

CHAPTER FIVE

The Sacrament of the Faithful

"Let us, the faithful..."

I

THE FIRST PART OF THE LITURGY, WHICH, AS WE HAVE seen, consists of the assembly as the Church, the entrance and the sacrament of the word, is completed with the so-called "Litany of Fervent Supplication" or "Augmented Litany," special petitions and prayers for the catechumens, i.e., those who are preparing for baptism, and their dismissal from the church assembly.

Like the Great Litany, the "Augmented" Litany is an inalienable part not only of the eucharistic liturgy but of every church service. But while we find the Great Litany at the beginning of each service, the Augmented Litany as a rule comes at its conclusion. Today the distinction between the two—the opening and closing litanies—has almost entirely vanished. The Augmented Litany consists of the same petitions in the same order as the Great Litany, and thus, in the Greek practice, for instance, it is simply omitted as being redundant, and the service proceeds directly to the next part of the eucharistic ceremony. But in its original design, the Augmented Litany was not only not "repetitious"—i.e., a repetition, with minor changes, of the Great Litany—but fulfilled a function in the service the opposite of that which the Great Litany embodies. What was this function?

In order to answer this question, one must recall that all of Christianity, the entire life of the Church, is constructed on the

conjoining of what at first glance appear to be two mutually contradictory affirmations. On the one hand the Church, like Christ, and because she is Christ's, is directed to the whole world, to all of creation, to all humanity. Christ sacrificed himself "on behalf of all and for all," and he sent his disciples, and therefore the Church, "into all the world [to] preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15). He is the *Savior of the world*. On the other hand, the Church affirms that through his saving love Christ is turned to each human being, for each human being, unique and unrepeatable, is not only an object of this love of Christ's but is also linked with Christ by the uniqueness of God's design for each human being. From here stems the antinomy that lies at the foundation of Christian life. The Christian is called to deny himself, to "lay down his life for his friends"; and the same Christian is summoned to "despise the flesh, for it passes away, but to care instead for the soul, for it is immortal." In order to save "one of the least of these" the shepherd left the ninety-nine, but the same Church—for the sake of her purity and fulness—cuts off sinners from herself.

We find this same polarization in religious thought. There are always those in the Church who experience the cosmic, universal calling of the Church with special force, but there are also those who are, as it were, blind and deaf to all this and see in Christianity above all a religion of "personal salvation." The same holds true in piety, in the prayers and intercessions of the Church. On the one hand they call man to the unity of love and faith, in order to fulfil the Church as the body of Christ. On the other, they are open to my needs, to my sorrows, to my joy. While not rejecting the "liturgy," i.e., the Church as the *common task*, afterward the believer requests that *his* prayer service, *his* memorial service, be served. And here, whatever possible distortions are contained in both experiences of Christianity, one can hardly doubt that they both are equally rooted in its very essence. For the antinomy of Christianity consists in the fact that it is simultaneously directed to the whole—to the entire creation, the whole world, all mankind—and to each unique and unrepeatable human person. And if the fulfilment of the human personality lies in "keeping council with all," then the fulfilment of the world lies in its becoming life for everyone to whom God has given this

world as life. The Christian faith can say that the world was created for each individual, and it can say that each person was created for the world, to surrender himself for "the life of the world."

In practice, in everyday life, it proves to be very difficult to maintain a balance between these two "dimensions," inseparable from each other and equally essential for Christianity. But if it is inevitable and even legitimate that there be a certain variety in the experience of each separate person, in the mystery of his personal calling and participation in the "economy" of the Church, then in the Church's rule of faith, expressed in her rule of prayer, is disclosed to us the fulness of the Church's twofold calling.

In order to sense and identify this, let us compare the first—the "great"—litany, with the last and concluding—the "augmented"—litany. The Great Litany bestows on us, reveals the prayer of the Church, or, still better, *the Church as prayer*, as precisely the "common task," in its full cosmic and universal extent. In the church assembly man is called above all to give up, to "lay aside" his "cares" for everything that is only *his own*, personal, private, and as it were to "dissolve" himself and what is his own in the prayer of the Church. The Great Litany discloses the Christian "hierarchy of values"; and only to the extent that each participant accepts it as his own can he fulfil his "membership," overcoming that egoism that very often taints and perverts the Church and religious life itself. The personal and the concrete, however, are not excluded from the Church's prayer. And here is the essence of the concluding, Augmented Litany: in it the Church focuses her prayer on the "private," personal needs of men. If in the first case, in the Great Litany, everything private "dies" as it were in the *whole*, then here all the power of the Church's prayer, all her love, is concentrated on *this person*, on his *needs*. But it is only because we could first identify ourselves with the *general*, in the love of Christ, because we could liberate ourselves from our egocentrism, that we can now, through the love of Christ, abiding in the Church, turn to "every Christian soul that is afflicted and weary in well-doing, in need of God's mercy and help" (petition from the vesperal litē).

In its contemporary form the Augmented Litany does not quite fulfil this function, as it reflects the tendency, common to the services, of becoming *fixed*. Thus, for example, at every litur-

gy, in one of its petitions we pray "for the priests, hieromonks, and all our brotherhood in Christ." This petition originated and became established in the liturgy in Jerusalem; it is a "local" petition regarding the members of the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre. Fully appropriate in Jerusalem, it is incomprehensible for the overwhelming majority of the faithful in other locales. Yet even with this "fixing" the Augmented Litany remains to a certain measure open: even now special petitions—for the sick, travelers, people celebrating some family event, etc.—are inserted. This practice needs to be explained in greater depth. For whenever private memorial and prayer services are detached from the liturgy, from the "common task," and become private "services of need" (*treby*), the correlation of the *common* and the *personal* in church consciousness itself is weakened, and we cease to perceive the liturgy as simultaneously the cosmic sacrament of the salvation of the world and the offering to God of "the afflictions of the people, the sighings of the captives, the sufferings of the poor, the needs of travelers, the afflictions of the infirm, the infirmities of the aged, the wailing of the infants, the promises of virgins, the prayers of widows, the tenderness of orphans . . ." (prayer of St Ambrose of Milan).

Regarding this separation of private "services of need" from the liturgy, Archimandrite Kiprian Kern writes: "... the serving of any *treby* after the liturgy so contradicts the spirit of our worship . . . The serving of prayer services after the liturgy is a liturgical contradiction."¹ The whole point, however, is that this essentially correct accusation remains fruitless as long as the balance between the common and the private is not restored within the liturgy itself, as long as, in other words, everything personal and private is not again embraced by and directed to the general, to the one and undivided love of Christ—the sacrament of which we accomplish in the eucharist.

2

AFTER THE "FERVENT SUPPLICATION" WE RECITE THE LITANY for the catechumens, read the prayer associated with it and then

¹*Evkharistia*, 341-2.

“dismiss” the catechumens. In antiquity, *catechumens* referred to Christians who were preparing for baptism—which at that time was not performed as it is now, on any day whatsoever and, moreover, as a private “service of need,” but on paschal eve. This preparation for baptism, as we already know, sometimes lasted for a rather long period of time—a year or two—and consisted of both the instruction of the new converts in the truths of the faith and their gradual introduction into the liturgical life of the Church. In time, the institution of the catechumenate gradually vanished, for baptism came to be primarily performed on infants, and the contemporary prayers for the catechumens sound somewhat like an anachronism and, even more serious, a case of nominalism. “It is not known whom the church community directs to pray,” writes Fr Kiprian Kern, “when the deacon exclaims ‘pray to the Lord, you catechumens’; it is not known whom the deacon is asking to leave the liturgical assembly when he says ‘depart, catechumens...’ There are no catechumens, and the prayer and the litany are pronounced for people whom the Church in general doesn’t have among her members or in general doesn’t intend to teach, enlighten and baptize.”² Because of this, the Greek Orthodox Church long ago dispensed with this litany, proceeding directly from the “fervent supplication” to the Cherubic Hymn, i.e., the beginning of the offering. And among the Russians, even before the revolution, during the preparations for the Moscow church council, a part of the hierarchy came out in favor of omitting this part of the liturgy because it did not answer to any real needs of the Church. All these arguments, of course, are weighty enough and true, according to Archimandrite Kiprian, who observed that “the reasoning of the majority of the church conservatives, that we should humbly apply the words and petitions about the catechumens to ourselves and equate ourselves with them, is stretching it a bit.”³ Nominalism can have no place in church life. But at some point it is appropriate to ask how nominal these petitions are and what is the proper meaning of the “relevance of the services to real needs”?

One of the essential functions of liturgical tradition is to preserve the fulness of the Christian conception and doctrine of the

²*Ibid.*, 188-9.

³*Ibid.*, 189.

world, of the Church, of man—a fulness that neither one individual man, one epoch nor one generation by itself is capable of either accommodating or preserving. Each of us as well as each “culture” or society will, conscious of it or not, *choose* precisely what it is in Christianity that answers to our “needs” or problems. It is therefore extremely important that the *tradition* of the Church, her order, dogmatic definitions and rule of prayer, not allow any of these “choices,” or opinions and adaptations, to be identified with the fulness of Christian revelation. A process of reevaluation of tradition from the point of view of its relevance to the “needs of the time” and the “questions of contemporary man” is occurring right now in western Christianity. And the criterion for what is eternal and what is obsolete in Christianity is almost without any argument declared to be precisely “contemporary man” and “contemporary culture.” In order to suit these, some are ready to discard from the Church everything that appears to be “irrelevant.” This is the eternal temptation of modernism, which periodically disturbs the church organism. And therefore, when people talk about this or that obsolete custom or tradition, it is always necessary to show the utmost care and to put the question not in terms of its relevance or irrelevance to what is “contemporary,” but in terms of whether it expresses something eternal and essential in Christianity, even if it outwardly seems “obsolete.”

Applying what has been said to the prayers for the catechumens, we must ask ourselves above all what they express, to what they are relevant in the order of Christian worship. Is it accidental that in the past the Church attached such significance to them that the entire first part of the eucharistic gathering eventually came to be called the “liturgy of the catechumens”? Does this not mean that there was a profound direction to the whole first part, its very essence, which one cannot simply do away with without touching something very important to the basic meaning of the liturgy? Or, by analogy, it could be asked: inasmuch as the liturgy is often served without communicants even on a Sunday, why not serve it only when there are communicants? Certain Protestant communities do precisely that, thinking that in this way they avoid “nominalism.” In other words, what must we see in the prayers for the catechumens—only a dried and withered limb (not unlike the royal Many Years, which fell away when there no

longer was an Orthodox tsar), or an essential part of the very *order of Christian worship*?

