6

FINALLY, IF THE "ASSEMBLY AS THE CHURCH" IS THE IMAGE of the body of Christ, then the image of the head of the body is the *priest*. He presides over, he heads the gathering, and his standing

at their head is precisely what makes a group of Christians the gathering of the Church in the fulness of her gifts. If according to his humanity the priest is only one—and perhaps the most sinful and unworthy—of those assembled, then by the gift of the Holy Spirit, which has been preserved by the Church since Pentecost and handed down without interruption through the laying on of hands of the bishop, he manifests the power of the priesthood of Christ, who consecrated himself for us and who is the one priest of the New Testament: “and he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues for ever” (Heb 7:24). Just as the holiness of the assembly is not that of the people who constitute it but Christ’s, so the priesthood of the priest is not his but Christ’s, bestowed on the Church because she is his body. Christ is not *outside* the Church, and neither his power nor his authority is delegated to anyone. He himself abides in the Church and, through the Holy Spirit, he fulfils her entire life. The priest is neither a “representative” nor a “deputy” of Christ: in the sacrament he is Christ himself, just as the assembly is his body. Standing at the head of the body, he manifests in himself the unity of the Church, the oneness of the unity of all her members with himself. Thus, in this unity of the celebrant and the assembled is manifested the divine-human unity of the Church—in Christ and with Christ.

The vesting of the priest, even if it is done today before the liturgy, likewise is linked with the assembly, for it is an image, an *icon*, of the unity of Christ and the Church, of the indissoluble union of the many who constitute the one. The white garment—the *podriznik* or *stikharion* (alb)—is first of all the same white baptismal robe that each of us received at baptism. It is the garment of all the baptized, the garment of the Church herself, and in putting it on the priest manifests the oneness of the assembly, uniting all of us with himself. The *epitrakhilion* (stole) is the image of the Savior’s taking on of our nature for its salvation and theosis, a sign of the priesthood of Christ himself. Such is also the case with the *epimanikia* (cuffs): the priest’s hands, with which he blesses and performs the service, are no longer his own but the hands of Christ. The belt or girdle has always been a sign of obedience, preparedness, brotherhood and service. The priest does not take himself to the “high places” on his own authority; he “is not

greater than his master.” Rather, he is sent to this ministry by his master, whom he follows and by whose grace he serves. Finally, the *phelonion* or *riza* (chasuble) represents the glory of the Church as the new creation, the joy, truth and beauty of the new life, the prefiguration of the kingdom of God and the King who forever “reigns; he is robed in majesty” (Ps 93:1).

The vesting concludes with the washing of the celebrant’s hands. The eucharist is for those whose sins have been forgiven, who have abandoned lawlessness, who have been reconciled with God. It is the service of the new humanity, “who once had not received mercy but now have received mercy” (1 Pt 2:10). We go to the temple, we “assemble as the Church,” we are clothed in the garments of the new creation—these are the first rites of the “sacrament of sacraments,” the most holy eucharist.

CHAPTER TWO

The Sacrament of the Kingdom

"...as my Father appointed a kingdom for me, so do I appoint one for you that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom."

LUKE 22:29-30

I

IF ASSEMBLING AS THE CHURCH IS, IN THE MOST PROFOUND sense of the term, the *beginning* of the eucharistic celebration, its first and fundamental condition, then its *end* and completion is the Church's entrance into heaven, her fulfilment at the table of Christ, in his kingdom. It is imperative to indicate and to confess this as the sacrament's end, purpose and fulfilment immediately after confessing the "assembly as the Church" as its beginning because this "end" also reveals the unity of the eucharist, its order and essence as movement and ascent—as, above all and before all, the sacrament of the kingdom of God. And it is no accident, of course, that in its present form the liturgy begins with the solemn blessing of the kingdom.

Today we particularly need to remind ourselves of this "end" because our school teaching on the sacraments—which took hold in the Orthodox East in the "dark ages" of the Church's western "captivity"—makes no mention either of the "assembly as the Church" as the beginning and condition of the sacrament or of her ascent to the heavenly sanctuary, to the "table of Christ." The

sacrament was reduced to two "acts," two "moments": the change of the eucharistic gifts into the body and blood of Christ and the communion itself. Its definitions consisted in answering the questions of *how*, i.e., on account of what "causality," and *when*, i.e., at what moment, did the change occur. In other words, our school theology determined for each sacrament a *consecratory formula*, inherent to the given sacrament and at the same time both necessary and sufficient for its accomplishment.

Thus, as an example, in the authoritative *Longer Catechism* of Metropolitan Filaret (Drozdov) of Moscow, which was accepted by the entire Orthodox East, this "formula" is defined as "the pronouncing of the words that Christ spoke at the institution of the sacrament: take, eat, this is my body . . . drink of it all of you, this is my blood . . . and then the invocation of the Holy Spirit and the blessing of the gifts, the bread and wine that had been offered. . . . When this takes place, the bread and wine are changed into the very body and very blood of Christ."¹

The influence of the scholastic theology of the sacraments that underlies the "consecratory formula" is unfortunately evident in our own liturgical practice. It is expressed in the patent desire to *single out* that part of the eucharistic prayer that can be identified with the "consecratory formula," to make it, so to speak, independent and self-contained. With this end in view, the reading of the eucharistic prayer is as it were "interrupted" by the threefold reading of the Troparion of the Third Hour: "O Lord, who didst send down Thy Most Holy Spirit upon Thine apostles at the third hour: Take Him not from us, O Good One, but renew Him in us who pray to Thee"—a supplication related neither grammatically nor semantically to the anaphora.² With this same intention we ritually and verbally single out from the eucharistic prayer a dialogue between the deacon and the priest whose essence lies in separate consecrations first of the bread and then of the cup, and

¹(Paris, 1926; repr. Jordanville, N.Y., 1961) 86-7. See A. Katansky, *Dogmaticeskoe uchenie o semi tserkovnykh tainstvakh* (Dogmatic teaching concerning the seven sacraments of the Church in the works of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, St. Petersburg, 1877); V.J. Malachov, "Presushchestvlenie Sviatikh Darov v Tainstve Evkharistii" (The transformation of the Holy Gifts in the sacrament of the Eucharist), *Bogoslovskii Vestnik* (1898) 113-40. Cf Thomas Aquinas' treatise *De sacramentis* and, more recently, Dom A. Vonier, *The Key to the Doctrine of the Eucharist* (New York, 1925).

²Fr Kiprian (Kern), *Evkharistia*, 277ff.

finally of the gifts together. Further testimony to the fact that we are dealing with a "consecratory formula" is the completely illiterate transferral of the last words of the benediction, "Making the change by Thy Holy Spirit," from the anaphora of St John Chrysostom to that of St Basil the Great.

As far as the other rites of the liturgy are concerned, they are either generally ignored—since they are unnecessary for the accomplishment of the sacrament and are thus not a subject for theological comprehension—or, as in the above-cited catechism, they are construed as symbolic "illustrations" of one or another event in Christ's ministry, whose recollection is "edifying" for the faithful in attendance.

✦ We will have to return later to this doctrine of a "consecratory formula." For now, in this initial stage of our work, the important thing to note is that it isolates the eucharist from the liturgy, and thus *separates* the eucharist from the Church, from its ecclesiological essence and meaning.

This separation is, of course, external, for the spirit of tradition is too strong in the Orthodox Church to allow a change in or betrayal of the ancient forms of worship. Nevertheless, the separation is a real one, for, in this approach, the Church ceases to perceive herself not only as the "dispenser" of the sacraments but as their very *object*: they represent her fulfilment of herself in "this world" as the sacrament of the kingdom of God, which "has come in power." The very fact that the eucharist's beginning, the "assembly as the Church," and its end and fulfilment, its realization as "that which it is," the manifestation and presence of the kingdom of God, simply dropped out of the experience as well as the explanations and definitions of the eucharist amply demonstrates the truly tragic *damage* of this approach and of the reduction it contains.

2

BUT WHAT IS THE CAUSE OF THIS REDUCTION, AND HOW DID IT penetrate church consciousness? This question is of immeasurable importance not only for an interpretation of the sacraments and the eucharist but above all for an understanding of the Church herself, her place and ministry in "this world."

We can best begin our analysis of this reduction with a concept that, although occupying an enormous position in all "discussions" of church worship, remains vague and obscure. This is the idea of the *symbol*.³ It has long been normal to speak of the "symbolism" of Orthodox worship. Indeed, even apart from these "discussions," one can hardly doubt that it is in fact *symbolic*. But what is understood by this term, what is its concrete content?

The most prevalent, "current" answer to this question consists in an identification of the symbol with a *representation* or *illustration*. When someone says that the "Little Entrance" "symbolizes" the Savior's coming out to preach the gospel, he understands by this that the rite of entrance represents a certain event of the past. And this "illustrative symbolism" has come to be applied to worship in general, whether taken as a whole or in each of its separate rites. And since this interpretation of "symbolism" (the flowering of which had begun already during the Byzantine period) is undoubtedly rooted in the most pious of feelings, it would occur to very few that not only does it not correspond to the basic and original Christian conception of worship, but actually distorts it and provides one of the reasons for its present decline.

The reasons for this lie in the fact that "symbol" here designates something not only *distinct* from reality but in essence even *contrary* to it. Further on we shall see that the specifically western, Roman Catholic emphasis on the "real presence" of Christ in the eucharistic gifts grew primarily out of a fear that this presence would be degraded into the category of the "symbolic." But this could only happen when the word "symbol" ceased to designate something *real* and became in fact the antithesis of reality. In other words, where one is concerned with "reality" there is no need for a symbol, and, conversely, where there is a symbol there is no reality. This led to the understanding of the liturgical symbol as an "illustration," necessary only to the extent that what is represented is not "real." Thus, two thousand years ago the Savior came forth to preach the gospel in *reality*, and now we illustrate this act *symbolically* in order to recall for ourselves the

³On liturgical symbolism see R. Borner, *Les commentaires byzantins de la divine liturgie du VIIe au XVe siècle* (Paris, 1966); Dom Odo Casel, *Le mystère du culte dans le christianisme* (Paris, 1946); B. Neunheuser, *L'Eucharistie, II: Au Moyen Age et à l'époque moderne* (Paris, 1966).

meaning of the event, its significance for us, etc.

I repeat, these are pious and legitimate intentions in and of themselves. However, this type of symbolism is not only quite frequently utilized arbitrarily and artificially (thus, the *entrance* at the liturgy is turned into a symbol of Christ *going out*), but in fact reduces ninety percent of our rites to the level of didactic dramatization—not unlike acting out a “procession on a donkey” on Palm Sunday or the mystery play of the “youths in the furnace of Babylon.” Such reduction deprives the rites of their inner necessity, their relation to the *reality* of worship. They become “symbolical” settings, mere decorations for the two or three acts or “moments” that alone provide, so to speak, “reality” to the liturgy—and which alone are necessary and therefore “sufficient.” This is demonstrated by our school theology, which long ago in fact dismissed the entire *ordo* of the eucharist from its field of interest and attention and concentrated entirely upon a single moment: the isolated consecratory formula. On the other hand, it is also demonstrated—however strange it may seem—in our very piety. It is no accident, of course, that an increasing number of people in the Church find this piling up of symbolical representations and explanations disturbing to their prayer and to their genuine participation in the liturgy, distracting them from that spiritual reality the direct contact with which is the very essence of prayer. The same “illustrative” symbolism that is unnecessary for the theologian is also unnecessary for the serious believer.

3

THIS SEPARATION, THIS CONTRAPOSITION OF SYMBOL AND reality is the foundation of that perception and subsequent definition of the sacraments—and above all of the eucharist—whose focus is the *consecratory formula*. This approach came to us from the West, where, in contrast to the East, the sacraments quite early became a subject of special teaching and definition. Particular attention should be given to the scholastic treatise *De sacramentis*, in its progressive development, for the peculiar *estrangement* of the sacraments from the Church. This estrangement, of course, is not to be understood in the sense that the sacraments were established

and function outside or independently of the Church. Rather, they are given to the Church, they are performed within her and only through the power given her to perform them and, finally, they are performed on her behalf. Yet while being accomplished in and through the Church, they constitute—even in the Church herself—a special reality, distinct unto itself. They are special in their being established directly by Christ himself, special in their essence as the “visible signs of invisible grace,” special in their “efficacy” and, finally, special as the “causes of grace” (*causae gratiae*).