I believe that the latter is closer to the truth. For the prayers for the catechumens are above all a liturgical expression of a fundamental calling of the Church—precisely *the Church as mission*. The Church came into the world as mission—“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation” (Mk 16:15)—and cannot, without betraying her nature, cease to be mission. Historically, of course, the prayers for the catechumens were introduced at a time when the Church not only contained the institution of the catechumenate but in actuality considered herself directed toward the world with the aim of converting it to Christ, when she considered the world as an object of mission. Then the historical setting changed, and it seemed that the world had become Christian. But do we not live again today in a world that has either turned away from Christianity or has never even heard of Christ? Is not *mission* again in the center of church consciousness? And is it not a sin against this basic calling when the Church, the ecclesial community, locks herself in her “inner” life and considers herself called only “to attend to the spiritual needs” of her members and thus for all intents and purposes denies that mission is a basic ministry and task of the Church in “this world”?

Perhaps in our day it is important precisely to preserve the structure of worship that conjoins mission and the fruits of mission: the “liturgy of the catechumens” and the “liturgy of the faithful.” For whom do we pray when we hear the petitions of the Litany of the Catechumens: “that the Lord may have mercy on them...that He may teach them the word of truth...reveal to them the gospel of righteousness...unite them to His Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church”? In the first place, of course, for all those who are indeed about to enter the Church: children, new converts, “seekers.” But even more, for those whom *we* can draw to the “Sun of Righteousness,” were it not for our laziness, our indifference, our habit of considering the Church “our” property, existing for us and not for the divine task, not for him who “desires *all* men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Thus, while preserving its direct meaning, the prayers for the catechumens must become for us a constant reminder and judgment: what are you doing—what is your church doing—for

Christ's mission in the world? How are you fulfilling the basic command of the Head of the Church: "go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation"?

3

THE FIRST PART OF THE LITURGY DRAWS TOWARD ITS CONCLUSION with the dismissal of all who are not baptized but still only preparing for baptism. In antiquity, those doing *penance*, i.e., who were temporarily excommunicated from participation in the sacrament, also left immediately after the catechumens. "Let no catechumen, no one whose faith is not firm, no one under penance, no one impure draw near to the holy sacrament." The works of St Gregory the Great, referring to this exclamation by the deacon, admonish: "Whoever is not receiving communion, let him leave the assembly."⁴ Only the *faithful*, i.e., baptized members of the Church, are left in the church assembly, and they are now summoned through a general prayer to prepare themselves for the eucharistic offering.

"Let us, the faithful"—*only* the faithful. With these words we reach a turning point in the service, the deepest meaning of which is almost lost to contemporary church consciousness. In our day the doors of the temple are open throughout the entire liturgy, and anyone can enter or leave at any time. And this is because in contemporary understanding it is essentially only the priest who "serves" and the service takes place in the altar, *for* and *on behalf of* the laity, who are present and take part in it "individually"—through prayer, through paying attention, sometimes through receiving communion. Not only the laity but the clergy as well have simply forgotten that the eucharist, by its very nature, is a closed assembly of the Church, and that in this assembly all are *ordained* and all *serve*, each in his place, in the one liturgical action of the Church. Who is serving, in other words, is not the clergy, and not even the clergy with the laity, but the Church, which is constituted and made manifest in all fulness by everyone together.

⁴*Dialogues* 1:23, PL 77:233.

There is much talk today about the participation of the laity in church life, about their "royal priesthood," about the raising of their "church consciousness." But one fears that all these efforts to restore to the laity their rightful place in the Church lead nowhere as long as they proceed—as they do now—exclusively from the correlation of "clergy-laity" and not from the correlation, above all, of "Church-world," which alone can truly make clear the nature of the Church and, consequently, the place and correlation of her various members. The deficiency in contemporary church psychology lies in regarding the whole life of the Church in terms of the interrelation of clergy and laity. We have equated the Church with the clergy, and the "laity" with the world—witness the Russian and Greek terms for laity: *miriane* (from *mir*, world) and *kosmikoi*—and this in turn distorts both this interrelationship itself and the clergy's and laity's understanding of their place in the Church.

We find ourselves before a paradox. On the one hand, the purpose of the "clergy" seems to consist in "ministering to" the laity—which means to perform the services, govern and manage church affairs, teach, tend to the spiritual and moral condition of the flock. On the other hand, many consider it wrong that the laity themselves take no part in this ministry and that all direction and leadership of church life is concentrated in the hands of the clergy alone. Today when one speaks of the participation of the laity in church life, he usually has in mind their participation in church administration, in liturgical preaching, in councils—i.e., precisely all those things that, by essence and from time immemorial, were the express ministry of the hierarchy, for the sake of which they were established and still exist in the Church. A false dilemma arises: either the laity are a "passive" element and all activity in the Church belongs to the clergy, or else some share of the clergy's functions can, and therefore must, be transferred to the laity. This dilemma in fact results in a conflict between pure "clericalism," which divides the Church into "active" and "passive" parts and demands of the laity only blind submission to the clergy, and a peculiar form of church "democracy," according to which the only special sphere of activity of the clergy is the services (performing the sacraments and various minor offices), and everything else is to be shared with the laity. But if the first case

results in everyone who wishes to be "active" almost inevitably joining the clergy, then in the second the problem becomes providing "representation" for the laity in all church affairs.

All this, however, is a false dilemma, a dead end. For the question of the interrelationship of the clergy and laity is in fact inseparable from the question of the *purpose of the Church herself*, and apart from this it has no meaning. Before we clear up the role of clergy and laity in the conduct of church "business," we must remind ourselves of the fundamental task to which the Church herself is called and how she is commanded to carry it out. The point is, being the new people of God, gathered, redeemed and sanctified by the Lord Jesus Christ, the Church is *consecrated* by him for witness about him *in the world and before the world*.

Christ is the savior of the world. And the salvation of the world was already accomplished in his incarnation, his sacrifice on the cross, death, resurrection and glorification. In him God became man, and man is deified, sin and death are conquered, life is made manifest and triumphant. And thus, first of all, the Church is his life, "which was with the Father and was made manifest to us" (1 Jn 1:2)—i.e., Christ himself, living in the people who have accepted him and who in him have unity with God and with each other. Inasmuch as this unity in Christ with God is also unity in Christ with all, inasmuch as this new and eternal life, eternal not only in duration but also in "quality," is the goal of creation and salvation, the Church in herself has no other "business" than the incessant acquisition of the Holy Spirit and growth into the fulness of Christ, who lives in her. In Christ everything is "done" and no one needs to add anything to his work. Therefore, "in herself" the Church always abides in "the last days," and her life, according to St Paul, is "hid with Christ in God." In every liturgy she meets the coming Lord and has the fulness of the kingdom, which is coming in power; in her everyone who hungers and thirsts is granted, here, on this earth, in this age, the contemplation of the imperishable light of Tabor, the possession of perfect joy and peace in the Holy Spirit. In this new life there is no difference between strong and weak, slave and free, male and female, but "if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Co 5:17). God gives the Spirit without measure, all are consecrated by him, all are called to fulness and perfection, to "life abundant."

But that is why the hierarchical structure of the Church itself, the distinction between priests and laymen and all the multitude of her ministries has no other purpose than the growth of each and all together into the fulness of the body of Christ. The Church is not a religious society in which God rules *through* the priests *over* the people, but the very body of Christ, with no other source and content of her life than the divine-human life of Christ himself. This means that in the Church no one submits to another (as laity to clergy), but all together submit to each other in the unity of the divine-human life. In the Church the authority of the hierarchy is indeed “absolute”—but not because this authority is granted to them by Christ. Rather, it is because it is the authority of Christ himself, just as the obedience of the laity is itself the obedience of Christ. For Christ is not *outside* the Church, he is not *above* the Church, but he is in her and she is in him, as his body. “We should regard the bishop as the Lord himself,” writes St Ignatius of Antioch concerning the authority of the hierarchy,⁵ and regarding obedience he says: “follow the bishop as Jesus Christ did the Father.”⁶ There is a certain deep misunderstanding of the mystery of the Church in the various endeavors to “limit” the authority of the hierarchy, to lower their ministry solely to the “sacramental” or liturgical sphere, as if the ministry of administration or any other service could have any other source besides precisely the “sacramental,” i.e., the Holy Spirit himself, as if “authority” and “obedience” did not cease, precisely in their “sacramentality,” to be merely human and did not become Christ-like, as if, finally, both authority and obedience and all other ministries in the Church could have some other content besides the love of Christ, and some other goal besides the service of all for all, toward the fulfilment of the Church in all her fulness. “Let no one’s position swell his head, for faith and love are everything—there is nothing preferable to them,” writes St Ignatius.⁷ And if, in their ministry, members of the Church betray the Christ-like nature of their service and regress from grace and love to the law, and from the law to lawlessness, then, of course, it will not be through the “law of this world,” through constitutions and legislatures, that the

⁵*Ephesians* 6:1, tr. Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, 89.

⁶*Smyrneans* 8:1, tr. Richardson, 115.

⁷*Smyrneans* 6:1, tr. Richardson, 114.

spirit of Christ will return to church life, but through unceasing "rekindling of the gift of God" (2 Tm 1:6), which never abandons the Church.

But being made perfect in Christ, salvation is accomplished in the world even while the hour of the final triumph of Christ, when "God will be all in all" (1 Co 15:28), is still to come. The whole world still lies in evil, and the "prince of this world" still has dominion in it. And therefore the sacrifice, offered once and for all, is always offered and the Lord is crucified for the sins of the world. He remains the priest and intercessor for the world before the Father, and thus the Church, his body, a participant in his flesh and blood, takes part in his priesthood and intercedes by his intercession. She offers not a new sacrifice, for all the fulness of salvation has been given to the world "through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb 10:10), and "by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Heb 10:14), but, being his body, *she is herself priesthood, offering and sacrifice*. And if we live in the Church through the love of Christ, if love is the source and content and goal of her life, then this love exists in order that "as he is, so are we in this world" (1 Jn 4:17). He came to save the world and to give his life for it. By what is the world saved if not by Christ's sacrifice, and how can we further fulfil the ministry of Christ if we do not take part in his sacrifice? This is also the "universal priesthood" of the Church: the very priesthood of Christ, in which she is consecrated, being his body. This is her first service in relation to the world, for which she was left and abides in the world: "to proclaim the death of the Lord, to confess his resurrection, to await his coming." And to this ministry everyone who in baptism was joined with Christ and made a member of his body is ordained. We are ordained so that, together constituting the Church, we may offer his sacrifice for the sins of the world, and in offering it, witness to salvation.