One result of the setting apart of the sacraments as a new, sui generis reality was the scholastic definition of the sacraments as being established only in view of man’s fall and his salvation by Christ. In the state of “original innocence” man had no need of them; they are necessary only because man sinned and requires *medicine* for the wounds of sin. The sacraments are precisely this medicine: “quaedam spirituales medicamenta quae adhibentur contra vulnera peccati.” Finally, the sole source of these medicines is the *passio Christi*, the suffering and sacrifice of the cross, through which Christ redeemed and saved mankind. The sacraments are accomplished by the power of the passion of Christ (*in virtute passionis Christi*) which they apply to mankind (*passio Christi quaedam applicata hominibus*).

Summing up the results of the development of western sacramental theology, the Catholic theologian Dom Vonier, in his well-known book *The Key to the Doctrine of the Eucharist*, writes: “The world of the sacraments is a new world, created by God entirely apart from the natural and even from the spiritual world. . . . Neither in heaven nor on earth is there anything like the sacraments. . . . They have their own form of existence, their own psychology, their own grace. . . . We must understand that the idea of the sacraments is something entirely sui generis.”⁴

⁴Vonier, 41-3. Cf n. 1.

4

THERE IS NO NEED FOR US TO ENTER INTO A DETAILED examination of this system, well constructed and internally consistent though it may be. Enough has been said, I believe, to realize how *alien* this doctrine is to the Orthodox experience of the sacraments, how incompatible it is with the age-old liturgical tradition of the Orthodox Church. But I say alien to experience, not to doctrine, because the teaching on the sacraments, and above all on the eucharist, that we find in our dogmatics textbooks, patterned as they are on western models and constructed in western categories, not only does not correspond to this experience but openly contradicts it.

But when we speak of *experience*, what has been preserved from the beginning by the Church in her *lex orandi*, then the most profound alienation of western sacramental scholasticism from this experience cannot but become obvious. The chief source of this estrangement is the Latin doctrine's denial and rejection of *symbolism*, which is inherent to the Christian perception of the world, man and all creation, and which forms the ontological basis of the sacraments. In this perspective, the Latin doctrine is the beginning of the disintegration and decomposition of the symbol. On the one hand, being "reduced" to "illustrative symbolism," the symbol loses touch with reality; and, on the other, it ceases to be understood as a fundamental *revelation* about the world and creation. When Dom Vonier writes that "Neither in heaven nor on earth is there anything like the sacraments," does he not indicate above all that, although the sacraments in any event depend on creation and its nature for their accomplishment, of this nature they do not reveal, witness or manifest anything?

This doctrine of the sacraments is alien to the Orthodox because in the Orthodox ecclesial experience and tradition a sacrament is understood primarily as a revelation of the genuine *nature* of creation, of the world, which, however much it has fallen as "this world," will remain God's world, awaiting salvation, redemption, healing and transfiguration in a new earth and a new heaven. In other words, in the Orthodox experience a sacrament is primarily a revelation of the *sacramentality* of creation itself, for

the world was created and given to man for conversion of creaturely life into participation in divine life. If in baptism water can become a "laver of regeneration," if our earthly food—bread and wine—can be transformed into partaking of the body and blood of Christ, if with oil we are granted the anointment of the Holy Spirit, if, to put it briefly, everything in the world can be identified, manifested and understood as a gift of God and participation in the new life, it is because all of creation was originally summoned and destined for the fulfilment of the divine economy—"then God will be all in all."

Precisely in this *sacramental* understanding of the world is the essence and gift of that *light of the world* that permeates the entire life of the Church, the entire liturgical and spiritual tradition of Orthodoxy. Sin is itself perceived here as a *falling away* of man, and in him of all creation, from this sacramentality, from the "paradise of delight," and into "this world," which lives no longer according to God, but according to itself and in itself and is therefore corrupt and mortal. And if this is so, then Christ accomplishes the salvation of the world by renewing the world and life itself as sacrament.⁵

5

A SACRAMENT IS BOTH COSMIC AND ESCHATOLOGICAL. IT refers at the same time to God's world as he first created it and to its fulfilment in the kingdom of God. It is cosmic in that it embraces all of creation, it returns it to God as God's own—"Thine own of Thine own . . . on behalf of all and for all"—and in and by itself it manifests the victory of Christ. But it is to the same degree eschatological, oriented toward the *kingdom which is to come*. For, having rejected and killed Christ—its Creator, Savior and Lord—"this world" sentenced itself to death, as it does not have "life in itself" and rejected him of whom it was said, "In him was life and this life was the light of men" (Jn 1:4). As "this world" it

⁵On the sacramental nature of creation see Schmemann, *For the Life of the World*. The nature of "the world as sacrament" appears particularly clearly (unfortunately without having been carefully studied) in the Church's prayer and hymnody (the psalms, the Lenten Triodion, the Pentecostarion, the Octoechos and other liturgical texts). "The heavens were seized with astonishment, the earth with trembling": in texts like this we behold the cosmic dimension of the Church.

comes to an end—"heaven and earth will pass away"—and thus those who believe in Christ and accept him as the "Way, the Truth and the Life" live in hope of the age to come. They no longer have here a "lasting city, but...seek the city which is to come" (Heb 13:14). But this is precisely the joy of Christianity, the paschal essence of its faith: this "age which is to come," though future in relation to "this world," is already "in our midst." And our faith itself is already "the substance [ὕπόστασις, reality] of things hoped for, the evidence [ἔλεγχος, proof] of things not seen" (Heb 11:1). It is, it manifests and it grants that to which it is directed: the presence among us of the approaching kingdom of God and its unfading light.

This in turn means that in the Orthodox experience and tradition the *Church* is herself a sacrament. Historians of theology have many times noted that in the early patristic tradition we find no *definition* of the Church. The reason for this, however, lies not in the "lack of development" of the theology of that time—as several learned theologians suppose—but in the fact that in her early tradition the Church was not an object of "definition" but the living experience of the new life. This experience—in which we find also the *institutional* structure of the Church, her hierarchy, canons, liturgy, etc.—was *sacramental*, *symbolical* by its very nature, for the Church exists in order to be always changing into that same reality that she manifests, the fulfilment of the invisible in the visible, the heavenly in the earthly, the spiritual in the material.

Hence, the Church is a sacrament in both of the higher dimensions we have indicated, the cosmic and the eschatological. She is a sacrament in the cosmic sense because she manifests in "this world" the genuine world of God, as he first created it, as the *beginning*, and only in the light of and in reference to this beginning can we know the full heights of our lofty calling—and also the depths of our falling away from God. She is a sacrament in the eschatological dimension because the original world of God's creation, revealed by the Church, has already been saved by Christ. And in liturgical experience and the life of prayer it is never severed from that *end* for the sake of which it was created and saved, that "God may be all in all" (1 Co 15:28).

6

BEING A SACRAMENT IN THE MOST PROFOUND AND COMPREHENSIVE sense of the term, the Church creates, manifests and fulfils herself in and through the sacraments, and above all through the "sacrament of sacraments," the most holy eucharist. For if, as we have just said, the eucharist is the sacrament of the beginning and the end, of the world and its fulfilment as the kingdom of God, then it is completed by the Church's ascent to heaven, to the "homeland of the heart's desire," the *status patriae*—the messianic banquet of Christ, in his kingdom.

This means that all this—the "assembly as the Church," the ascent to the throne of God and the partaking of the banquet of the kingdom—is accomplished *in and through the Holy Spirit*. "Where the Church is, there is the Holy Spirit and the fulness of grace."⁶ In these words of St Irenaeus of Lyons is engraved the experience of the Church as the sacrament of the Holy Spirit. For if where the Church is the Holy Spirit is also, then where the Holy Spirit is there is the renewal of creation, there we find the "beginning of another life, new and eternal," the dawn of the mysterious, unfading day of the kingdom of God. For the Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of truth, the gift of sonship, the pledge of future inheritance, the first fruits of eternal blessing, the life-creating power, the fountain of sanctification, through whom every creature of reason and understanding worships Thee and always sings to Thee a hymn of glory" (from the anaphora of the Liturgy of St Basil the Great). In other words, where the Holy Spirit is, there is the kingdom of God. Through his coming on the "last and great day of Pentecost" the Holy Spirit transforms this *last* day into the first day of the new creation and manifests the Church as the gift and presence of this first and "eighth" day.

Thus, everything in the Church is by the Holy Spirit, everything is in the Holy Spirit and everything is partaking of the Holy Spirit. It is by the Holy Spirit because with the descent of the Spirit the Church is revealed as the transformation of the end into the beginning, of the old life into the new. "The Holy Spirit

⁶Against Heresies 3:24:1.

grants all things; he is the source of prophecy, he fulfils the priesthood, he gathers the entire church assembly" (hymn of Pentecost). Everything in the Church is in the Holy Spirit, who raises us up to the heavenly sanctuary, to the throne of God. "We have seen the true light, we have received the heavenly Spirit" (another hymn of Pentecost). Finally, the Church is entirely oriented toward the Holy Spirit, "the treasury of blessings and giver of life." The entire life of the Church is a thirst for acquisition of the Holy Spirit and for participation in him, and in him of the fulness of grace. Just as the life and spiritual struggle of each believer consists, in the words of St Serafim of Sarov, in the acquisition of the Holy Spirit, so also the life of the Church is that same acquisition, that same eternally satisfied but never completely quenched thirst for the Holy Spirit. "Come to us, O Holy Spirit, and make us partakers of your holiness, and of the light that knows no evening, and of the divine life, and of the most fragrant dispensation..." (compline canon of the feast of the Holy Spirit).

7

HAVING SAID ALL THIS, WE CAN NOW RETURN TO WHAT WE began this chapter with: the definition of the eucharist as the sacrament of the kingdom, the Church's ascent to the "table of the Lord, in his kingdom."

We know now that this definition "slipped out" of our scholarly, theological explanations of the liturgy, which were adopted by Orthodox theology from the West. The main reason for this was the disintegration, in Christian consciousness, of the key concept of the *symbol*, its contraposition to the concept of *reality* and thus its reduction to the category of "illustrative symbolism." Inasmuch as the Christian faith from the very beginning confessed precisely the *reality* of the change of the gifts of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ—"this is indeed the *very* body, and this is indeed the *very* blood of Christ"—any "confusion" of this reality with "symbolism" came to be seen as a threat to eucharistic "realism" and hence also to the *real presence* of the body and blood of Christ on the altar. This led to the reduction of the sacrament to the "consecratory formula"—which by its very nar-

rowness "guarantees" in time and space the reality of the change—and this "fear" also led to the more and more detailed definition of the "modus" and "moment" of the change, as well as its "efficacy." Hence the persistent reminders that *before* the consecration of the gifts the paten holds only bread and the chalice contains only wine; but *after* the consecration we find only body and blood. Hence the attempts to explain the "reality" of the change by using Aristotelian categories of "essence" and "accidents" and to describe the change as "transubstantiation." Finally, we find here the source of the denial of the real relation of the liturgy—both in its many details as well as taken as a whole—to the change of the holy gifts and the practical exclusion of the liturgy from explanations of the sacrament.

Here and now, we must ask whether this understanding of the symbol and symbolism, their contraposition to "reality," corresponds to the original meaning of the idea of the "symbol," and whether it applies to the Christian *lex orandi*, the liturgical tradition of the Church. To this fundamental question I answer in the negative. And this is precisely the heart of the matter: the primary meaning of "symbol" is in no way equivalent to "illustration." In fact, it is possible for the symbol *not* to illustrate, i.e., it can be devoid of any external similarity with that which it symbolizes.