The "royal" or "universal" priesthood in the Church does not consist in her being a society of priests—for there are both priests and "laymen" in her—but in the fact that she as a whole, as the body of Christ, has a priestly ministry in relation to the world, she fulfils the priesthood and intercession of the Lord himself. Again, the very distinction between clergy and "laity" inside the

Church is necessary in order that the Church may be in her fulness a sacred organism—for, if the priests are the ministers of the sacraments, then through the sacraments the entire Church is sanctified and consecrated for the ministry of Christ, and herself becomes the mystery of the theandric reality of Christ. The “priesthood” of the laity does not consist in their being some sort of priests of a second order in the Church—for the ministries are distinct and must never be confused—but in that being the *faithful*, i.e., the members of the Church, they are *ordained* into the ministry of Christ to the world, and they realize this, above all, through participation in the offering of Christ’s sacrifice on behalf of the world.

Such, in the end, is the meaning of the exclamation “let us, the faithful.” Through it the Church separates herself from the world, because, being the body of Christ, she is already “not of this world.” But this separation is accomplished *for the sake of* the world, for the offering of Christ’s sacrifice “on behalf of all and for all.” If the Church did not have in herself the fulness of salvation, she would have nothing to witness to the world about. And if she were not to witness, if her calling and service were not the offering of Christ’s sacrifice, then Christ would not be the savior of the world, but the savior *from the world*. And, finally, with this exclamation we are reminded that the meaning of the liturgy is not that in it the priest serves for the laity, or that the laity participates in the service each “for himself,” but that the entire assembly, in the mutual submission of all ministries one to another, constitutes a single body for the realization of the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

And thus, when we hear these words, let us ask ourselves: are we confessing ourselves to be the *faithful*? Are we agreeing to fulfil the ministry to which each of us was ordained on the day of our baptism? Here there is no place for false humility or for separating ourselves from the gathering on the pretext of our sins. No one has ever been worthy of this participation, and no amount of righteousness can make a man able to offer the sacrifice of Christ for the world. But he himself has ordained, sanctified and placed us in this ministry, and he himself accomplishes it in us. We must remember, finally, that we do not go to church *for ourselves* and for our own desires, but for the service of Christ’s work in the world.

For there is no other way of *our* salvation than to give our lives over to Christ—"who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and has made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father" (Rv 1:5-6). We are gathered in the eucharist for the fulfilment of this service, and we now proceed to its first liturgical act, to the offering.

4

THE SOLEMN ACT THAT SIGNIFIES THE END OF THE LITURGY OF the word and the beginning of the liturgy of the faithful is the unfolding of the *antimension* on the altar. This Greek word, which literally means "in place of a table," refers to the linen or silk rectangle that usually has a picture of the Lord being placed in the tomb, as well a particle of a relic sewn into the middle in a special pocket, and the signature of the bishop who consecrated this particular antimension on the bottom.

The history, development and usage of the antimension in the Orthodox Church is fairly complex and even contradictory. For example, while the chief meaning of the antimension among the Russians is focused on the relics sewn into it, the Greek East uses the antimension without relics—which alone points to a certain contradiction in the understanding of its function in worship. As its history is of interest to specialists, we shall submit our remarks on it in a special note.⁸ Here it is enough to emphasize that for the entire Orthodox Church the common and therefore normative feature of the antimension is its connection with the bishop. Like the holy chrism, the antimension is blessed only by the bishop, and his signature on it serves as the condition for its "validity." And whatever further stratifications of the various meanings of the antimension, it originally signified the bishop's "delegation" to a presbyter of the right to perform the eucharist. As I already pointed out above, the normal celebrant of the eucharist in the early Church was the bishop. For, inasmuch as the eucharist is realized and experienced above all as the sacrament of the assembly, the sacrament of the Church—i.e., of the unity of the people of God—then it is obvious that its celebrant would be the one

⁸Fr Schmemann was unable to write this supplementary note before his death.

whose ministry consists in the creation, expression and preservation of this unity. That is why even when the Church ceased to be a relatively small group of believers and embraced practically the entire population of the empire, traces of this understanding and experience of the eucharist as a presupposed "gathering of all in one place" under the presidency of the bishop were preserved for a long time in church practice. In Rome, for example, even in the seventh century, although the number of Christians made several gatherings inevitable, only one eucharist was performed, and the consecrated gifts were distributed by the deacons to the other assemblies. This underscores the meaning of the sacrament as the sacrament of the unity of the Church—as the overcoming of the sinful shatteredness and division of the world. And even today, the interdiction in the Orthodox Church against one priest serving more than one eucharist on the same altar bears witness to the understanding of the eucharist, which goes back to Christian antiquity, as the sacrament of the Church and unity *par excellence*. It is precisely in this connection that we need to understand the meaning of the antimimension.

Historically, the antimimension arose from a necessity to coordinate in actual life, on the one hand, the meaning of the eucharist as an act of the entire Church, expressing her unity and therefore being the primary ministry of the bishop, and on the other hand, the necessity of a multitude of eucharistic assemblies. St Ignatius of Antioch had written: "You should regard that eucharist as valid which is celebrated either by the bishop or by someone he authorizes."⁹ This indicates that already in those early times there were instances when a bishop could not serve it and delegated the responsibility to one of his presbyters. In the later development and complication of church life, what began as an exception became a general rule. The bishop was gradually transformed from the leader of a concrete church community into an administrator of a more or less extensive ecclesiastical district (eparchy), and the "church," as a living community, became a "parish." For a brief moment the Church perhaps did not know which was better: to preserve the former immediate link of the bishop with the community, and thus to multiply the number of bishops so that one

⁹*Smyrneans* 8:1, tr. Richardson, 115.

would head each parish (such is the historical context of the short-lived and unsuccessful experiment with the so-called *chorepiskopoi*), or to preserve the regional and thus ecumenical significance of the episcopate and therefore grant new functions to the members of the episcopal council, or "prebyterium," and place presbyters at the head of parishes. Historically the second alternative triumphed and gradually led to the appearance of the ministry of the "parish priest," i.e., an individual leader of a more or less extensive church community, a performer of the services and sacraments and the immediate pastor of his flock.

One can hardly doubt that in current church consciousness the idea of pastorship is chiefly linked with the priest, and not with the bishop, who has been transformed into an "archpastor" and is much more strongly perceived as the head and superior of the clergy, an "administrator" of the Church, rather than the living bearer of church unity and the focus of church life. (Thus, it is characteristic that we call the priest, not the bishop, "father," while we greet the bishop as "master.") But, whatever the pluses and minuses of the change that took place in the Church, there is no doubt that the meaning of the contemporary "parish" does not coincide with that of the original community—the "Church." The early "church" possessed, in the unity of the bishop, clerics and people, the fulness of church life and church gifts. The parish, in contrast, lacks this fulness. Not only administratively, but mystically, spiritually, it is a part of the greater unity, and only in union with the other parts, the other "parishes," can it live in the entire fulness of the Church. Consequently, the calling and mystical essence of the episcopate consists in ensuring that no one community, no single "parish" becomes self-contained, shut up in itself, and ceases to live and breathe by the "catholicity" of the Church.

Thus, one of the chief causes of the change indicated above, precisely the separation of the bishop from the concrete community and his substitution by the parish priest, was the fear of reducing the bishop to the level of the leader of a purely local community and of completely identifying him with local "interests" and "needs." For the time when this change occurred was the time of the reconciliation of the Church with the empire, when Christianity was turned into the state religion. The local

Church—a community, in that era of persecution, separated from natural life—was the Church *in* a given city, but not the Church *of* the given city. Now it gradually began to merge with the natural city or provincial society, being transformed into its so-called “religious projection.” And this in turn signified a deep change in the psychology and self-consciousness of the Christian. From a “third race” of people (in the expression of one of the earliest Christian documents, the *Letter to Diognetus*), who were living in a foreign land but whose true home was somewhere else, Christians now became full and equal citizens of the land, and their faith became the natural, compulsory and self-evident religion of all society. And it was precisely in hopes of averting the ultimate merger of the Church and the world, of the church assembly and “natural” society, that the Church was compelled in a certain sense to modify her original structure and place the bishop *over* the parishes, in order that each of them would always be transformed into the Church, in order to remind them of the otherworldly, universal calling of the Church.

Yet this also signified an essential change in eucharistic practice and even in the very order of the eucharistic assembly. The presbyter, who at first had been a “concelebrant” of the bishop in the eucharistic gathering and only in exceptional cases had substituted for him as the *president*, now became the president of the eucharistic gathering in the parish. We have already seen that this essential change is apparent to this very day in the eucharistic offices, particularly in the first part of the liturgy. But all the same, such is the organic link between the eucharist, the Church and the bishop, that even when the eucharist was for all purposes separated from the bishop as its natural celebrant and presider and became the basic lot of the parish clergy, it still remained linked with the bishop, and the witness to this link, its guardian, is precisely the antimension. From any truly deep point of view (and not reduced to only administrative or even canonical categories) the eucharist is today, always and everywhere accomplished *by the commission of the bishop*, or, speaking in juridical language, by the authority delegated by him. But this is not because the bishop bears authority as an individual. In the early, pre-Nicene Church he exercised his authority precisely with his “council” or “prebyterium,” and the expression “monarchical episcopate,” used so

frequently in church history textbooks, very poorly expresses the spirit and structure of the early Church. The issue here is not "authority" but the nature of the eucharist as the sacrament of the Church, as an act in which the unity of the Church and her other-worldly and universal nature is fulfilled and realized. Not only "quantitatively," but "qualitatively," ontologically, the Church is *more* than the parish, and the parish is the Church only to the degree that it partakes of the fulness of *tserkovnost'*, that it "transcends" itself as a parish and overcomes the inner, natural "ego-centrism" and narrowness peculiar to everything "local." Both Protestant congregationalism, which simply identifies any parish with the Church, and Roman centralism, which identifies the Church only with the "whole," with the sum of all "parishes," are equally foreign to Orthodoxy. In the Orthodox understanding, the Church exists so that each of her parts can live in fulness and be an incarnation of the fulness of the Church—so that, in other words, each part can live *by the whole* and *wholly*. The parish is, on the one hand, only a *part* of the Church, and only in the bishop and through the bishop is it linked with the fulness of the Church, always receiving this fulness and itself "revealing" it. This is the meaning of the dependence of the parish on the bishop and through him on the "whole" Church. On the other hand, the eucharist is a gift of the Church to the parish, and through it each parish partakes of the "whole Christ," receives all the fulness of the beneficent gifts and identifies itself with the Church. From this stems the dependence of the eucharist on the bishop, on his "commission," and along with this the self-evidency of the eucharist as the focus of the "parish" and all its life. Without the link with the bishop the eucharist would cease to be an act of the whole Church, the surmounting of the natural narrowness of the parish. Without the eucharist the parish would cease to be a part of the Church, living by the fulness of the Church's gifts.