The history of religions shows us that the more ancient, the deeper, the more "organic" a symbol, the less it will be composed of such "illustrative" qualities. This is because the purpose and function of the symbol is *not* to illustrate (this would presume the *absence* of what is illustrated) but rather to *manifest* and to *communicate* what is manifested. We might say that the symbol does not so much "resemble" the reality that it symbolizes as it *participates* in it, and therefore it is capable of communicating it in reality. In other words, the difference (and it is a radical one) between our contemporary understanding of the symbol and the original one consists in the fact that while today we understand the symbol as the representation or sign of an *absent* reality, something that is not really in the sign itself (just as there is no real, actual water in the chemical symbol H_2O), in the original understanding it is the manifestation and presence of the *other* reality—but precisely as *other*, which, under given circumstances, cannot be manifested and made present in any other way than as a symbol.

This means that in the final analysis the true and original symbol is inseparable from faith, for faith is "the evidence of things unseen" (Heb 11:1), the knowledge that there is another reality different from the "empirical" one, and that this reality can be entered, can be communicated, can in truth become "the most real of realities." Therefore, if the symbol presupposes faith, faith of necessity requires the symbol. For, unlike "convictions," philosophical "points of view," etc., faith certainly is contact and a thirst for contact, embodiment and a thirst for embodiment: it is the manifestation, the presence, the operation of one reality within the other. All of this *is* the symbol (from *συνβάλλω*, "unite," "hold together"). In it—unlike in a simple "illustration," simple sign, and even in the sacrament in its scholastic-rationalistic "reduction"—the empirical (or "visible") and the spiritual (or "invisible") are united not *logically* (this "stands for" that), nor *analogically* (this "illustrates" that), nor yet by *cause and effect* (this is the "means" or "generator" of that), but *epiphanically*. One reality *manifests* (*ἐμφαίνω*) and *communicates* the other, but—and this is immensely important—only to the degree to which the symbol itself is a participant in the spiritual reality and is able or called upon to embody it. In other words, in the symbol *everything* manifests the spiritual reality, but *not* everything pertaining to the spiritual reality appears embodied in the symbol. The symbol is always partial, always imperfect: "for our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect" (1 Co 13:9). By its very nature the symbol unites disparate realities, the relation of the one to the other always remaining "absolutely other." However *real* a symbol may be, however successfully it may communicate to us that other reality, its function is not to quench our thirst but to intensify it: "Grant us that we may more perfectly partake of Thee in the never ending day of Thy Kingdom." It is not that this or that part of "this world"—space, time, or matter—be made *sacred*, but rather that everything in it be seen and comprehended as expectation and thirst for its complete spiritualization: "that God may be all in all."

Must we then demonstrate that only this ontological and "epiphanic" meaning of the word "symbol" is applicable to Christian worship? And not only is it applicable—it is inseparable. For the essence of the symbol lies in the fact that in it the dichotomy

between reality and symbolism (as *unreality*) is overcome: reality is experienced above all as the fulfilment of the symbol, and the symbol is comprehended as the fulfilment of reality. Christian worship is symbolic not because it contains various "symbolical" depictions. It may indeed include them, but chiefly in the imagination of various "commentators" and not in its own ordo and rites. Christian worship is symbolic because, first of all, the world itself, God's own creation, is symbolic, is sacramental; and second of all, because it is the Church's nature, her task in "this world," to fulfil this symbol, to realize it as the "most real of realities." We can therefore say that the symbol reveals the world, mankind and all creation as the "matter" of a single, all-embracing sacrament.

Now we can raise the basic question: What does the eucharist symbolize? What symbolism unites into a single whole the entire ordo and all of its rites? Or, to put it differently, what *spiritual reality* is manifested and given to us in this "sacrament of all sacraments"? And this leads us back to what we began this chapter with—the identification and confession of the eucharist as the *sacrament of the kingdom*.

8

THE DIVINE LITURGY BEGINS WITH THE SOLEMN DOXOLOGY: "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages." The Savior likewise began his ministry with the proclamation of the kingdom, the ringing announcement that it has *come*: "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying: 'The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel'" (Mk 1:14-15). And it is with desire for the kingdom that the first and foremost of all Christian prayers begins: "Thy kingdom come..."

Thus, the kingdom of God is the content of the Christian faith—the goal, the meaning and the content of the Christian life. According to the unanimous witness of all scripture and tradition, it is the knowledge of God, love for him, unity with him and life in him. The kingdom of God is unity with God, the

source of all life, indeed life itself. It is life eternal: "And this is eternal life, that they know thee" (Jn 17:3). It is for this true and eternal life in the fulness of love, unity and knowledge that man was created. But man lost this in the fall, and by man's sin, evil, suffering and death triumphed in the world. The "prince of this world" began his reign; the world rejected its God and King. Yet God did not reject the world: as we pray in the anaphora of St John Chrysostom, "and when we had fallen away [Thou] didst not cease to do all things until Thou hadst brought us up to heaven, and hadst endowed us with Thy kingdom which is to come." The prophets of the Old Testament hungered for this kingdom, prayed for it, foretold it. It was the very goal and fulfilment of the entire sacred history of the Old Testament, a history holy not with human sanctity (for it was utterly filled with falls, betrayals and sins) but with the holiness of its being God's preparation for the coming of his kingdom.

And now, "the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mk 1:15). The only-begotten Son of God became the Son of man, in order to proclaim and to give to man forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God and new life. By his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead he has come into his kingdom: God "made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named . . . and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things" (Eph 1:20-22). Christ reigns, and everyone who believes in him and is born again of water and the Spirit belongs to his kingdom and has him within himself. "Christ is the Lord"—this is the most ancient Christian confession of faith, and for three centuries the world, in the form of the Roman empire, persecuted those who spoke these words for their refusal to recognize *anyone* on earth as lord except the one Lord and one King.

The kingdom of Christ is accepted by faith and is hidden "within us." The King himself came in the form of a servant and reigned only through the cross. There are no external signs of this kingdom on earth. It is the kingdom of "the world to come," and thus only in the glory of his second coming will all people recognize the true king of the world. But for those who have believed in it and accepted it, the kingdom is already here and now, more

obvious than any of the "realities" surrounding us. "The Lord has come, the Lord is coming, the Lord will come again." This triune meaning of the Aramaic expression *maranatha!* contains the whole of Christianity's victorious faith, against which all persecutions have proven impotent.

At first glance all of this might sound like some sort of pious platitudes. But reread what has just been said and compare it with the faith and "experience" of the vast majority of contemporary Christians, and you cannot but be convinced that there is a deep abyss between what we have said and the modern "experience." One can say without any exaggeration that the *kingdom of God*—the central concept in evangelical preaching—has ceased to be the central content and inner motivation of the Christian faith. Unlike the early Christians, those of later ages came, little by little, to lose the perception of the kingdom of God as being "at hand." They came to understand it only as the kingdom *to come*—at the end and *after* the end, referring only to the "personal" death of individual believers. "This world" and "the kingdom," which in the gospels are set side by side and in tension and struggle with one another, have come to be thought of in terms of a chronological sequence: now—only the world; then—only the kingdom. For the first Christians the all-encompassing joy, the truly startling novelty of their faith lay in the fact that the kingdom was *at hand*. It *had appeared*, and although it remained hidden and unseen for "this world," it was already present, its light had already shone, it was already at work in the world. Then, as the kingdom was "removed" to the end of the world, to the mysterious and unfathomable reaches of time, Christians gradually lost their awareness of it as something hoped for, as the desired and joyous fulfilment of all hopes, of all desires, of life itself, of all that the early Church implied in the words "Thy kingdom come."

It is characteristic that our scholarly tomes of dogmatic theology (which cannot, of course, pass over the early doctrine in silence) speak of the kingdom in quite sparing, dull and even boring terms. Here, *eschatology*—the doctrine of the "final destiny of the world and man"—is virtually reduced to the doctrine of "God as the Judge and Avenger." As to piety, i.e., the personal experience of individual believers, the interest is narrowed to the question of one's personal fate "after death." At the same time,

“this world,” about which St Paul wrote that its form is “passing away,” and which for the early Christians was transparent to the kingdom, reacquired its own value and existence independent of the kingdom of God.

9

THIS GRADUAL NARROWING, IF NOT RADICAL METAMORPHOSIS of Christian eschatology, its peculiar break with the theme and experience of the kingdom, has had tremendous significance in the development of liturgical consciousness in the Church. Returning to what we said above about the symbolism of Christian worship, we can now affirm that the Church’s worship was born and, in its external structure, “took shape” primarily as a *symbol of the kingdom*, of the Church’s ascent to it and, in this ascent, of her fulfilment as the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit. The whole newness, the uniqueness of the Christian *leitourgia* was in its eschatological nature as the presence here and now of the future *parousia*, as the epiphany of that which is to come, as communion with the “world to come.” As I wrote in my *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, it is precisely out of this eschatological experience that the “Lord’s day” was born as a *symbol*, i.e., the manifestation, now, of the kingdom. It is this experience that determined the Christian “reception” of the Jewish feasts of Pass-over and Pentecost, as feasts precisely of a “pass-over” from the present “aeon” to the one which is to come, and thus—symbols of the kingdom of God.

But, of course, the symbol of the kingdom par excellence, the one that fulfils all other symbols—the Lord’s day, baptism, Pascha, etc.—as well as all of Christian life “hid with Christ in God” (Col 3:3), is the *eucharist*, the sacrament of the coming of the risen Lord, of our meeting and communion with him “at his table in his kingdom.” Secretly, unseen by the world, “the doors being shut,” the Church—that “little flock” to whom it was the Father’s good pleasure to give the kingdom (Lk 12:32)—fulfils in the eucharist her ascension and entrance into the light and joy and triumph of the kingdom. And we can say without any exaggeration that it was from this totally unique and incomparable experience,

from this fully *realized* symbol, that the whole of the Christian *lex orandi* was born and developed.

It should now be clear why it was that with the weakening and the eclipse of the original eschatology the liturgical symbolism of the kingdom became overgrown little by little with the wild grass of secondary explanations and allegorical commentaries, i.e., with the "illustrative symbolism" that—as I have tried to show above—in fact means the collapse of the symbol. The more time went on, the more the symbolism of the kingdom, so fundamental for the Church, was forgotten. Inasmuch, however, as the liturgy, the *lex orandi* of the Church, with all its forms and its entire *ordo*, already existed and was perceived as an un-touchable part of tradition, it naturally came to demand a new explanation—in the same "key" in which Christian consciousness was beginning to apprehend the place and ministry of the Church in "this world." This was the beginning of an ever-deeper infiltration of "illustrative symbolism" into the explanation of worship. And, paradoxical as it may seem, in this process the otherworldly, heavenly *reality* of the eucharist came to be "included" in "this world," in its causality, its time, the categories of its thought and experience, while the symbolism of the kingdom of God, so inherent to and inseparable from creation—the true key for the Church and her life—was reduced to the category of this *unnecessary* illustrative symbolism.

IO

THIS PROCESS, TO BE SURE, WAS LONG AND COMPLICATED AND not some kind of instant "metamorphosis." And we must decidedly affirm that, whatever its external triumph, "illustrative" symbolism has never completely succeeded in supplanting the original, eschatological symbolism of the liturgy, which is rooted in the faith itself. No matter how much development took place, for instance, in Byzantine worship in the direction of what, in my *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, I termed "external solemnity," no matter how overgrown it became with decorative and allegorical details, with the pomp borrowed from the imperial cult and with terminology adopted from mysteriological "sacredness,"

worship as a whole, as well as its deep intuition in the minds of the faithful, continued to be determined by the *symbolism of the kingdom of God*. And there is no better witness to this than the fundamental Orthodox *experience* of the temple and of iconography, an experience that crystalized precisely during the Byzantine period and in which the "holy of holies" of Orthodoxy is expressed better than in the redundant rhetoric of the "symbolic" liturgical interpretations.

"Standing in the temple we stand in heaven." I have spoken of the origins of the Christian temple in the experience of the "assembly as the Church." We can now add that insofar as this assembly is undoubtedly conceived of as *heavenly*, the temple is that "heaven on earth" that realizes the "assembly as the Church." It is the symbol that unites these two realities, these two dimensions of the Church—"heaven" and "earth," one manifested in the other, one made a reality in the other. And this experience of the temple, I repeat, has survived almost unchanged and unweakened throughout the entire history of the Church, despite the numerous declines and breakdowns in the authentic traditions of church architecture and iconography. This experience constitutes that "whole" that unites and coordinates all the elements of the temple: space, form, shape, icons, all that can be termed the *rhythm* and *order* of the temple. As to the icon, it is in its very essence a symbol of the kingdom, the "epiphany" of the new and transfigured creation, of heaven and earth full of God's glory, and it is for this reason that the canons forbid the introduction into iconography of any allegorical or illustrative "symbolism." For the icon does not "illustrate"—it *manifests*, and does so only to the degree that it is itself a *participant* in what it manifests, inasmuch as it is both presence and communion. It is enough to have stood, be it only once, in the "temple of all temples," Hagia Sophia in Constantinople—even in its present devastated and kenotic state—to *know* with one's whole being that the temple and the icon were born and nurtured in the living *experience of heaven*, in communion with the "peace and joy of the Holy Spirit" (Rm 14:17).

This experience was frequently darkened. Historians of Christian art often speak of the decline of church architecture and the icon. And it is important to note that this decline usually came about by the *whole*—of the temple, of the icon—being weakened

and lost beneath the thickening growth of details. Thus, the temple almost disappears under a thick layer of self-contained decorations, and in the icon, Byzantine as well as Russian, the original wholeness is replaced by an ever-growing attention to cleverly drawn details. Is this not the same movement—from the “whole” to the “particular,” from the experience of the whole to a discursive “explanation,” and, in short, from symbol to “symbolism”? And yet, as long as the “Christian world,” be it imperfectly and sometimes nominally, “refers” itself to the kingdom of God, the “homeland of the heart’s desire,” this centrifugal movement cannot fully overpower the centripetal force.

One might say that, at first and for a long period of time, the “illustrative” symbolism—be it in worship, in the icon or in the temple—developed *inside* the initial and ontological symbolism of the kingdom. The deeper and truly tragic rupture between the two of them, the initial replacement of the one by the other, began with the break from the patristic tradition and the coming of the long (and in many ways continuing) “western captivity” of the Orthodox mind. It is not accidental that the luxuriant and unchecked flowering of “illustrative” symbolism corresponded in time with the triumph of western juridicism and rationalism in Orthodox theology, of pietism and sentimentality in iconography, of embellished “pretty” baroque in church architecture, of “lyricism” and emotionalism in church music. All of these manifest one and the same “pseudomorphosis” of the Orthodox consciousness.

Yet even this deep and truly tragic decline cannot be considered final. In its depths, the Church’s consciousness ultimately remains untouched by all this. Thus, everyday experience shows us that “illustrative symbolism” is foreign to the living, authentic faith and life of the Church, just as “scholastic” theology remains foreign, in the last analysis, to such faith. “Illustrative symbolism” is at home in that superficial, “showy” and routine religiosity in which a widespread but shallow curiosity toward anything “holy” is lightly taken as religious feeling and “interest in the Church.” But where there is a living, authentic and, in the best sense of the word, *simple* faith, it becomes *unnecessary*, for genuine faith lives not by curiosity but by thirst.

Just as he did a thousand years ago, so today the “simple”

believer goes to Church in order primarily to "touch other worlds" (Dostoevsky). "And almost free, the soul breathes heaven unhindered" (Vladislav Khodasevich). In a sense, he is not "interested" in worship, in the way in which "experts" and connoisseurs of all liturgical details are interested in it. And he is not interested because "standing in the temple" he receives all that for which he thirsts and seeks: the light, the joy, and the comfort of the kingdom of God, the *radiance* that, in the words of the agnostic Chekhov, beams from the faces of the "old people who have just returned from the church." What use could such a believer have for complex and refined explanations of what this or that rite "represents," of what the opening and closing of the royal doors is supposed to mean? He cannot keep up with all these "symbolisms," and they are unnecessary for his faith. All he knows is that he has left his everyday life and has come to a place where everything is *different* and yet so essential, so desirable, so vital that it illumines and gives meaning to his entire life. Likewise he knows, even if he cannot express it in words, that this *other* reality makes life itself worth living, for everything proceeds to it, everything is referred to it, everything is to be judged by it—by the kingdom of God it manifests. And, finally, he knows that even if individual words or rites are unclear to him, the kingdom of God has been given to him in the *Church*: in that common action, common standing before God, in the "assembly," in the "ascent," in unity and love.

II

THUS WE RETURN TO WHERE WE BEGAN, INDEED TO WHERE the eucharist itself begins: to the blessing of the kingdom of God. What does it mean to *bless* the kingdom? It means that we acknowledge and confess it to be our highest and ultimate value, the object of our desire, our love and our hope. It means that we proclaim it to be the goal of the sacrament—of pilgrimage, ascension, entrance—that now begins. It means that we must focus our attention, our mind, heart and soul, i.e., our whole life, upon that which is truly the "one thing needful." Finally, it means that now, already in "this world," we confirm the possibility of com-

munion with the kingdom, of entrance into its radiance, truth and joy. Each time that Christians "assemble as the Church" they witness before the whole world that Christ is King and Lord, that his kingdom has already been revealed and given to man and that a new and immortal life has begun. This is why the liturgy begins with this solemn confession and doxology of the King who comes *now* but abides forever and shall reign unto ages of ages.

"It is time [καιρός] to begin the service to the Lord," the deacon announces to the celebrant. This is not simply a reminder that it is now "opportune" or "convenient" for the performance of the sacrament. It is an affirmation and confession that the *new time*, the time of the kingdom of God and its fulfilment in the Church, now enters into the fallen time of "this world" in order that we, the Church, might be lifted up to heaven, and the Church transfigured into "that which she is"—the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit.

"Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit..." *Amen*, answer the people. This word is usually translated as "so be it," but its meaning is really stronger than this. It signifies not only agreement, but also active acceptance. "Yes, this is so, and *let* it be so." With this word the ecclesial assembly concludes and, as it were, *seals* each prayer uttered by the celebrant, thereby expressing its own organic, responsible and conscious participation in each and every sacred action of the Church. "To that which you are—say Amen," writes St Augustine, "and thus seal it with your answer. For you hear 'the body of Christ' and answer 'Amen.' *Be* a member of the body of Christ, which is realized by your Amen... Fulfil that which you are."

CHAPTER THREE

The Sacrament of Entrance

"O Master, Lord our God, who hast appointed in heaven orders and hosts of angels and archangels for the service of Thy glory: Grant that with our entrance there may be an entrance of holy angels, serving with us and glorifying Thy goodness..."

PRAYER OF ENTRANCE

I

IN EARLY TIMES, THE FIRST ACT OF THE LITURGY AFTER the assembly of the faithful was the *entrance of the celebrant*.¹ "When the president of the assembly enters," writes St John Chrysostom, "he says 'peace be with all of you.'"² It is precisely with and through the entrance that the solemn ceremony begins—as is evident to this very day in our order of the pontifical reception. Later on, for various reasons, this initial entrance was supplanted in its own turn by another "beginning," so that now what we call the "Little Entrance" is no longer understood as precisely the first, fundamental rite of the liturgy. And from here,

¹On the entrance and its evolution, the three antiphons, etc., see J. Mateos, "Evolution historique de la Liturgie de S. Jean Chrysostome," part 2, *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 16 (1966) 133-61, and *La célébration de la Parole dans la liturgie byzantine*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 191 (Rome, 1971), chapters 2-3, pp. 46-90. See also R. Taft, *The Great Entrance*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 200 (Rome, 1978).

²*Homily on Colossians* 3:4, PG 62:322-3.

incidentally, also comes its popular interpretation in the category of "illustrative symbolism" as Christ's going out to preach, etc. It is appropriate here, however, to remind ourselves of the original practice not because of some kind of archeological pedantry but because the idea of *entrance* has a truly decisive significance for the understanding of the eucharist. And in the end, the purpose of our investigation is to show that the meaning of the eucharist is contained in the *entry* of the Church into the kingdom of God; that in a sense the eucharist is entirely *entrance*; and that the lifting up, the ἀναφορά, is related not only to the holy gifts ("that we may offer the Holy Oblation in peace...") but to the Church herself, to the very assembly. For—and I shall repeat this again and again—the eucharist is the *sacrament of the kingdom*, accomplished by the ascent and entry of the Church into the heavenly sanctuary.

Today, however, the *entrance* is preceded by a certain introductory part consisting of the *Great Litany*, three *antiphons* and three *prayers*, and thus we must explain, however briefly, how and why this "pre-entry section" arose and became, as a general rule, the beginning of the liturgy. Let us begin with the *Great Litany*—i.e., the series of supplicatory petitions that, in our present-day order of worship, begins all the "liturgical" services of the Church without exception. We find it in the beginning of vespers, matins, the marriage services, the funeral rite, the blessing of the waters, etc. In all probability of Antiochian origin, the Great Litany appeared comparatively early in the Byzantine order of services as precisely the initial, general prayer of the assembled Church. However, right up to the twelfth-thirteenth century this litany was said not as it is today—at the beginning of the liturgy—but *after* the entrance and the singing of the *Trisagion*, the hymn of the entrance, which is a confession of the holiness of God: "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us." In certain manuscripts the Great Litany is called the "Trisagion litany" or the "Trisagion petitions." This once again demonstrates that the genuine beginning of the eucharistic celebration was precisely the *entrance*, and hence it also follows that the Great Litany was transferred to its present place—before the *antiphons*—at the time when these antiphons were added to the liturgy as its beginning.

We must note above all that the "service of the three antiphons"—i.e., the unification in a single unit or sequence of the

antiphonal (i.e., alternating between two singers or choirs) singing of the three psalms (or three groups of psalms), separated from each other by prayers—is quite widespread in the Byzantine type of worship. We find such antiphons in the so-called “sung office,” i.e., the Sunday vigil of the Constantinopolitan order, and in the services of the daily cycle: matins, vespers, nocturn, etc. We must consider it beyond doubt that they were joined to the eucharistic celebration precisely as a “whole,” as a liturgical unit that already existed apart from the liturgy.

Usually, they stood as part of a service in commemoration of a certain saint or event and were performed during the procession to the church where the festal eucharist celebrating this “memory” was to be performed. We must remember that, in contrast to our present organization, in which each parish is liturgically “independent” and celebrates the entire liturgical cycle on its own, in the Byzantine Church the *city*—especially, of course, Constantinople—was considered as one ecclesiastical *whole*, so that the liturgical *Typikon of the Great Church* embraced all the individual churches, each of which was dedicated to a certain “memory.”