All this is expressed in the antimimension. I repeat, whatever were the developments and stratifications in its meaning, its fundamental significance lies in this: when the priest unfolds it upon the altar in preparation for the offering of the eucharistic sacrifice, and when he kisses the signature of the bishop on it, this altar is "fulfilled" not only as the altar of the given temple and local community, but as the one altar of the Church of God, as the place of

the offering, presence and coming of the *whole Christ*, in whom we are all the body of Christ, in whom all "parts," all divisions, are overcome by the "whole" and given the gift and grace of the new life and above all the *fulness of life*. For this fulness is precisely preserved and fulfilled in the indissoluble bond of bishop, eucharist and the Church.

CHAPTER SIX

The Sacrament of Offering

"... Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

EPHESIANS 5:2

I

BREAD AND WINE. BY BRINGING THESE HUMBLE HUMAN gifts—our earthly food and drink—and placing them on the altar, we perform, often without thinking of it, that most ancient, primordial rite that from the first day of human history constituted the core of every religion: we offer a sacrifice to God. "Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock" (Gn 4:2-4).

A thousand books have been written on sacrifices and sacrificial offerings, and they still produce the most varied explanations. Theologians, historians, sociologists, psychologists—all have their own points of view, endeavoring to elucidate the essence of the sacrifice, some finding it in fear, some in joy, some in "lower" and some in "higher" causes. And whatever may be the value of all these explanations, it remains indubitable that wherever and whenever man turns to God, he necessarily senses the need to offer him the most precious things that he has, what is most vital for his life, as a gift and sacrifice. From the time of Cain and Abel,

the blood of sacrifices has daily covered the earth and the smoke of burnt offerings has unceasingly risen to heaven.

Our "refined" sensibilities are horrified by these blood sacrifices, by these "primitive" religions. In our horror, however, do we not forget and lose something very basic, very primary, without which in essence there is no religion? For in its ultimate depths religion is nothing other than *thirst for God*: "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God" (Ps 42:2); and often "primitive" people know this thirst better, they sense it more deeply—as the psalmist declared once and for all—than contemporary man does, with all his "spiritualized" religion, abstract "moralism" and dried-up intellectualism.

To want God means above all to know with one's whole being that *he is*, that outside of him there is only darkness, emptiness and meaninglessness, for in him and only in him is the cause, the meaning, the goal and the joy of all existence. This means further to love him with one's whole heart, one's whole mind and one's whole being. And this means, finally, to feel and to recognize our complete and boundless alienation from him, our frightful guilt and loneliness in this rupture—to know that ultimately there is only one sin: not wanting God and being separated from him; and there is only one sorrow: "not being a saint,"¹ not having *sanctification*—unity with the One who is holy.

But where there is this thirst for God, this consciousness of sin and this yearning for genuine life, there necessarily is sacrifice. In the sacrifice man gives himself and his own over to his God, because, knowing God, he cannot but love him, and loving him, he cannot but strive toward him and toward unity with him. But as his sins stand on this road and encumber him, in his sacrifice man likewise seeks forgiveness and atonement; he offers it as a propitiation for sin, he fills it with all the pain and torment of his life, so that through suffering, blood and death he may finally *expiate* his guilt and be reunited with God. And however darkened and coarsened our religious consciousness may be, however crude, "utilitarian" or "pagan" is man's understanding of his sacrifice—as well as of him in whose name and to whom he offers it—at its basis necessarily remains man's primordial, indestructible

¹Leon Bloy, *La femme pauvre*.

thirst for God. And in his sacrifices, in these innumerable offerings, invocations and holocausts, man, albeit in darkness, albeit savage and primitive, seeks and thirsts for the one for whom he cannot cease to seek, for "God created us for himself, and our hearts will not rest until they rest in him."²

2

ALL THESE SACRIFICES, HOWEVER, WERE POWERLESS TO destroy sin and restore the fulness of unity with God that man had forfeited. All alike, and not only Old Testament sacrifices, could be related to the words of the epistle to the Hebrews: "it [the law] can never, by the same sacrifices which are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered? If the worshipers had once been cleansed, they would no longer have any consciousness of sin" (10:1-2). They were powerless because, though filled with thirst for God and for unity with him, they themselves remained *under the law of sin*. And sin is not guilt, which can be smoothed over and atoned for—albeit at a very high price. Sin is above all the rupture from God of life itself, and that is why it is such a fall and shattering, in which all life, and not just individual actions, becomes sinful, mortal and under the "shadow of death." And this fallen life, wholly subordinate to the law of sin, does not, and cannot, have the power to heal and revive itself, to fill itself with life again, to make itself sanctified once more. Separation, yearning, repentance remain, and man includes them in his "religion", and in his sacrifices, but this religion and these sacrifices cannot save man from slavery to sin and death, just as one who is falling into an abyss cannot turn back upward, one who is buried alive cannot dig himself up, a dead man cannot raise himself. Only God can save—precisely *save*—us, for our life needs salvation, and not simply help. Only he can fulfil that concerning which all sacrifices remain an impotent plea, of which they were all expectation, prefiguration and anticipation. And he fulfils this in the ultimate, perfect and all-embracing sacrifice in which he gave his only-begotten Son for the salvation of the world, in which the Son

²Augustine, *Confessions* 1:1.

of God, having become the Son of man, offered himself as a sacrifice for the life of the world.

In this sacrifice everything is fulfilled and accomplished. In it, above all, sacrifice itself is cleansed, restored and manifested in all its essence and fulness, in its preeternal meaning as perfect love and thus perfect life, consisting of perfect self-sacrifice: in Christ "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son," and in Christ man so loved God that he gave himself totally, and in this twofold giving nothing remains not given, and love reigns in all—"the crucifying love of the Father, the crucified love of the Son, and the love of the Spirit triumphing through the power of the cross."³ In this sacrifice, furthermore, because it was made only through love and only in love, was forgiveness of sins granted. And finally, in it man's eternal thirst for God was fulfilled and slaked: the divine life became our food, our life. Everything that man, consciously or unconsciously, in darkness, partially, distortedly, included in his sacrifices, everything that man hoped for from them, and all that "the heart of man could not conceive," was fulfilled, perfected and granted *once*—once and for all—in this sacrifice of sacrifices.

The ultimate and most joyful mystery of all is that Christ gave this sacrifice to us, to the new humanity regenerated in him and united with him: the Church. In this new life, his life in us and our life in him, his sacrifice became our sacrifice, his offering our offering. "Abide in me, and I in you" (Jn 15:4). What does this mean, if not that his life, fulfilled by him in his perfect sacrifice, was granted to us as our life, as the only true life, as the fulfilment of God's eternal design for mankind? For if Christ's life is offering and sacrifice, then also our life in him and the whole life of the Church are offering and sacrifice—the offering of ourselves and each other and the whole world, the sacrifice of love and unity, praise and thanksgiving, forgiveness and healing, communion and unity.

And thus this sacrifice, which we have been given and commanded to offer and in the offering of which the Church fulfils herself as Christ's life in us and ours in him, is not a new sacrifice, something "other" in relation to the single, all-encompassing and unrepeatable one that Christ offered *once* (Heb 9:28). Embracing

³Filaret (Drozdov), Metropolitan of Moscow, *Homily on Holy Friday*, in *Sermons and Discourses*, 1 (St Petersburg, 1873).

and uniting in himself all "things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1:10), filling all things with himself, being the life of life, Christ offers all to the God and Father. In his sacrifice is forgiveness of all sins, all the fulness of salvation and sanctification, the fulfilment and therefore the completion of all "religion." And therefore other, new sacrifices are unnecessary and impossible. They are impossible, however, precisely because through the one and unrepeatable sacrifice of Christ our life itself was restored, regenerated and fulfilled as offering and sacrifice, as the possibility of always converting our bodies and our whole lives into "a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (Rm 12:1); "be yourself built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God, through Jesus Christ" (1 Pt 2:5). New sacrifices are not needed, for in Christ we "have access . . . to the Father" (Eph 2:18). This access, however, consists in the fact that in it our life has become offering and sacrifice, it "grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph 2:21), through the joy of offering ourselves and each other and all creation to God, who has called us into "his wonderful light." The Church lives by this offering and fulfils herself in it. Each time we again offer this sacrifice, we know with joy that we offer it *through Jesus Christ*, that it is he who, giving himself to us and abiding in us, eternally offers the sacrifice that was once and forever offered by him. In offering our life to God, we know that we are offering Christ—for he is our life, the life of the world and the life of life, and we have nothing to bring to God except him. We know that in this offering Christ is "the Offerer and the Offered, the Receiver and the Received."

3

THE EUCHARISTIC OFFERING BEGINS WITH A SOLEMN RITE THAT is now usually called the "Great Entrance." This is a secondary name; for it is absent from the service books. It was introduced and came into fixed usage when the original meaning of this rite, as precisely the bringing of the sacrifice to the sacrificial table, became somewhat obscured, and the entrance into the sanctuary with the gifts became overgrown with the illustrative symbolism

already familiar to us and began to be interpreted as an image of the Lord's royal entrance into Jerusalem or the burial of Christ by Joseph and Nicodemus, etc.

We must acknowledge that the chief source of this symbolic complication of the Great Entrance was the gradual detachment of the preparation of the eucharistic gifts, i.e., the offering in the immediate, literal sense of the word, from the liturgy itself and its disjunction into a separate rite, which acquired the name *prothesis* or *proskomidē* (from the Greek, meaning the carrying or conveying of something to a certain place). In contemporary practice this service is performed *before* the liturgy, at the side of the sanctuary, by the clergy alone. The participation of the laity in it is reduced to giving ("outside," by the way, through third parties) their personal prosphora with lists of names to be mentioned—"For the Health of..." and "For the Repose of..."—and even this is not done everywhere.

What is most noteworthy in the *proskomidē* from the theological point of view is its *order*, which consists of a certain *symbolic sacrifice*. The preparation of the eucharistic bread is likened to an immolation of the lamb, and the pouring of wine and water into the cup recalls the effusion of blood and water from the ribs of the crucified Christ, etc. At the same time it is evident that this sufficiently complex symbolical rite is in no way a substitute for the liturgy itself, for which it is a preparation.

Thus, the question inevitably arises: what is the meaning of these symbols? What is the connection between this, as it were, "preliminary" sacrifice and the offering that, as we already were saying, constitutes the essence of the eucharist? These questions are of tremendous importance for an understanding of the liturgy, and yet they are simply ignored by our school theology. And as far as liturgists are concerned, their answers consist entirely of references to that "symbolism," as though it were inherent to our worship, that explains precisely nothing. And yet this is the whole point: in its essence, in the fact that it is rooted in the divine incarnation and in its orientation to the coming kingdom of God manifested in power, the liturgy rejects and excludes the contraposition of "symbol" and "reality." But meanwhile, every day over the course of centuries, thousands of priests, while making cross-shaped incisions in the eucharistic bread, recite, reflecting

with reverence and faith, the hallowed words: "Sacrificed [i.e., offered as a sacrifice] is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."