On appointed days the church procession began at Hagia Sophia and made its way to the church dedicated to the saint or event of the feastday, in which the entire Church—and not a separate “parish”—would celebrate the commemoration. Thus, for example, on January 16, on the feastday of “the chains of the apostle Peter,” the procession, according to the instructions of the *Typikon of the Great Church*, “goes out from the Great Church [i.e., Hagia Sophia] and makes its way to the Church of St Peter, where the festal eucharist is celebrated.” The singing of the *antiphons* took place during this procession and was completed at the doors of the church with the reading of the “prayer of entrance,” and only then did the clergy and the people of God actually enter the church for the performance of the eucharist. From here stems the diversity of the antiphons, their “variability,” depending on the event celebrated by the feast; from here stems the existence to this day of special antiphons prescribed for the major Lord’s feasts, etc. Sometimes, however, special troparia to the saint are sung in place of the antiphons; in that case the *Typikon*, noting these troparia, prescribes: “...and with the entrance into the Church of St Peter is to be sung the ‘Glory’ with

this same troparion. *There are no antiphons*, but immediately the *Trisagion* . . .”³

Even from this brief analysis—though it would be possible to extend it a hundredfold—it is evident that the “antiphons” originally constituted a separate service, which took place before the eucharist and, at first, outside of the church building. It belonged to the type of *litē* (procession around the city), which was extraordinarily popular in Byzantium and which in our contemporary worship is preserved as the *litē* in the all-night vigil and the processions around the church on certain feasts. Later on, following that logic of liturgical development in which a kind of law functions according to which the “peculiarities” become the “general rule,” this service came to be seen as an inseparable part of the eucharist, as a liturgical expression of the “assembly as the Church.” However, even here it was still understood as a separate, introductory section: the patriarch, for example, entered the church only after the singing of the antiphons. This is also evident to the present day in our pontifical liturgy, in which the hierarch does not in fact take part until the “Little Entrance,” so that the initial “blessing of the kingdom” and all the exclamations are done by the priests. From all that has been said, it is clearly apparent, as a Catholic specialist on the history of Byzantine worship has written, that at first the three antiphons were sung not in the church, but outside of it and only on the occasion of a solemn procession. What is now called the “Little Entrance” was none other than the entrance of the people and clergy into the church—either at the conclusion of the procession, or without any preliminary procession.⁴

2

ALL THIS WOULD BE OF MERELY HISTORICAL AND ARCHEOLOGICAL interest if it did not serve to emphasize not only that the *entrance* actually comprises the *beginning* of the eucharistic ceremony, but also the *entering*, dynamic character of this ceremony, the

³J. Mateos, *Le Typikon de la Grande Eglise*, I, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 165 (Rome, 1962) 198-9.

⁴Mateos, “Evolution historique,” part 1, 344.

eucharist as *movement*. We no longer live in a Christian or, to put it better, "Christianized" world, in which the liturgical symbols—the *litē*, processions, etc.—can reveal its *relation* to the Church as the way to the kingdom, and therefore its own orientation toward the kingdom of God. Our churches are surrounded by, if not an openly hostile, then in any case a "religiously neutral," "secularized" and indifferent world. But this is why it is so important that we realize and sense that fundamental, original and immutable *correlation* of the Church and the world, which in another time, in entirely different conditions, found its liturgical expression in these processions of the people to the church. If "assembling as the Church" presupposes separation from the world (Christ appears "the doors being shut"), this exodus from the world is accomplished *in the name of the world*, for the sake of its salvation. For we are flesh of the flesh and blood of the blood of this world. We are a part of it, and only by us and through us does it ascend to its Creator, Savior and Lord, to its goal and fulfillment. We separate ourselves from the world in order to bring it, in order to lift it up to the kingdom, to make it once again the way to God and participation in his eternal kingdom. In this is the task of the Church; for this she was left in the world, as part of it, as a symbol of its salvation. And this symbol we fulfil, we "make real" in the eucharist.

As we follow the order of the eucharist this purpose will be more clearly and deeply revealed. But already, from the very beginning, in these "common supplications" made "with one accord," in these joyous and triumphal antiphons, which proclaim and glorify the kingdom of God, we signify that the "assembly as the Church" is above all the joy of the regenerated and renewed creation, *the gathering of the world*, in contrast to its fall into sin and death. The sacrament of the Church—the eucharist—is likewise the sacrament of the world, which "God so loved . . . that he gave his only Son" (Jn 3:16).

3

LET US RETURN NOW TO THE GREAT LITANY.⁵ "IN PEACE LET US pray to the Lord," the deacon exclaims. After the confession and glorification of the kingdom, we offer "common supplications" made "with one accord." Do we understand the entire significance and, chiefly, the entire *newness* of these prayers—prayers of the Church herself? Do we understand that this is not "simply" the prayer of a man or a group of people, but the prayer of Christ himself to his Father, which has been granted to us, and that this gift of Christ's prayer, of his mediation, of his intercession is the first and greatest gift of the Church? We pray in Christ, and he, through his Holy Spirit, prays in us, who are gathered in his name. "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Ga 4:6). We can add nothing to his prayer, but according to his will, according to his love, we have become members of his body, we are one with him and have participation in his protection and intercession for the world. The apostle Paul, urging the faithful "First of all . . . that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men," adds: "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, *the man* Jesus Christ" (1 Tm 2:1, 5). And that is why the prayer of the Church is a divine-human prayer, for the Church is Christ's humanity, with him standing at its head: "I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me" (Jn 17:23).

"For the peace from above and for the salvation of our souls . . ." In the Church we are given the peace of Christ, just as we are *given* the anointment of the Holy Spirit. Everything is given to us, and for everything we unceasingly pray: come and save us, thy kingdom come. For what is given must be accepted, and we are called to grow unceasingly in this gift. Sin and grace, the old and the new man carry on in us an incessant struggle, and what is given by God is all the time being contested by the enemy of God. And the Church—the assembly of the saints—is also an

⁵*Ibid.*

assembly of sinners, who receive but do not accept, who are forgiven but reject grace and unceasingly fall away from her. We above all pray for what in the gospels is called the "one thing needful." But the "peace from above" is the kingdom of God, the "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rm 14:17). It is that for the sake of which we must be prepared to give up everything, to refuse everything, to sacrifice all: "seek first his kingdom?...and all these things shall be yours as well." The acquisition of this kingdom, this "peace from above," is also salvation of the soul. For, in the language of holy scripture, the *soul* signifies the man himself, in his genuine nature and calling. This is the divine particle that makes man the image and likeness of God, and because of which the foremost sinner is, in the eyes of God, a priceless treasure, for whose salvation the shepherd left the ninety-nine righteous ones. The soul is the gift of God to man, and therefore "what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and loses his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?" (Mt 16:26). The first petition of the Great Litany indicates to us the ultimate, highest purpose of our life, that for which we have been created, to which we must strive and what must become for us the "one thing needful."

"For the peace of the whole world..." that this peace of Christ may be spread over all, that the leaven, sown in the world, might leaven the whole lump (1 Co 5:6), that everyone, far and near, might become participants in the kingdom of God.

"For the welfare of the holy churches of God..." "You are the salt of the earth," Christ said to his disciples, and this means that the Church is left in the world to witness to Christ and his kingdom and that his work is bequeathed to her. "But if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?" (Mt 5:13). If Christians neglect their *ministry*, to which all, from first to last, are appointed, then who will ring out the good news of the kingdom of God and introduce people to the new life? The prayer for *welfare* is a prayer for the fidelity and steadfastness of Christians, that the Church, diffused over the whole earth, may in each place be faithful to herself, to her essence, to her purpose—that she may be the "salt of the earth and the light of the world."

"For the union of all..." The unity of all in God constitutes the ultimate aim of creation and salvation. Christ came in order to

“gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad” (Jn 11:52). The Church prays for this unity, for the overcoming of all divisions, for the fulfilment of the prayer of Christ: “that they may become perfectly one” (Jn 17:23).

“For this holy house and for those who enter with faith, reverence, and the fear of God . . .” Here we find the condition for our genuine participation in the prayer and the sacrament, and everyone who enters the temple must examine himself: does he have in his heart a living faith and reverence for the presence of God—that saving “fear of God” that we so often lose, being “accustomed” or “used to” the Church and the worship services?

“For the episcopate, for all the clergy and the people . . .,” for the Church, to which we belong and which, in the unity of all her servants—bishops, priests, deacons and the people of God—manifests and fulfils herself, here and now, as the body of Christ.

“For the country, for the city, for the authorities, for all people, for seasonable weather, for the abundance of the fruits of the earth, for travelers by land or by sea, for the sick and the suffering, for captives . . .” The prayer extends to and embraces the entire world, all nature, all mankind, all life. The Church is given power and authority to lift up this universal prayer, interceding before God for his entire creation. Whenever we narrow our faith and our religious life to ourselves, to our own concerns and wants, we forget that the calling of the Church is always and everywhere “to offer prayers, petitions and thanksgiving for all mankind.” And, as we come to the liturgy, we need again and again to learn to live according to the rhythm of the Church’s prayer, to expand ourselves and our consciousness to the fulness of the Church.

And, finally, “commemorating all the saints,” i.e., the whole Church with the Mother of God at her head, “let us commend ourselves and each other, and all our life unto Christ our God”—and not only for protection, help and success. “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Col 3:2-4). We return our life to Christ because he is our life, because in the baptismal font we died to the simple “natural life,” and our true life is hid in the mysterious heights of the kingdom of God.

4

AFTER THE GREAT LITANY COME THE THREE ANTIPHONS AND the three prayers, which are inscribed in the service books as the "prayer of the first antiphon," "of the second," etc. We have already spoken of the antiphons, of their origin and insertion into the order of the liturgy, and inasmuch as they obviously relate to the changeable part of the service we shall not discuss them right now. Regarding the three prayers, however, with which the celebrant in a certain sense "elevates" these songs of praise and thanksgiving, we must say a few words.

We all know that in the contemporary practice, whose origin we shall come to speak of separately, almost all the prayers offered by the celebrant are read *silently*, "to himself," so that the assembly hears only the concluding doxology, usually in the form of a subordinate clause—"...for Thou art..."—which is usually called the exclamation. This practice is relatively recent. Originally the prayers of the liturgy were read aloud, for in their direct meaning and content they are prayers of the entire assembly or, to put it better, of the Church herself. But, once fixed in the services, this practice led to the multiplication of the so-called *little litanies*, which consist of the first and last two petitions of the Great Litany. And now these little litanies are chanted by the deacon while the celebrant reads the prayers in secret. When the service is performed without a deacon, the priest must both pronounce the litany and read the prayer. But this led to the prayers being read *at the same time* as the singing of the antiphons. And so, this practice—besides the fact that it resulted in the frequent and monotonous repetition of the little litanies—disturbed the unity of the "assembly as the Church," it separated it precisely from those "common supplications made with one accord" in which this unity is expressed.

In the "prayer of the first antiphon" the celebrant confesses the Church's faith that God's power is *incomparable*, that his glory is *incomprehensible*, that his mercy is *immeasurable* and that his love for man is *inexpressible*. All these terms, which in the Greek text begin with negative particles (the so-called *alpha privative*), express the Christian experience of the absolute transcendence of

God—his incommensurability with our words, concepts and definitions, the *apophatic* foundations of the Christian faith, of Christian knowledge of God. This incommensurability was always felt with special strength by the saints.

Yet God himself desired to *reveal* himself, and, at the same time as we confess his incommensurability, the Church invites him to “look down on us and on this holy house with pity . . . and impart the riches of Thy mercy and Thy compassion to us.” And God not only revealed himself to people, but he also united them with himself, he made them *his own*. This belonging of the Church to God is confessed in the “prayer of the second antiphon”: “save *Thy* people and bless *Thine* inheritance. Preserve the fullness of *Thy* Church. Sanctify those who love the beauty of *Thy* house”—for in the Church is revealed his power, his kingdom, his strength and glory.

And, finally, according to the witness of the “prayer of the third antiphon,” to this new humanity, united with God, is given the knowledge of the truth in this age, and the truth bestows eternal life: “granting us in this world the knowledge of Thy truth, and in the world to come, life everlasting.”

5

WE MEET THE EXPRESSION “LITTLE ENTRANCE” (AS DISTINCT from the *Great Entrance* at the beginning of the liturgy of the faithful) for the first time in manuscripts of the fourteenth century. This was the time of the final and definitive consolidation of the eucharistic ordo into its contemporary state. We know already that for a long time this entrance was the *beginning* of the liturgy, its first rite. But when it lost this significance and the succession of “antiphons” (or “typical psalms”) became the first part of the service, the chief stress—in its perception at least—was transferred to the *carrying out of the gospels*. In contemporary practice this entrance is above all the entrance with the gospels, i.e., the solemn carrying of the book out from and then back into the altar through the royal doors. In several manuscripts it is even called the “entrance of the gospels.” And it is precisely this, as already mentioned, that served as the starting point in the development

of that “illustrative symbolism” that, when applied to the Little Entrance, interprets it as a “representation” of Christ’s going out to preach the gospel. We shall speak of the real significance of this bringing out of the gospels in the following chapter, dedicated to the liturgy as the sacrament of the word. Within the limits of this chapter, our chief emphasis is only that our current Little Entrance can obviously be traced to two diverse rites, two themes, which it unites: the entrance as such, and the ceremonies connected with the reading of the word of God. In the present chapter it is appropriate to include a brief analysis of the first of these.

We will stress once more that, in spite of all its complexity, the Little Entrance preserves the character precisely of an entrance, a beginning, a drawing near. Witnesses to this are, in the first place, our repeated references to the peculiarities of the hierarchical order of the liturgy and, in the second, the *prayer of the entrance*, which, as we also mentioned, was formerly read during the entrance of the celebrant and people into the temple and even today—in the order of consecration of a new temple—is read at the outer doors, and not before the royal doors of the iconostasis. In this prayer there is not even the slightest indication of any kind of “illustration,” but instead we see the *heavenly* character of the entrance: in it the heavenly powers and hosts, i.e., the angels, are “serving with us.”

A new element that cropped up out of the development of the Byzantine temple and the complication of the idea of the entrance was the transferal of the idea of the *sanctuary* from the temple as a whole to the *altar*, i.e., to that part of the temple that contains the altar table and is separated from the nave by the iconostasis. Under the influence of “mysteriological” theology, about which I wrote in my *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* and at whose center stands the contraposition of the “initiated” and the “uninitiated”—meaning the clergy and the laity—there arose inside the temple an inner *sanctuary*: the *altar*, access to which was open only to the “initiated.” All “entrances” came to be performed here, in the altar. And this development certainly weakened the perception and experience of the “assembly as the Church” itself as the entrance and ascent of the Church, the people of God, to the heavenly sanctuary. For “Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into *heaven itself*, now to

appear in the presence of God on our behalf" (Heb 9:24).

6

THIS TYPICALLY "BYZANTINE" COMPLICATION, HOWEVER, DID not affect the main thing: precisely that in essence the *entrance* consists in drawing near to the *altar*, which from the beginning was the focus of the temple, its holy place. The word "altar" itself refers primarily to the altar table and only gradually came to be applied to the space surrounding it and separated from the temple by the iconostasis. We shall dwell in greater detail on the significance of the altar when we speak of the offering of the holy gifts. For now it is enough to say that, according to the witness of all tradition, the altar is a symbol of Christ and Christ's kingdom. It is the table at which Christ gathers us, and it is the sacrificial table that unites the high priest and the sacrifice. It is the throne of the King and Lord. It is heaven, that kingdom in which "God is all in all." And it is precisely from this experience of the altar as the focus of the eucharistic mystery of the Church that all the "mystique" of the altar developed—as heaven, as the eschatological pole of the liturgy, as that sacramental *presence* that converts the entire temple into "heaven on earth." And therefore the entrance, the drawing near to the altar, is always an *ascent*. In it the Church ascends to the place where her genuine "life is hid with Christ in God." She ascends to heaven, where the eucharist is celebrated.

It is important to remember all this because, under the influence of the western understanding of the eucharist, we usually perceive the liturgy not in the key of *ascent* but of *descent*. The entire western eucharistic mystique is thoroughly imbued with the image of Christ *descending* onto our altars. Meanwhile, the original eucharistic experience, to which the very order of the eucharist witnesses, speaks of our *ascent* to that place where Christ ascended, of the heavenly nature of the eucharistic celebration.

The eucharist is always a going out from "this world" and an ascent to heaven, and the altar is a symbol of the reality of this ascent, of its very "possibility." For Christ has ascended to heaven, and his altar is "sacred and spiritual." In "this world" there *is*

not and cannot be an altar, for the kingdom of God is “not of this world.” And that is why it is so important to understand that we regard the altar with reverence—we kiss it, we bow before it, etc.—not because it is “sanctified” and has become, so to speak, a “sacred object,” but because its very sanctification consists in its *referral* to the reality of the kingdom, in its conversion into a symbol of the kingdom. Our reverence, our veneration is never related to “matter,” but always to that which it reveals, of which it is an *epiphany*, i.e., a manifestation and presence. Any *consecration* in the Church is not a creation of “sacred objects,” by their sanctity contraposed to the “profane,” i.e., the unconsecrated, but their *referral* to their original and at the same time ultimate meaning—God’s conception of them. For the entire world was created as an “altar of God,” as a temple, as a symbol of the kingdom. According to its conception, it is all *sacred*, and not “profane,” for its essence lies in the divine “very good” of Genesis. The sin of man consists in the fact that he has darkened the “very good” in his very being and as such has torn the world away from God, made it an “end in itself,” and therefore a fall and death.

But God has saved the world. He saved it in that he again revealed its *goal*: the kingdom of God; its *life*: to be the path to this kingdom; its *meaning*: to be in communion with God, and in him with all creation. And therefore, in contrast to the pagan “sanctification,” which consists in the *sacralization* of separate parts and objects of the world, the Christian sanctification consists in the restoration to everything in the world of its symbolic nature, its “sacramentality,” in referring everything to the ultimate aim of being. All our worship services therefore are an ascent to the altar and a return back to “this world” for witness to “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Co 2:9).

7

THIS ESCHATOLOGICAL MEANING OF THE ENTRANCE, AS DRAWING near to the altar and ascent to the kingdom, is best of all expressed in the prayer and singing of the *Trisagion*, with which the entrance is concluded. Having entered into the sanctuary and

standing before the altar, the celebrant intones the "Trisagion prayer": "Thou hast vouchsafed to us, Thy humble and unworthy servants, even in this hour to stand before the glory of Thy holy altar, and to offer worship and praise which are due unto Thee... accept even from the mouths of us sinners the thrice-holy hymn, and visit us in Thy goodness. Forgive us every transgression... Sanctify our souls and bodies..."

This prayer begins with the salutation "O holy God," with confession of the holiness of God and with supplication for our own sanctification, i.e., for participation in this holiness. But what does the word *holy*—which in the words of the prophet Isaiah comprises the eternal content of the angelic glorification, in which we in "this hour" are preparing ourselves to take part—mean and express as a word for God? No discursive thought, no logic is capable of explaining this, yet meanwhile it is precisely this sensation of the holiness of God, this feeling for the holy that is the foundation and source of religion. And here, arriving at this moment, we perhaps more powerfully than ever comprehend that the services, while not explaining to us what the holiness of God is, *reveal* it to us, and that in this manifestation is the age-old essence of *cult*—those rites that are as fundamental and ancient as man himself and whose meaning is almost indistinguishable from the gestures, the blessings, lifting up of the hands, prostrations, to which it gave rise. For the cult also was born from necessity, from the thirst of man for partaking of *the holy*, which he sensed before he could "think" about it.

"It is as though the liturgy alone," writes Louis Bouyer, "knows the full meaning of this notion impenetrable to reason. In any event, the liturgy alone is able to transmit it and teach it.... That religious trembling, that interior vertigo before the Pure, the Inaccessible, the wholly Other, and at the same time that sense of an invisible presence, the attraction of a love so infinite and yet so personal that, having tasted it, we know only that it surpasses all that we still call love: only the liturgy can communicate the unique and incommunicable experience of all this. ... In it, this experience somehow flows from every element—the words, the gestures, the lights, the perfume that fills the temple, as in the vision of Isaiah—coming from what is behind all this and yet not simply all this, but which communicates this, in the same

way that the striking expression of a face permits us in an instant to discover a soul, without our knowing how.”⁶

Thus *we have entered* and stand now before the holy. We are sanctified by his presence, we are illumined by his light. And the trembling and the sweet feeling of the presence of God, the joy and peace, which has no equal on earth, is all expressed in the threefold, slow singing of the Trisagion: “Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal”—the heavenly hymn, which is sung on earth but testifies to the accomplished reconciliation of earth and heaven, to the fact that God revealed himself to men and that it is given to us to “share his holiness” (Heb 12:10).

With this singing the celebrant ascends still higher, to the very heart of the temple, to the “high place,” to the holy of holies. And in this rhythm of ascent—from “this world” to the gates of the temple, from the gates of the temple to the altar, from the altar to the high place—he witnesses to the accomplished unification, to the heights to which the Son of God has lifted us. And, after ascending to the “high place”—from there, but turning his face to the gathering, as one of the gathered but also as the image of the Lord, vested in his power and authority—the celebrant grants us *peace* for listening to the word of God.

⁶Neither the English nor the French translators have been able to locate the source of this passage, attributed by the author to Fr Louis Bouyer, even after consultation with the latter.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Sacrament of the Word

"Illumine our hearts, O Master who lovest mankind, with the pure light of Thy divine knowledge. Open the eyes of our mind to the understanding of Thy gospel teachings. Implant also in us the fear of Thy blessed commandments, that trampling down all carnal desires, we may enter upon a spiritual manner of living, both thinking and doing such things as are well-pleasing unto Thee..."

PRAYER BEFORE THE GOSPEL

I

ACCORDING TO THE UNANIMOUS TESTIMONY OF ALL EARLY evidence, the reading of holy scripture from the very beginning constituted an inseparable part of the "assembly as the Church" and, specifically, the eucharistic gathering. In one of the first descriptions of the eucharist that we have, we read: "on the day called Sunday there is a meeting in one place of those who live in the cities or the country, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits. When the reader has finished, the president in a discourse urges and invites [us] to the imitation of these noble things. Then we all stand up together and offer prayers...and when we have finished the

prayer, bread is brought, and wine and water . . ."¹ Here the link between the reading of scripture and the homily, on the one hand, and the offering of the eucharistic gifts, on the other, is obvious. And we find further witness to this in the contemporary order of the eucharist, in which there is an inseparable link between the so-called liturgy of the catechumens, dedicated primarily to the word of God, and the liturgy of the faithful, consisting of the offering, consecration and distribution of the holy gifts.

Meanwhile, our official textbooks, our theological explanations and definitions of the eucharist practically ignore this unanimous testimony. In the life and practice of the Church the eucharist consists of two inseparably linked parts. But in theological reflection it is reduced to only one—the second—part, i.e., to what is accomplished over the bread and wine, as if this second part were self-contained and unrelated, whether spiritually or theologically, to the first.

This "reduction" is explained, of course, by the influence on our school theology of western ideas, in which *word* and *sacrament* long ago lost touch with each other and became subjects of independent study and definition. However, this rift constitutes one of the chief deficiencies in the western doctrine on the sacraments. After being adopted de facto by our school systems, it sooner or later led to an erroneous, onesided and distorted understanding both of *word*—i.e., holy scripture and its place in the life of the Church—and *sacrament*. I daresay that the gradual "decomposition" of scripture, its dissolution in more and more specialized and negative criticism, is a result of its alienation from the eucharist—and practically from the Church herself—as an experience of a spiritual reality. And in its own turn, this same alienation deprived the sacrament of its evangelical content, converting it into a self-contained and self-sufficient "means of sanctification." The scriptures and the Church are reduced here to the category of two formal *authorities*, two "sources of the faith"—as they are called in the scholastic treatises, for which the only question is which authority is the higher: which "interprets" which.

As a matter of fact, by its own logic, this approach demands a further contraction, a further "reduction." For if we proclaim

¹Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 67:3-5, tr. C.C. Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, Library of Christian Classics 1 (New York, 1970) 287.

holy scripture to be the supreme authority for teaching the faith in the Church, then what is the "criterion" of scripture? Sooner or later it becomes "biblical science"—i.e., in the final analysis, naked reason. But if, on the other hand, we proclaim the Church to be the definitive, highest and inspired interpreter of scripture, then through whom, where and how is this interpretation brought about? And however we answer this question, this "organ" or "authority" in fact proves to be standing *over* the scriptures, as an *outside* authority. If in the first instance the meaning of scripture is dissolved in a multiplicity of private—and therefore devoid of ecclesial authority—"scientific theories," then in the second case the scriptures are considered the "raw material" for theological definition and formulation, "biblical matter" available to be "interpreted" by theological reason. And it would be incorrect to think that this position is characteristic only of the West. The very same thing, though possibly in a different manner, happens also in the Orthodox Church. For, if Orthodox theologians firmly hold to the formal principle that the authoritative interpretation of scripture belongs to the Church and is accomplished in the light of tradition, then the vital content and "practical" application of this principle remain unclear and in fact lead to a certain paralysis of the "understanding of scripture" in the life of the Church. Insofar as it exists, our biblical scholarship finds itself entirely in the grasp of western presuppositions and timidly repeats outmoded western positions, clinging as much as possible to the "moderate," i.e., in fact the penultimate, western theories. And as far as church preaching and piety are concerned, they too have long since ceased to be "fed" by, to find their true source in the scriptures.