What is this? "Simply a symbol," in which "as a matter of fact" nothing happens, nothing is accomplished, there is no "reality"? But then we venture to ask: precisely why is it needed? Performed in the solitude of the sanctuary, removed from the presence of the laity, it cannot be attributed even to pedagogical considerations, as a certain "lesson." It is imperative to analyze this question more deeply, for a correct understanding of the eucharist and the sacrificial offering accomplished therein depends on it.

4

WHILE NOT REDUCING THIS QUESTION TO HISTORY ALONE, IT does require first of all an understanding of the historical factors that determined the development of our contemporary *proskomidē*. The point of departure of this development is without any doubt the participation, self-evident for early Christianity, of all members of the Church in the eucharistic offering. In the consciousness, in the experience and in the practice of the early Church, the eucharistic sacrifice was offered not only on behalf of all and for all, but *by all*, and therefore the real offering by each of his own gift, his own sacrifice, was a basic condition of it. Each person who came into the gathering of the Church brought with him everything that, "as he has made up his mind" (2 Co 9:7), he could spare for the needs of the Church, and this meant for the sustenance of the clergy, widows and orphans, for helping the poor, for all the "good works" in which the Church realizes herself as the love of Christ, as concern of all for all and service of all to all. The eucharistic offering is rooted precisely in this sacrifice of love, therein lies its origin. And this was so self-evident for the early Church that, according to one witness, orphans who lived at the expense of the Church and did not have anything to bring participated in this sacrifice of love by bringing water.

In the early Church, the appointed ministers of charity and thus of this sacrifice of love were the *deacons*. Concern not only for

the "material prosperity" of the community (a concern that in our day is reduced almost entirely to the activity of all manner of church committees and, in effect, of the entire church organization) but precisely for love, as the very essence of church life, for the Church, as the sacrificial and active service of all for all, lay primarily with them. And just as in the early Church the place and ministry of each in the eucharistic gathering expressed the place and ministry (*leitourgia*) of each in the church community, so to the deacons fell the responsibility for receiving the gifts from those who came, for sorting them out and for preparing that portion of them that, as an expression of this offering, of this sacrifice of love, was to constitute the "matter" of the eucharistic mystery. The performance of the *proskomidē* by the deacons—and not, like today, by the priests—was preserved in the Church right up to the fourteenth century, as was the bringing of the holy gifts precisely by them to the presider at the beginning of the eucharistic oblation, the eucharist proper. And while we shall still speak further about the change that occurred at that time, we can already note that if in our day the presence of a deacon in *every* church community has ceased to be perceived as necessary and self-evident, as one of the conditions of the *fulness* of church life, and the "diaconate" has been converted into a certain "decorative" appendage (particularly in the hierarchical service) and likewise a "step" on the way to the priesthood, then is that not because the experience of the Church herself as the love of Christ and the liturgy as the expression and fulfilment of that love has been weakened in us, if not entirely dissipated?

Gradually, however, this original, as it were "family" practice of the participation of all in the offering of the gifts became complicated and modified. The sudden increase of the numbers of Christians—especially after the conversion to Christianity of the whole empire, with practically the entire populace becoming Christian—made it impossible in practice to bring to the eucharistic gathering of the Church everything necessary for church "philanthropy" and for the living needs of the community. Not only was she recognized by the government, but with all "charitable" activity being gradually concentrated in her hands, the Church could not but have been transformed into a complex organization, overcome by an "apparatus." And this in itself led to

the eucharistic gathering, which in the early Church had been the focus of the *entire* life of the Church—teaching and proclamation, philanthropy and administration—ceasing to be such. “Good works,” being gradually isolated into a special sphere of church activity, ceased outwardly to “depend” on the eucharistic offering. Here, however, we approach the most important element for an understanding of the *proskomidē*. For so obvious was the *inner* link between the eucharist and the “sacrifice of love,” the inner dependency of one on the other in the consciousness of the Church, that the preparation of the gifts, on ceasing to be an expression of practical needs, remained as a rite, expressing this inner dependency, realizing this inner link.

Here we find a vivid example of that law of liturgical “development” according to which changes in outward *form* are frequently determined by the necessity of preserving inner *content*, of preserving intact the succession and identity of the experience and faith of the Church under all changes in the outward circumstances of her existence. However complex and specifically “Byzantine” in many respects was the development of the *proskomidē*, reaching its present form only in the fourteenth century, for us it is important that it remained and still remains an expression of that *reality* from which it was born, a witness to the organic link between the eucharist and the essence of the Church herself as love, and *therefore*, sacrifice and offering, as the fulfilment in time and space of the sacrifice of Christ. And now, having considered the historical meaning of the development of the *proskomidē*, we may go on to its theological meaning.

5

THIS MEANING CONSISTS IN THAT, FIRST OF ALL, BY WHOMEVER and however the “matter,” i.e., the bread and cup, of the eucharistic mystery is offered, from the very beginning we foresee and anticipate in them Christ’s sacrifice of love, Christ himself, offered by us and in himself offering us to the God and Father. And this foreknowledge, our knowing *before the liturgy* and therefore “signifying” the predestination of the bread to be changed into the body of Christ and the wine into the blood of Christ, consti-

tutes in essence the basis and condition of the very *possibility* of the eucharistic offering.

In actuality, we only serve the liturgy and only can serve it because the sacrifice of Christ *has already been offered* and in it was revealed and fulfilled the preeternal design of God for the world and mankind, their predestination, and therefore also their possibility of becoming a sacrifice to God and in this sacrifice finding their fulfilment.

Yes, the proskomidē is a *symbol*, but, like everything in the Church, it is a symbol completely filled with the *reality* of the new creation, which already exists in Christ but which in "this world" is known only through faith. Thus, for faith there are only transparent symbols. When, preparing for the eucharistic mystery, we take the bread into our hands and place it on the diskos, *we already know* that this bread, like everything in the world, like the world itself, has been sanctified by the incarnation of the Son of God, by his becoming man, and that this sanctification consists in Christ's restoration of the possibility for the world to become a sacrifice to God and for man to offer this sacrifice. What is destroyed and overcome is its "self-sufficiency," which constitutes the essence of sin and which made bread only bread—the mortal food of mortal man, a partaking of sin and death. In Christ our earthly food, which is converted into our flesh and blood, into our very selves and our lives, becomes that for which it was created—participation in the divine life, through which the mortal is clothed in immortality and death is swallowed up in victory.

Precisely because the sacrifice of Christ, which includes all things in itself and was offered *once*, occurred *before* all our offerings, which have their principle and content in it, likewise the proskomidē, the preparation of the gifts, takes place *before* the liturgy. For the essence of this preparation lies in referring the bread and wine, i.e., our very selves and our whole life, to the sacrifice of Christ, their conversion precisely into *gift* and *offering*. Here is precisely the *reality* of the proskomidē—the identification of the bread and wine as the sacrifice of Christ, which encompasses all our sacrifices, our offering of our very selves to God. Hence the *sacrificial* character of the office of the proskomidē, the preparation of the bread as if it were the immolation of the Lamb, the wine as the effusion of blood; hence, the assembling on the diskos

each time of everything around the Lamb, the inclusion of everything in his sacrifice. Only when this preparation is completed, when all is *referred* to the sacrifice of Christ and included in it, and our lives, "hid with Christ in God," are placed on the diskos in a way visible to the eyes of faith, can we begin the liturgy—the eternal offering of him who offered himself and in himself all that exists to God, the ascent of our life to that place, the altar of the kingdom, where the Son of God, who has become the Son of man, has lifted it.

6

OF COURSE, LIKE MANY OTHER THINGS IN OUR WORSHIP, THE proskomidē stands in need of a cleansing—but precisely not of its *order*, its form, but of that perception of it that has made it in the consciousness of the faithful "only a symbol," in the unchurchly, nominal meaning of this word. What is needed to cleanse it (or, to put it better, restore it) is a sense of the genuine meaning of the *commemoration*, which is performed in the proskomidē while the pieces are taken out of the prosphora, and which is reduced in the understanding of the faithful and the clergy to one aspect of the prayers "for the health of" and "for the repose of," i.e., to an utterly individualistic and utilitarian understanding of church worship. The fundamental meaning of this commemoration, however, lies precisely in its sacrificial character, in referring all of us together and each of us individually to the sacrifice of Christ, in the gathering and formation of the new creation around the Lamb of God. In this is the power and the joy of this commemoration, that in it is overcome the partition between the living and the dead, between the earthly and the heavenly Church, for all of us—both living and fallen asleep—"have died and our lives are hid with Christ in God," for the whole Church, with the Mother of God and all the saints at her head, is gathered on the diskos, for all are united in this offering by Christ of his glorified and deified humanity to the God and Father. Thus, in taking out particles and pronouncing names, we are caring not simply for the "health" of ourselves or certain of our neighbors, nor for the fate of the dead "beyond the grave"; we offer and return them to God

as a "living and well-pleasing" sacrifice in order to make them participants in the "inexhaustible life" of the kingdom of God. We immerse them in the forgiveness of sins, which shines forth from the grave, in that healed, restored and deified life for which God has created them.

Such is the meaning of commemoration in the *proskomidē*. In offering our *prosphora* (offering), we offer and return "ourselves and each other and all our life" to God. And this offering is *real*, because Christ has already accepted this life and made it his own, he has already offered it to God. In the *proskomidē* this life, and through it the entire world, is realized again and again as sacrifice and offering, as the "matter" of that sacrament in which the Church fulfils herself as the body of Christ, "the fulness of him who fills all in all" (Eph 1:23).

That is why the *proskomidē* concludes with a joyous confession and affirmation. Covering the gifts—and thus signifying that in "this world" the reign of Christ, the manifestation of the kingdom of God in him, remains mysterious, known and visible only to faith—the priest recites the words of the psalm: "The Lord reigns; he is robed in majesty... Thy throne is established... the Lord on high is mighty." And he blesses God, who is "thus well-pleased," who desired all this, who fulfilled all this, who granted and is granting us in our earthly bread to joyously anticipate and desire "the Heavenly Bread, the food of the whole world, our Lord and God Jesus Christ." And only now, having grasped the meaning of the *proskomidē*, can we return to the Great Entrance, to the *sacrament of offering*.

7

IN THE FIRST APOLOGY OF ST JUSTIN MARTYR, IN ONE OF THE earliest descriptions of the liturgy to have reached us, we read: "Then bread and a cup of water and mixed wine are brought to the president of the brethren."⁴ And from the *Apostolic Tradition* of St Hippolytus of Rome we know that these gifts were brought by the deacons: "offerent diacones oblationem..."⁵ As we can see,

⁴65:3, tr. Richardson, 286.

⁵Ed. Dom B. Botte, 4, Sources Chrétiennes, 11 bis (Paris, 1968) 90.

between this simplest form of the offering and our present Great Entrance an extensive and complex development of the eucharistic order occurred, about which it is proper to say a few words at this time. For while the general course and succession of this development has been made sufficiently clear by liturgists, next to nothing has been said about its theological meaning, of the elucidation in it of the faith and experience of the Church.

In the current order of the liturgy the procession includes the following rites: the reading by the priest of the prayer "No one is worthy"; the censuring of the altar, the gifts and the people assembled; the hymn of the offering; the solemn transfer of the gifts; the exclamation by the celebrant of the commemorative formula "May the Lord God remember all of you in His Kingdom"; the placing of the gifts on the altar, their being covered by the aer and a repetition of their censuring; and the reading by the priest of the "Prayer of the Offering after the Deposition of the Gifts on the Altar." Inasmuch as in each of these rites one aspect of the *whole*, i.e., the Church's offering, finds its expression, each of them demands an explanation, however brief.

8

IN EARLY MANUSCRIPTS THE PRAYER "NO ONE IS WORTHY" (and we find it already in the well-known eighth-century *Codex Barberini*) is called "the prayer that the priest says for himself while the entrance of the holy gifts is being performed." And, in fact, the formal peculiarity of this prayer lies in the fact that, in contrast to all other prayers of the liturgy, the priest offers it *personally* and for *himself*, and not on behalf of us, who comprise the gathering of the Church: "Look down on me, a sinner, Thine unprofitable servant, and cleanse my soul and my heart from an evil conscience; and by the power of the Holy Spirit enable me, who am endowed with the grace of the priesthood, to stand before this, Thy holy table, and perform the sacred mystery of Thy holy and pure Body and precious Blood..."

This peculiarity deserves attention because, if not properly understood, one may find in it a confirmation of that contraposition of the priest and the assembly, that identification of *ministry*

only with the clergy, that long ago penetrated our theology from the West and, alas, became firmly accepted in everyday piety. Has it not become generally accepted to relate the words "serving," "performing," "offering," only to the priest, and to understand the laity as a *passive* element in relation to this service, taking part in the service only through a pious presence? This use of words is not accidental. It reflects a gross distortion of church consciousness itself, of its understanding not only of the liturgy but of the Church herself. It finds its expression in the fact that, with each passing century, an understanding of the Church has intensified in which she is experienced above all as the clergy's "serving" of the laity, the satisfaction by the clergy of the "spiritual needs" of the faithful. It is precisely in this perception of the Church that we must seek the cause of those two chronic illnesses of church consciousness that run like a red thread through the entire history of Christianity: "clericalism" and "laicism," which usually takes the form of "anticlericalism."

In the present context, however, it is important for us to note that this "clericalization" of the Church, the reduction of "ministry" to the clergy alone and the consequent atrophy in the consciousness of the laity, led to the gradual demise of the *sacrificial* perception of the Church herself and of the sacrament of the Church—the eucharist. The conviction that the priest serves *on behalf of* the laity and, so to speak, *in their place* led to the conviction that he serves *for* them, for the satisfaction of their "religious needs," subordinate to their religious "demand." We have already seen this in the example of the *proskomidē*, where the extraction of particles during the commemoration came to be perceived not as the transformation by ourselves of ourselves and each other into a "sacrifice, living and well pleasing to God," but as a method of satisfying certain personal needs—"for the health of . . .," "for the repose of . . ." But this example could be extended to the entire life of church society, to all its psychology. The overwhelming majority of the laity (supported in this, alas, all too often by the clergy and the hierarchy) sense the Church as existing for themselves but do not sense themselves as the Church transformed and eternally being transformed into a sacrifice and offering to God, into participants in the sacrificial ministry of Christ.

We have already spoken of this in the chapter on "the faith-

ful," and if we return to it now, it is only because, with an incorrect understanding of the priest's prayer "for himself," with which the eucharistic offering begins, it is possible to conclude that this offering is performed only by the priest. This is why it is so important to understand its genuine meaning. This meaning lies not in contraposing the priest to the gathering, to the "laity," and not in any separation of one from the other, but in the *identification* of the priesthood of the Church with the priesthood of Christ, the one Priest of the New Testament, who through his own offering of himself sanctified the Church and granted her participation in his priesthood and in his sacrifice: "Thou art the Offerer and the Offered, the Receiver and the Received, O Christ our God."

Let us note, first of all, that, again in distinction from the eucharistic prayer as a whole, which, as we shall see, is offered to God the Father, this prayer is directed *personally* to Christ. Why? Because, of course, precisely at this moment of the eucharistic ceremony, when *our* gifts, *our* offering, are brought to the altar, the Church affirms that this offering is accomplished by Christ ("Thou art the Offerer") and that it is an offering of the sacrifice that was offered by him once and is eternally being offered ("and the Offered"). It is *only* the priest who is called and ordained to affirm this identity, to manifest and fulfil it in the mystery of the eucharist. This is the whole point, the whole meaning of this astonishing prayer: that he can fulfil this service only because the priesthood of the priest is not "his," not "other" in relation to the priesthood of Christ, but the one and same indivisible priesthood of Christ, which eternally lives and is eternally fulfilled in the Church, the body of Christ. And in what is the priesthood of Christ constituted, if not in the unity in him of all who believe in him, if not in the gathering and the creation of his body, if not in the offering of all in him and in all of him? Thus, in confessing the priesthood, in the grace of which he is "clothed," to be the priesthood of Christ, in preparing himself to celebrate the sacred mystery of the body of Christ, i.e., to manifest the identity of our offering with the sacrifice of Christ, not only does the priest not separate himself from the gathering, but, on the contrary, he manifests his unity with it as the unity of the head with the body.

That is precisely why his *personal* prayer *for himself* is not only

appropriate but also necessary and, so to speak, self-evident. For (and we most strongly stress this) both the Latin reduction of the sacraments to *ex opere operato*—i.e., that understanding of them under which the *person* of the priest (as distinct from the “objective” gift of the priesthood, that is, the “right” to perform the sacraments) has no significance whatsoever in relation to their “validity”—and their reduction to *ex opere operantis*—to dependency on the subjective qualities of their performer—are equally foreign to Orthodoxy. For Orthodoxy this is a false dilemma, one of those impasses to which theological rationalism inevitably leads. In the Orthodox perception of the Church, both the absolute non-dependence of the gift that God has given on any earthly, human “causality” whatsoever, and the *personal* character of this gift, whose reception depends, consequently, on the person to whom it is given, are equally self-evident. “God gives the Spirit without measure . . .,” but man can “assimilate” it only through personal endeavor, and only to the “measure” of this assimilation is the gift of grace actualized in him. And the very distinction of gifts and ministries in the Church (“Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?” 1 Co 12:29) is an indication of the correspondence of the gift to the person receiving it, to the mystery of choosing, appointing, calling, which is directed to each to fulfil *his* vocation, to “earnestly desire the higher gifts” and “a still more excellent way” (1 Co 12:31). And if, obviously, the Church does not make the “validity” of the sacraments dependent on the qualities of the person appointed to perform them—for in such case no single sacrament would be “possible”—then the dependence of the fulness of church life on the measure of the growth of her members in the reception and assimilation of the gifts received by them is equally obvious to her. The fundamental and eternal defect of any scholasticism, of any theological rationalism, lies precisely in the fact that it would be “satisfied” by this question concerning “validity” and “objectivity” and reduce the entire teaching on the sacraments (and on the Church herself) to it, whereas genuine faith, and therefore also the essence of each vocation, each gift, consists in the thirst for *fulness*, and this means the fulfilment by each and by the whole Church of the grace that God granted without measure.

The uniqueness of the ministry of the priest consists in that he

is called and appointed in the Church, the body of Christ, to be the *image* of the Head of the body—Christ—and this means to be the one through whom the *personal* ministry of Christ is continued and realized. It is not simply Christ's authority—for his authority is the authority of love and is not separated from his *personal* love for the Father and for mankind—and it is not simply his priesthood—for Christ's priesthood consists in his *personal* self-sacrifice to God and to mankind—and it is not simply his teaching—for his teaching is inseparable from his *person*—but it is precisely the very essence of this ministry as love and self-sacrifice to God and to mankind, as *pastorship* in the deepest sense of that term: the shepherd's laying down of "his life for the sheep." And this means that the calling to the priesthood itself is directed to the *person* of the one called and is inseparable from it, and that any difference between "priesthood" and "personality," by which priesthood would prove to be something self-contained and having no relation to the personality of the bearer, is false, for it distorts the essence of priesthood as the continuation in the Church of the priesthood of Christ. The crude popular expression "as is the priest, so is the parish" has greater truth than all the cunning reasoning about *ex opere operato* and *ex opere operantis*. The Church does not reject the "validity" of a sacrament performed in love by any parish priest, whether bad or good, yet she knows the full, actually frightening dependence of church life on the adequacy or inadequacy of those to whom the "stewardship of the mysteries of God" is handed over.

And that is why, at the onset of that moment in the eucharistic mystery when it falls to the priest to *become Christ*, to take the place in the Church and in all creation that belongs only and personally to Christ and which he has transferred and "delegated" to no one, when through the hands, voice and whole being of the priest Christ himself will function, how can the priest not turn to Christ with this *personal* prayer, how can he not confess his unworthiness, how can he not pray for help and for "clothing with the power of the Holy Spirit," how can he not give his *person* back to Christ, who chose him in order to manifest and fulfil in him his presence and his eternal priesthood? How can he not feel precisely a *personal* trembling, a need precisely for *personal* help from above and, chiefly, a *personal* responsibility—and not just for the "objec-

tive reality" of the sacrament but also for its "validity" in the hearts and life of the faithful? For if "no one is worthy" to perform this ministry, if it is entirely and completely a gift of the grace of God, then it is only in our humble consciousness of this unworthiness that the possibility of receiving and assimilating it is revealed to us.