This "rupture" between word and sacrament has pernicious consequences also for the doctrine on the sacraments. In it, the sacrament ceases to be biblical and, in the deepest sense of the word, *evangelical*. It was no accident, of course, that the chief focus of interest in the sacraments for western theology was not their essence and content but rather the conditions and "modi" of their accomplishment and "efficacy." Thus, the interpretation of the eucharist revolves around the question of the method and moment of the transformation of the gifts, their conversion into the body and blood of Christ, but with almost no mention of the

meaning of this transformation for the Church, for the world, for each of us. As much as it may seem paradoxical, "interest" in the *real presence* of the body and blood of Christ replaces "interest" in Christ. Partaking of the gifts is perceived as one of the means for "receiving grace," as an act of personal sanctification, but it ceases to be perceived as our *participation* in Christ's cup: "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" (Mk 10:38). Alienated from the word, which is always the word of Christ ("You search the scriptures... and it is they that bear witness to me"—Jn 5:39), the sacrament is in a certain sense torn away from Christ. Both in ✓ theology and in piety he remains, of course, their "founder," but he ceases to be their *content*—the gift to the Church and to the faithful of his very self and of his divine-human life. Thus, the ✓ sacrament of confession is experienced not as "reconciliation and reunification with the Church in Christ Jesus" but as the *authority* to "forgive" sins; thus, the sacrament of marriage has "forgotten" its foundation in "the great mystery of Christ and the Church," etc.

Yet in the liturgical and spiritual tradition of the Church, the Church's essence as the incarnation of the Word, as the fulfilment in time and space of the divine incarnation, is realized precisely in the unbreakable link between the word and the sacrament. Thus the book of Acts can say of the *Church*: "the word...grew and multiplied" (12:24). In the sacrament we partake of him who ✓ comes and abides with us in the word, and the mission of the Church consists precisely in announcing this good news. The word presupposes the sacrament as its fulfilment, for in the sacrament ✓ Christ the Word becomes our life. The Word assembles the Church for his incarnation in her. In separation from the word the sacrament is in danger of being perceived as magic, and without the sacrament the word is in danger of being "reduced" to "doctrine." And, finally, it is precisely through the sacrament that the word is interpreted, for the interpretation of the word is always witness to the fact that the Word has become our life. "And the ✓ Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14). The sacrament is his witness, and therefore in it lies the source, the beginning and the foundation of the exposition and comprehension of the word, the source and criterion of theology.

Only in this unbreakable unity of word and sacrament can we truly understand the meaning of the affirmation that the Church alone preserves the true meaning of scripture. That is why the necessary *beginning* of the eucharistic ceremony is the first part of the liturgy—the *sacrament of the word*, which finds its fulfilment and completion in the offering, consecration and distribution to the faithful of the eucharistic gifts.

2

IN SEVERAL EARLY MANUSCRIPTS OF THE SERVICE BOOKS THE Little Entrance is called the *entrance with the gospels*. And in its contemporary form its central focus is in actuality the gospel book: it is triumphally carried out of the northern door of the iconostasis by the deacon and then brought through the royal doors and placed on the altar. Taking into consideration what was said above about the original meaning of the Little Entrance as the entrance of the celebrant and the people into the temple, it is obvious that the “entrance with the gospels” is, as it were, its second “form.” In antiquity, after the entrance into the temple the celebrant and the concelebrating clergy assumed “their places” to listen to the scriptures. Today, the original Little Entrance having ceased to be the real beginning of the liturgy, it is precisely the “entrance with the gospels” that has taken over the meaning of this procession. In order to understand this meaning, it is necessary to say a few words about the original “topography” of the church building.

In contemporary practice, the altar is the natural and self-evident “place” of the celebrant and the clergy. But in ancient times this was not so. *Approach* to the altar and serving at it was restricted exclusively to the liturgy of the faithful, i.e., the offering and consecration of the holy gifts—the eucharist in the strict sense of the term. The celebrant would go up to the altar only at the moment of the offering of the gifts. The rest of the time—just as in the services of the daily and yearly cycle—the place of the celebrant and the clergy was on the “bema,” i.e., among the people. This is indicated to this very day by the location of the bishop’s throne—in the middle of the church among the Russians, on the

right side of the ambo among the Greeks. And in fact even now, the most important parts of the noneucharistic services—the *polyleion*, for example—are performed in the middle of the church and not in the altar. Thus, the altar table was exclusively the *table* of the Lord's supper, the sacrificial table on which the bloodless sacrifice was offered. The service had, as it were, two centers: one in the gathering itself and another at the altar. Therefore the first part of the liturgy—the “assembly as the Church,” the listening to the scriptures and the homily—took place not in the altar but in the temple, with the celebrant and the clergy having assumed their special places on the bema. The *entrance* into the temple (the first meaning of the Little Entrance) was followed by the ascent of the celebrant and the clergy to “their place” for the celebration of the liturgy of the word (the second meaning of the Little Entrance), and after this, their ascent into the sanctuary and to the altar table for the offering and consecration of the gifts (the current Great Entrance). Through these three “entrances” (processions) the fundamental symbolism of the gathering of the Church as her ascent to the kingdom of God was expressed.

What caused the disruption and alteration of this original order was, in the first place, the disappearance of the first entrance—the entrance into the temple—and, secondly, the gradual disappearance of the bema as the place of the celebrant and the clergy during virtually all services *except the eucharist itself*. This disappearance was furthered when the gospel book began to be kept on the altar. During the persecution of Christianity, the gospels were not kept in the temple, as one form of persecution of the Church was confiscation of the holy books. Therefore, at each liturgy the gospel book was brought into the church from outside. But with the cessation of persecution and the appearance of majestic Christian basilicas, the place for the keeping of the gospels naturally became the temple, and in it, its “holy of holies”—the altar. The altar became the focus of both parts of the liturgy, although in different ways. Thus, in the so-called liturgy of the catechumens, as well as in all noneucharistic services, the gospels are *brought out* from the altar and to this day are read in the middle of the church, on the ambo or from the cathedra, while the eucharist is always performed at the altar.

All these “technical” details are necessary for us only in order

to show that the Little Entrance gradually united three fundamental dimensions: the beginning of the eucharist as *entrance* into the assembly; then, the fulfilment of this first entrance in the ascent, in the entrance of the Church into the heavenly sanctuary (the prayer and singing of the Trisagion, the approach to the altar); and, finally, the fulfilment of this beginning of the liturgy in the "sacrament of the word."

Returning now to the "entrance with the gospels," we can say that it is no less important for an understanding of the liturgy of the word and its connection with the eucharist than is the basic act of the reading of the holy scriptures. Here we find a parallelism with the eucharist, in which the consecration of the gifts is preceded by the *offering*. It is appropriate here to recall that the gospels are part of the Orthodox liturgical tradition not only in their reading, but precisely as a *book*. This book is rendered the same reverence as an icon or the altar. We are called to kiss it and to cense it, and the people of God are blessed with it. Finally, in several rites—the *cheirotonia* of a bishop, the sacraments of confession and holy unction, etc.—the gospels take part as a *book*, and not as one or another text contained in it. This is because, for the Church, the gospel book is a verbal icon of Christ's manifestation to and presence among us. Above all, it is an icon of his resurrection. The entrance with the gospels is therefore not a "representation," a sacred dramatization of events of the past—e.g., Christ's going out to preach (in which case it would be not the deacon, but the celebrant, as the image of Christ in the ecclesial assembly, who should carry the gospel book). It is the image of the appearance of the risen Lord in fulfilment of his promise: "where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20). As the consecration of the eucharistic gifts is preceded by their offering at the sacrificial table, so the reading and proclamation of the word is preceded by its *appearance*. The "entrance with the gospels" is a meeting, a joyous meeting with Christ, and this meeting is accomplished by means of the bringing out to us of this book of books, the book that is always transformed into power, life and sanctification.

3

"PEACE BE UNTO ALL!" THE CELEBRANT PROCLAIMS TO THE assembly, and the people answer him: "And to your spirit." We have already pointed out that *Peace* is the name of Christ himself. ✓ The western form of this greeting is *Dominus vobiscum*, "the Lord be with you." And this greeting, with which the celebrant addresses the Church before each new part of the eucharistic ceremony—before the reading of the word of God, before the kiss of peace, before the distribution of communion—is each time a reminder that Christ himself is "in our midst," that he himself heads our eucharist, for he himself is "the Offerer and the Offered, the Receiver and the Received."

Then the *prokeimenon* is intoned. This word, which in Greek means "what is set forth"—i.e., what *precedes*—is now used to refer to two or three verses of the psalms, sung antiphonally—by the reader and the people, or the choir. In antiquity the *prokeimenon* usually consisted of the entire psalm, the singing of which "preceded" the reading of holy scripture. And since the *prokeimenon* to this day occupies a special and undoubtedly important place in Orthodox worship, it is necessary to say a few words about it.

In order to understand the *prokeimenon*, we must first recall the special place the psalms held in the early Church. Without exaggeration it could be said that in the early Church the psalms were not only one of the prophetic or liturgical "high points" of the Old Testament, but a kind of special "revelation inside the revelation." ✓ If all scripture prophecies about Christ, the exceptional significance of the psalms lies in the fact that in them Christ is revealed as though from "within." These are *his* words, *his* prayer: "...ipse Dominus Jesus Christus locutus," "the Lord Jesus Christ himself speaks in them" (Augustine).² And because they are his words, they are also the prayer and words of his body, the Church. "In this book speak, pray and weep only Jesus Christ and his Church," writes Augustine. "These many members, united in the bonds of love and peace under one head—our Savior—constitute, as you know...one man. And in the better part of

²*Enarratio in Ps. XXX*, 11, PL 36:237.

the psalms, their voice sounds as the voice of one man. He implores for all, because all are one in unity.”³ This understanding, this *experience* of the psalms also lies at the heart of their liturgical usage. Thus, for example, it is impossible to understand the pre-eminent place of Psalm 119 (“Blessed are those whose way is blameless”) in matins of Holy Saturday unless we know that in this lengthy confession of love for the “law of God,” for his will, for his design for the world and mankind, the Church in a way hears the voice of the Lord himself, as he lies in the tomb and reveals to us the meaning of his lifegiving death. In this way, the psalms are not only a divinely inspired “exegesis,” an explanation of scripture and the events of sacred history. In them is expressed and incarnated and handed down to us that spiritual *reality* that allows us to comprehend the true meaning both of the sacred texts and of the rites.

The *prokeimenon*—“the psalm that precedes”—*introduces* us to the sacrament of the word. For the word of God is addressed not to the reason alone, but to the whole man—to his depths or, in the language of the holy fathers, to his *heart*, which is also an organ of religious knowledge, in contrast to the imperfect, discursive and rational knowledge of “this world.” The “opening of the mind” precedes the hearing and understanding of the word: “Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures” (Lk 24:45). We can say that the joyous, repeated exclamation of the *prokeimenon*, its “communication” to the assembly and its acceptance by the gathering also express that moment in worship of the “opening of the mind,” its union with the *heart*, when we listen to the word of the scriptures, the word of the Lord. ✓

4

AFTER THE PROKEIMENON COMES THE READING OF THE *epistle*, i.e., a passage from the second—the “apostolic”—part of the New Testament. We have every reason to think that in antiquity the reading of holy scripture included passages from the Old Testament. A detailed study of the “lectionary,” i.e., the princi-

³*Enarratio in Ps. LXIX*, 1, PL 36:866.

ples on which the liturgical distribution of the reading of holy scripture was based, belongs to that part of liturgical theology that I call the *liturgy of time*,⁴ and therefore we may put aside its explanation for now. It is enough to say that the *lectionary* experienced a long and complex evolution, and that one of the vital tasks of our time consists in reviewing it in the light of our contemporary liturgical "situation." In order to grasp the seriousness of this issue, it is enough to recall that the current lectionary excludes the greater part of the Old Testament from liturgical reading. As for the New Testament, since the lectionary is constructed on the presupposition of a daily liturgy, only a comparatively small part of the New Testament texts actually reaches the ears and consciousness of the faithful. Hence the striking ignorance of the holy scriptures among the overwhelming majority of Orthodox and, stemming from this ignorance, the absence of interest in them. They are not perceived as the chief, incomparable and truly *saving* source of faith and life. In our Church the "akathist" is immeasurably more popular than the scriptures. Inasmuch as all our worship is structured in a "biblical" key, this ultimately leads to incomprehension of the services, to a rupture between liturgical piety and the genuine meaning of the *lex orandi*, the rule of prayer.