9

WE HAVE ALREADY SPOKEN ABOUT THE MEANING OF CENSING in the services. To what was said we will add only that the censuring during the offering of the gifts, i.e., *before* their transformation into the body and blood of Christ, and likewise their identification from the very beginning of the liturgy as *holy* and *divine*, expresses the very same "foreknowledge" of them as the sacrifice of Christ of which we were just speaking in the section devoted to the *proskomidē*. The gifts are holy and divine, just as the humanity of Christ is holy and divine, the beginning and gift of the "new creation," the new life. In the new life, which the Church is called to manifest and fulfil in "this world," creation is transformed into a gift and sacrifice, and only thus can it be carried up to heaven and become the gift of the divine life and communion in the body and blood of Christ. That is why it is not to perishable "matter" and not to "flesh and blood" of mortal people that we render reverence with the incense, but to the "living and well-pleasing" gift and sacrifice that they are predestined to become through the divine incarnation and which the Church sees beforehand in them. That is why it is not "simply" bread that lies on the diskos. On it all of God's creation is presented, manifested in Christ as the new creation, the fulfilment of the glory of God. And it is not "simply" people who are gathered in this assembly, but the new humanity, recreated in the image of the "ineffable glory" of its Creator. To it, to this humanity, which is eternally called to ascend to the kingdom of God, to participation in the paschal table of the Lamb and to the honor of the highest calling, we also show reverence with the censuring, signifying by this ancient rite of preparation, sanctification and purification that it is "a living sacrifice, well pleasing to God."

IO

THIS SAME FOREKNOWLEDGE, THIS SAME JOYOUS AFFIRMATION of the cosmic essence of the offering that is beginning we find also in the "hymn of the offering," which accompanies the movement of the gifts to the altar. Today we almost always sing the Cherubic Hymn. Only twice in the entire year is it replaced with another hymn: on Holy Thursday with the prayer "Of Thy mystical supper..." and on Holy Saturday with the ancient hymn "Let all mortal flesh keep silent..." And although in antiquity the Church also knew other "hymns of the offering," their meaning lies not so much in the various words as much as in their tonality or key, which is common to all. We can define this key best of all with the word *royal*. It is precisely a royal doxology: "That we may receive the King of all..." "For the King of kings and the Lord of lords comes to be slain..." The offering of the gifts is understood here as a triumphant royal entrance, as a manifestation of the glory and power of the kingdom. This "royal" tonality is not limited to the Great Entrance and the "hymn of the offering" alone. We already find it at the end of the *proskomidē*: while covering the gifts, the priest pronounces the words of the royal psalm: "The Lord reigns, he is clothed in majesty." We hear it furthermore in the priest's prayer for himself, which we have just analyzed: "No one is worthy... to serve Thee, O King of Glory." We also see it, finally, in the gradual Byzantine "staging" of the offering as precisely a "great entrance" through the *royal doors*. From here, of course, stem the beginning and the relatively early appearance of the explanation of the Great Entrance in Christian writing as a "symbol" of the entrance of the Lord into Jerusalem.

Historians of the liturgy explain the introduction and development of this royal "key" and royal "symbolism" as the influence exerted on Christian worship by Byzantine court ritual, in which processions, "exits" and "entrances" occupied a particularly important place. While not denying this influence, which actually explains many things in the particulars of Byzantine worship, we would stress, however, that the *theological* meaning of this royal "key" is rooted above all in the Church's original *cosmic* understanding of Christ's sacrifice. By his offering of himself as a

sacrifice, Christ established his *reign*, he restored the mastery over "heaven and earth" that was "usurped" by the prince of this world. The faith of the Church knows Christ as the conquerer of death and Hades, as the King, who has already been manifested, of the kingdom of God, which has already "come in power." She knows him as the *Lord*, whom the Father of glory raised from the dead and sat down "at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, . . . and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things" (Eph 1:20-22). In contrast to our contemporary piety, utterly individualized and essentially minimalistic, which easily, in the name of "spiritual comfort," hands the world over to the devil, the joy over the lordship and reign of Christ imbued the faith of the early Church with such strength that she breathed precisely through this cosmic joy, through the experience of the kingdom that was granted in Christ. And thus, whatever the outward influences and borrowings, it is precisely from this faith and this experience that the *royal* tonality both of the hymn of the offering and the entire Great Entrance comes. From here stems the breakthrough of the Church into the *glory* of the age to come, her entering into the eternal doxology of the cherubim and seraphim before the "King of kings and Lord of lords."

II

AND, FINALLY, WE COME TO THE GREAT ENTRANCE ITSELF. Let us immediately note that in contemporary practice it has two *orders*. When the liturgy is served by a bishop, he does not take part in the actual carrying of the gifts, which is done by the clergy celebrating with him, but, standing at the royal doors and facing the assembly, he receives the gifts and then places them on the altar. In the priestly liturgy the priest and deacon carry the gifts, but only the priest places them on the altar.

We need to note this difference because, although the idea of the *correlation* between the place and function of each member of the Church in the eucharistic celebration and his ministry and calling in the Church has been almost entirely effaced from church consciousness, for early Christianity it was self-evident.

Quite often contemporary Orthodox are extremely zealous about preserving and observing "ancient rites," without, however, imparting to them any theological, or, as one would now say, existential meaning. Early Christian consciousness saw in the rites above all the Church's revelation and fulfilment of her essence, and therefore also of the essence of every ministry and every calling. In the liturgy is revealed that *image* of the Church that she has been summoned to realize in her life. And, conversely, all ministries—and the entire life of the church community—find their crowning and "fulfilment" in the liturgy. From this stems not only the "symbolic" but also the real correlation between what a member of the Church *does* in the life of the community and what he *does* in the eucharistic liturgy.

As we were saying above, in the early Church the ministers of the proskomidē, the preparation of the gifts, and likewise of their conveyance to the celebrant, were the deacons, for inside the church community their appointed vocation, their *leitourgia*, was the ministry of love, of the life of the Church as the love of all for all and the concern of all for all. That is why it was precisely the deacons who accepted from those who came into the church assembly the gifts through which the Church would realize her ministry of love. They distributed these gifts and singled out those that, *pars pro toto*, were to be offered in the eucharistic mystery. The contemporary "priestly" practice, i.e., the participation of the priest himself in the Great Entrance, arose, as we have already noted, when the *deacon*, or, to put it better, the ministry of the diaconate itself, ceased to be sensed as necessary and self-evident, when the experience of the Church as a community, linked through common life and active love, weakened, and the community was as it were dissolved into the "natural" society—the city, the village—became a "parish" or "congregation," "those who congregate" in the temple for the satisfaction of their religious needs, but who cease to live apart from the world through the life of the Church. In this new experience of the Church the deacon proved to be in essence unneeded, certainly not obligatory; and with his gradual disappearance his liturgical functions were for the most part transferred to the priest. From what has been said, it follows that of the two contemporary "orders" it is precisely the pontifical order of the Great Entrance that is closer to the ancient

practice and that more fully expresses the essence of the eucharistic offering. Precisely in it is revealed the place of each, the participation of the whole Church, in this offering.

We know already that it begins—in the *proskomidē*—with each offering his own *prospora*, his own sacrifice, with the inclusion of each in the offering of the Church. Alas, this rite is also threatened with almost total disappearance today, and it needs to be regenerated in every way possible, especially, of course, with the disclosure of its genuine meaning as precisely the participation of each member of the Church in the eucharistic offering. Inasmuch as in our day the *real* sacrifice of the members of the Church, their *real* participation in her life consists chiefly in monetary donations, it would be appropriate for our “collection basket” to be joined with the offering of *prospora*, to make the latter again obligatory for all. To realize this would not be difficult: let the money that each person who comes to the liturgy intends to place in the “basket” be used *for a prospora*, and in such manner make the *prospora* an expression of his offering, his sacrifice. In any case, precisely here is the beginning of our offering, which, in the *movement* of the bread and the cup—from us to the table of oblation, from the table of oblation to the altar, from the altar to the heavenly sanctuary—is revealed as our entrance into the sacrifice of Christ, our ascent to the table of the Lord in his kingdom.

The second act of this movement is the transfer of the gifts from the table of oblation to the altar, which, as we have just seen, comprises the express *leitourgia* of the deacons. Even now, when the table of oblation, on which the *proskomidē* is performed, is found inside the sanctuary, and not, as in the early Church, in a special location called the *prothesis* (only the altar was called a “table” of oblation), the gifts are first brought out into the assembly and only from the assembly are they brought to the sanctuary, do they “enter” the altar. The Greek practice of bringing the gifts around the whole church, the whole gathering, needs to be acknowledged as a better expression of the meaning of the Great Entrance than the Russian practice, where the gifts are only brought around the *solea* and then directly to the royal doors. For the meaning of this consists in the fact that the offering of *each*, included in the offering of *all*, is now being realized as the

Church's offering of her very self, and this means Christ, for the Church is his body, and he is the head of the Church.

And, finally, the third and concluding moment of the entrance consists of the reception of the gifts by the celebrant and their deposition on the altar. That which *we* offer is now manifested as being offered by Christ and being taken up by him into the heavenly sanctuary. Our sacrifice is the sacrifice of the Church, which is the sacrifice of Christ. Thus, in this triumphant and royal entrance, in this movement of the gifts, is revealed the truly universal significance of the offering, the unification of heaven and earth, the raising up of our life to the kingdom of God.

12

"MAY THE LORD GOD REMEMBER ALL OF YOU...IN HIS KINGDOM always, now and ever and unto ages of ages." These words, this *commemoration*, accompany the Great Entrance and the offering accomplished in it. The deacon pronounces them while bringing the gifts; the celebrants direct them to each other and to the gathering; the faithful answer the presider with them.

"Remember, O Lord..." Without any exaggeration one can say that the commemoration, i.e., the referral of everything to the *memory* of God, the prayer that God would "remember," constitutes the heartbeat of all of the Church's worship, her entire life. Not yet speaking of the sacrament of the eucharist, which Christ commanded us to "do...in remembrance of me" (we shall speak further of the precise meaning of this remembrance), the Church constantly, every day, almost every hour, "celebrates the memory" of a certain event, a certain saint, so that the essence of each of her "holy days" and all her services lies precisely in this "celebration of the memory," in this constant remembrance.

And if this is so, then we must ask: in what does the essence of this commemoration consist? This is necessary all the more because on this question our school theology maintains an almost total silence. Is it because the very concept of *memory* seems insufficiently objective to this theology, whose avowed single criterion is the "scientific method," and seems a surrender to the subjectivism and psychologism so hateful to "science"? Is it because, in the

interpretation and reconstruction of the faith of the Church as a certain "objective" doctrine, constructed above all on "texts," memory, and even experience in general, simply has no place? Whatever the case, commemoration, so fundamental to the life, prayer and experience of the Church, appears to remain outside of the theological field of vision. And, strangely enough, this theological obliviousness leads in fact precisely to the "psychologization" of worship, which, like a splendid flower, blossoms in its reduction to outward "illustrative" symbolism and so greatly interferes with a genuine understanding of and genuine participation in worship. If, on the one hand, the liturgical "remembrance," the "celebration of the memory" of this or that event, is perceived today entirely as a psychological, intellectual focus on the "meaning" of that event (which inevitably abets its "symbolization"), and if, on the other, commemoration in prayer is simply identified with a prayer *on behalf of* another human being, then it is of course because we forget the genuine meaning of memory and commemoration, which is manifested in the Church. And we forget above all because of that theology that itself is rooted not so much in the experience and memory of the Church as in "texts." That is why we must recall this meaning before we can understand the place of the commemoration in the eucharistic offering.