After the epistle the gospel is read. The reading is preceded by the singing of the *alleluia* and the *censing*. In contemporary practice the alleluia verses take up no more than two or three minutes, allowing the deacon time only to take the gospel book from the priest and proceed toward the ambo. As a result, the censing is not done as prescribed—during the singing of the alleluia—but rather during the reading of the epistle. Finally, the celebrant's prayer before the reading of the gospel, in which the Church asks God to "open the eyes of our mind to the understanding of Thy gospel teachings," is now read silently, depriving the faithful of the opportunity of hearing it. All this, taken together, obscures the original meaning of the *rite* of the liturgy of the word. Nevertheless, this rite is important for understanding the link between the liturgy of the word and the sacrament of the eucharist, and therefore it is necessary to say a few words about it.

⁴See Schmemann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, 49-57.

Our first consideration here must be the singing of the alleluia verses, which in antiquity comprised an important part of all Christian worship. Inherited by Christianity from Hebrew worship, the alleluia belongs to the type of the so-called *melismatic* singing. In the history of church music, melismatic, as opposed to *psalmodic*, refers to a form in which the melody takes precedence over the word. One may suppose that before the appearance of more "learned" hymnology—troparia, kontakia, stichera, in which the music and the text mutually define each other—the Church knew only two types of singing, corresponding to two fundamental aspects of the Christian perception of worship. *Psalmodic* singing, i.e., the melodic, rhythmic and musical reading of the psalms, scriptures and prayers, expressed the *verbal* nature of Christian worship, its inner subordination to the word: the holy scriptures, the apostolic witness, the tradition of faith. *Melismatic* singing, however, expressed the experience of worship as a real contact with the *transcendent*, an entry into the supernatural reality of the kingdom. Whatever was the source of melismatic singing—and there are several scholarly theories about its origin—there is no doubt that in early Christian worship it occupied a significant place and that one of its chief expressions was precisely the singing of the *alleluia*. For this term itself is not simply a word, but a certain melodic exclamation. Its logical content can of course be translated with the words "praise God," but by this content it is not exhausted and not in fact translated, for the word itself *is* a transport of joy and praise before the appearance of the Lord, a "reaction" to his coming. The historian of religion G. Van der Leeuw writes that, "when moved by the presence of God, man cries out." He "lifts up" his voice. "But the most important type of profoundly emotional utterance is *praise*: the *song of praise*."⁵ The alleluia is a *greeting* in the most profound sense of the term. And a genuine greeting, in the words of the same Van der Leeuw, is "always a confirmation of a fact." It presupposes a *manifestation*, and it is a reaction to this manifestation. The alleluia verses precede the reading of the gospel because, as we have already said above, the appearance of the Lord in the "assembly as the Church" and his opening of the minds of the faith-

⁵Religion in Essence and Manifestation (London, 1938) 430.

ful precedes the *hearing*. The ancient melody of the alleluia has come down to us as a sound, a melody expressing the joy and praise and experience of a presence that is more real than any words, than any explanations.

At the same time as the singing of the alleluia—and not during the reading of the epistle, as is usually the case today—the *censing* of the gospel book and of the assembly takes place. This ancient religious rite, common to a multitude of religions, was not immediately accepted by the Church because of its ties with pagan cults: in the era of persecution, Christians were ordered to burn incense before images of the emperor, thus rendering him divine worship. But it subsequently entered into church worship precisely as a “natural” religious rite, in which everything—the burning charcoal and incense transformed into fragrance and ascending to heaven as smoke—“expresses” the creatures’ adoration of the Creator and his holiness, present among the people.

The celebrant reads the *prayer before the gospel*, in which he asks God to send down the “pure light of Thy divine knowledge. Open the eyes of our mind to the understanding of Thy gospel teachings.” This prayer, which is now read silently, occupies the same place in the sacrament of the word that the *epiklesis*, the supplication for the Father to send down his Holy Spirit, occupies in the eucharistic prayer. Like the consecration of the gifts, *understanding* and *acceptance* of the word depend not on us, not only on our desire, but above all on the sacramental transformation of the “eyes of our mind,” on the coming to us of the Holy Spirit. The blessing that the priest bestows on the deacon as he is about to read the gospel testifies to this: “May God...enable you to proclaim the glad tidings with *great power, to the fulfillment of the gospel...*”

5

THE HOMILY IS A WITNESS TO THE HEARING OF THE WORD OF God, its reception and understanding. Therefore it is organically connected to the reading of scripture and, in the early Church, constituted a necessary part of the “synaxis,” an essential liturgical act of the Church. This act is the eternal self-witness of the

Holy Spirit, who lives in the Church and guides her into all the truth (Jn 16:13), the Spirit of truth, "whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him"—but "you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you" (Jn 14:17). In these "texts" the Church hears and recognizes, and will forever continue to recognize, hear and proclaim the word of God. Only in this way can she genuinely proclaim to "this world" the good news about Christ, can she witness to him—and not just expound her "doctrine"—because she herself always listens to the word of God, she lives by it, so that her very life is to *increase in the word*: "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly" (Ac 6:7); "So the word of the Lord grew and prevailed mightily" (Ac 19:20).

One can observe an undoubted decline or even crisis in preaching in contemporary church life. The essence of this crisis lies not in the inability to speak, in a loss of "style" or in any intellectual deficiency on the part of the preacher, but in something far deeper: in an oblivion to *what* preaching in the church assembly is supposed to be. The homily can be, and often is even today, intelligent, interesting, instructive and comforting, but these are not the criteria by which we can distinguish a "good" homily from a "bad" one—these are not its real essence. Its essence lies in its living link to the gospel that was read in the church assembly. For the genuine sermon is neither simply an explanation of what was read by knowledgeable and competent persons, nor a transmission to the listeners of the theological knowledge of the preacher, nor a meditation "a propos" of the gospel text. In general, it is not a sermon *about the gospel* ("on a gospel theme"), but the preaching of the gospel *itself*. The crisis of preaching consists chiefly in that it has become a sort of "personal" matter of the preacher. We say, for example, that a given preacher has or does not have a gift for speaking. Yet the genuine gift for speaking, for proclaiming the good news, is not an "immanent" gift of the preacher, but a charism of the Holy Spirit, given in the Church and to the Church. Genuine proclamation of the good news does not exist without faith that the "assembly as the Church" is really an assembly in the Holy Spirit, where the same one Spirit opens the preacher's lips to proclamation and the hearers' minds to acceptance of what is proclaimed.

The condition for true preaching therefore must be precisely the complete self-denial of the preacher, the repudiation of everything that is *only his own*, even his *own* gifts and talents. The mystery of church preaching, in contrast to any purely human "gift for speaking," is accomplished, according to the words of the apostle Paul, "not [by] proclaiming [it] to you... in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.... and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Co 2:1-5). Witness to Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit is the content of the word of God, and this alone constitutes the essence of preaching: "And the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth" (1 Jn 5:7). The ambo is the place where the sacrament of the word takes place, and therefore it must never be turned into a tribune for the proclamation of even the most elevated, most positive, but only human truth, only human wisdom. "Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification" (1 Co 2:6-7).

Here we see why all church theology, all *tradition*, grows precisely out of the "assembly as the Church," out of this sacrament of proclamation of the good news. Here we see why in it is comprehended the living, and not abstract, meaning of the classic Orthodox affirmation that only the Church is given custody of the scriptures and their interpretation. For tradition is not *another* source of the faith, "complementary" to the scriptures. It is the very same source: the living word of God, always heard and received by the Church. Tradition is the interpretation of the word of God as the source of life itself, and not of any "constructions" or "deductions." When St Athanasius the Great said that "the holy and God-inspired scriptures are sufficient for the exposition of truth,"⁶ he was not rejecting tradition, and still less preaching any specifically "biblical" method of theology—as a formal, terminological faithfulness to the scriptural "text"—for, as everyone

⁶Against the Pagans, 1, PG 25:4A.

knows, in expounding the faith of the Church he himself daringly introduced the nonbiblical term *homooousios*. He was affirming precisely the living, and not formal or terminological, link between scripture and tradition, tradition as the reading and hearing of scripture in the Holy Spirit. The Church alone knows and keeps the meaning of scripture, because in the sacrament of the word, accomplished in the church assembly, the Holy Spirit eternally gives life to the "flesh" of scripture, transforming it into "spirit and life." Any genuine theology is rooted in this sacrament of the word, in the church assembly, in which the Spirit of God exhorts the Church herself—and not simply her individual members—into all truth. Thus, any "private" reading of scripture must be rooted in the Church: outside of the mind of the Church, outside of the divine-human life of the Church it can neither be heard nor truly interpreted. So, the sacrament of the word, accomplished in the church gathering in a twofold act—reading and proclamation—is the source of the growth of each and all together into the fulness of the mind of truth.

Finally, in the sacrament of the word is revealed the collaboration of the hierarchy and the laity in the preservation of truth, which, in accordance with the famous Epistle of the Eastern Patriarchs (1869), is "entrusted to the whole people of the Church." On the one hand, in preaching the gift of *teaching* is realized: it is a charism given to the celebrant as his service in the church assembly. On the other hand, and precisely because preaching is not a "personal gift" but a charism given by the Church and realized in her gathering, the teaching service of the hierarchy is not separate from the gathering but finds in it its grace-filled source. The Holy Spirit rests on the entire Church. The ministry of the celebrant is preaching and teaching. The ministry of the people of God is in accepting this teaching. But both these ministries are of the Holy Spirit, both are accomplished by him and in him. One can neither accept nor proclaim the truth without the gift of the Holy Spirit, and this gift is given to the entire assembly. For the entire Church—and not one "sector" in it—have "received not the

⁷*Encyclical Letter of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church to the Orthodox Christians of All Lands* (the response of the patriarchs of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem and the synods of Constantinople, Antioch and Jerusalem to Pius IX's encyclical of January 6, 1848 to the Christians of the East).

spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God." "No one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God," and therefore those who are teaching do so "in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit," and those who accept the teaching accept it by the Holy Spirit. "For the unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them" (1 Co 2:11-14). In the Church, the bishop and priests are given the gift of teaching, but they are given it because they are witnesses to the faith of the Church, because the teaching is not theirs but the Church's, her unity of faith and love. Only the entire Church, manifested and actualized in the "assembly as the Church," has the mind of Christ. Only in the church gathering are all gifts, all ministries revealed in their unity and indivisibility, as manifestations of the one Spirit, who fills the whole body. And therefore, finally, each member of the Church, whatever his "rank" in the Church, must be a witness before this world of the entire fulness of the Church, and not just his *own* understanding of it.

In antiquity, the assembly responded to the celebrant's sermon with a triumphal *amen*, testifying by this to the acceptance of the word, sealing their unity in the Spirit with the celebrant. Here, in this *amen* of the people of God, is the source and principle of that "reception" of teaching by church consciousness, of which Orthodox theologians speak so often, contraposing it to the Roman division of the Church into the *learning* Church and the *teaching* Church, and also to Protestant individualism. But if it is so difficult to explain in what this "reception" consists and in what manner it is realized, perhaps this is because in our own consciousness we have almost entirely forgotten that this act is rooted in the church assembly and in the sacrament of the word accomplished in it.