13

THOUSANDS OF BOOKS HAVE BEEN WRITTEN, FROM ALL POSSIBLE points of view, on *memory*, this mysterious gift present only in man, and it would be impossible here to simply enumerate all the explanations and theories they provide. But this is unnecessary, for however much man would strive to understand and explain its meaning and "mechanism," the gift of memory would remain ultimately inexplicable, mysterious and even ambiguous.

One thing is without doubt: memory is man's capacity to "resurrect the past," to preserve knowledge of it within himself. But we must say precisely that this capacity is ambiguous. Actually, does its essence not lie in that if, on the one hand, in memory the past is surely resurrected—through it, in it I *see* a man who

some time ago passed from life, I *feel* in all particularities that morning when I met with him or the last time I saw him, and thus I can "collect" my life—then, on the other, it is resurrected precisely as past, that is, as unreturnable, so that in being realized through my memory the knowledge of this past is simultaneously a discovery of its *absence* in the present? Hence the sorrow inherent in memory. For, in the end, memory in man is nothing other than the *knowledge*, peculiar only to man, of *death*, of the fact that "death and time rule on the earth." This is why the gift of memory is ambiguous. Through it man simultaneously "resurrects" the past and comes to know the shatteredness of his own life, which "circling, vanishes in the mist"; he comprehends the shatteredness and unreturnability of time, in which, sooner or later, memory itself will darken, weaken and be snuffed out, and death will reign.

Only in relation to this "natural" memory—to the most human but therefore also the most ambiguous of all human gifts, thanks to which even before death man recognizes his own mortality and life as dying—can man not so much understand as feel the entire *newness* of that memory, that remembrance, which it is appropriate to call the essence of the new life given to us in Christ.

Here we should recall that in the biblical, Old Testamental teaching on God, the term memory refers to the attentiveness of God to his creation, the power of divine providential love, through which God "holds" the world and *gives it life*, so that life itself can be termed abiding in the memory of God, and death the falling out of this memory. In other words, memory, like everything else in God, is *real*, it *is* that life that he grants, that God "*remembers*"; it *is* the eternal overcoming of the "nothing" out of which God called us into "his wonderful light."

And this gift of memory, as the power that transforms love into life, into knowledge, communion and unity, has been given to man by God. Man's memory is his responding love for God, the encounter and communion with God, with the life of life itself. Out of all creation it is given to man alone to *remember* God and through this remembrance to truly live. If everything in the world witnesses to God, declares his glory and renders him praise, then only man "remembers" him and, through this memory,

through this living knowledge of God, comprehends the world as God's world, receives it from God and raises it up to God. To God's remembrance of him, man answers with his remembrance of God. If God's remembrance of man is the gift of life, then man's remembrance of God is the reception of this lifecreating gift, the constant *acquisition* of and increase in life.

But then it also becomes understandable why the very essence and depth and horror of *sin* are most perfectly expressed not in a multitude of "scientific-theological" definitions but in the common, popular expression: *man has forgotten God*. For in relation to what has just been demonstrated, to the biblical and, so to speak, ontological (and not simply "psychological") understanding of memory, to *forget* means above all to cut what has been forgotten off from life, to cease to live by it, to fall away from it. It is not simply to "stop thinking" about God—for the militant atheist is often "obsessed" with his hatred for God, and there are many on earth who, while sincerely convinced of their "religiosity," nevertheless seek in religion everything imaginable, but not God. It is precisely a *falling away* from him, from life, ceasing to live through him and in him. And it is precisely in such *obliviousness* toward God that the fundamental—"original"—sin of man consisted and consists. Man forgot God because he turned his love, and consequently his memory and his very life, to something else, and above all to himself. He turned away from God and ceased to *see* him. He forgot God, and God ceased to exist for him. For the terror and irreparability of obliviousness lie in the fact that, like memory, it is *ontological*. If memory is lifecreating, then obliviousness is death or, more precisely, the beginning of death, the poison of dying, which poisons life and converts it inexorably, inevitably, into dying. The absence of one whom I forget for me is *real*, he is actually *not* in my life, not a part of my life—he is dead for me, and I for him. If it is God, the giver of life and life itself whom I have forgotten, if he has ceased to be *my* memory and *my* life, my life itself becomes dying, and then memory, which is the knowledge and power of life, becomes knowledge of death and the constant tasting of mortality.

As man cannot annihilate himself, return himself to that non-existence from which God called him to life, so it is not given to him to annihilate his *memory*, i.e., his knowledge of his own life.

But just as man's life in separation from God was filled with death and became dying, so also his memory became knowledge of death and its kingdom in the world. Through memory he wants to overcome time and death, to "resurrect the past," to not allow it to be absorbed without a trace by the "abyss of time," but this resurrecting itself turns out to be a pitiful knowledge of the unreturnability of this past, of the smell of corruption that fills the world. In religion, in art, in all the culture of this fallen life—for it is the life of fallen man—"life, like a wounded bird, wants to soar off and cannot." These upward flights can be infinitely beautiful, but on earth what is really beautiful is *only* the sorrow for genuine life, only the memory of what is lost and the yearning for it, only "holy melancholy." These flights can remain in the "memory" of man as thirst, appeal, repentance, entreaty, and all the same, in the final analysis, they are devoured by oblivion, just as after the death of the last relatives, the last of those who "remember," wild grass begins to grow over the grave over which they not so long ago sang "memory eternal." The gravestone crumbles, and it is no longer possible to decipher the faded letters of the name it bears. All anyone can make out are two terrifying and senseless dates of a forgotten life, no longer of use to anyone.

14

HERE IS WHY THE SALVATION OF MAN AND THE WORLD—WHY the renewal of life—consists in the restoration of *memory* as a life-creating power, *remembrance* as the overcoming of time and of the destruction of life and the reign of death that it entails. This salvation is accomplished in Christ. He is the incarnation in man and for man, in the world and for the world, of God's remembrance, of the divine and lifecreating love directed toward the world. And he is the perfect manifestation and fulfilment in man of his remembrance of God, as the content, the power and the life of life itself.

The incarnation of the memory of God: if man has forgotten God, God has not forgotten man, he has not "turned himself away" from him. He has transformed the fallen and mortal time of "this world" into the history of salvation. He has revealed its

meaning as expectation of and preparation for salvation, the gradual restoration in man of *memory* of himself, and in this memory, knowledge and anticipation and love, so that at the coming of the fulness of time, i.e., at the accomplishment of this preparation, man could recognize God in the Savior who had come, *remember the forgotten*, and in it find his lost life. The restoration, through God's remembrance of man, of man's remembrance of God—such is the meaning of the Old Testament, and it is impossible to separate Christ from it, to know him otherwise than through the Old Testament, because it is nothing other than the gradually disclosed *recognition* of Christ, the "creation" of his "memory" before his coming in time. And when Simeon took Christ into his elderly hands and called him the "salvation prepared before the face of all people," when the forerunner John pointed him out in the Jordan wilderness as the lamb of God who takes upon himself the sins of the world, when Peter, on the road to Caesarea Philippi, confessed him as the Christ, the Son of God, it was not a puzzling and inexplicable "miracle" but the apex and fulfilment of that *memory* of the Savior and salvation, that *recognition*, in which God's remembrance of man is *fulfilled* as man's remembrance of God.

Salvation consists in this: that in Christ—perfect God and perfect man—memory comes to reign and is restored as a lifecreating power, and, in *remembering*, man partakes not of the experience of the fall, mortality and death, but of the overcoming of this fall through "life everlasting." For Christ himself is the incarnation and the gift to mankind of *God's memory* in all its fulness—as love directed toward each man and toward all humanity, toward the world and all creation. He is the Savior because in his memory he "remembers" all, and through this memory he receives all as his own life, and he gives his own life to all as their life. But being the incarnation of the memory of God, Christ is likewise the manifestation and fulfilment of man's perfect remembrance of God, for in this *memory*—love, self-sacrifice and communion with the Father—is his *entire* life, the entire perfection of his humanity.

The essence of our faith and the new life granted in it consists in *Christ's memory*, realized in us through our *memory of Christ*. From the very first day of Christianity, to believe in Christ meant to *remember* him and keep him always *in mind*. It is not simply to "know" about him and his doctrine, but to *know him*—living and

abiding among those who love him. From the very beginning the faith of Christians was memory and remembrance, but memory restored to its lifecreating essence—for, as opposed to our “natural,” “fallen” memory, with its illusory “resurrection of the past,” this new memory is a joyous recognition of the one who was resurrected, who lives and therefore is present and abides, and not only recognition but also encounter and the living experience of communion with him. While directed to the “past”—to the life, death and resurrection, in the time of Pontius Pilate, of the man Jesus—while rooted in this “past,” faith eternally knows that the one who is remembered *lives*. He “is and shall be” among us. Faith could not be this recognition were it not a remembrance, but it could not be a remembrance were it not *knowledge* of the one remembered. We were not alive “in the days of his flesh,” in the time of Pontius Pilate, and therefore we can neither remember nor recall what occurred at that time. Yet if we not only know *about* what happened—from “texts” that have reached us—but actually *remember* and *recall* it; if, moreso, our faith and our life in essence consist in this memory and in this remembrance, then it is because the one whom we remember lives, and everything that he has accomplished “for the sake of us men and for our salvation”—his life and death, his resurrection and glorification—he has given us and eternally gives to us, and through them he eternally communes with us. That is why it is no longer the “past” that we remember, but *Christ himself*, and this remembrance becomes our entry into *his* victory over time. over its collapse into “past,” “present” and “future.” It is an entry not into some abstract and motionless “eternity” but into “life everlasting,” in which all is *alive*, everything lives through the lifecreating memory of God, and *everything is ours*—“the world or life or death or the present or the future”—all is ours, for we “are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s” (1 Co 3:22-23).

Such is the essence of that *remembrance*, which, as was said above, comprises the basis of the life of the Church and which is realized above all in her worship. The services are the entry of the Church into the new time of the new creation, *gathered* by the memory of Christ, transformed by him into life and the gift of life, salvation from the collapse into “past,” “present” and “future.” In the worship of the Church—the body of Christ, which

lives by his life, by his memory—it is necessary for us to again and again recall, and this means to comprehend and realize, how for us, in us and with us “what was accomplished,” what was given to us—the creation of the world and its salvation in Christ and the kingdom of God, which is coming in glory but in Christ is already revealed—has already been granted. We *recall*, in other words, both the past and the future as *living* in us, as given to us, as transformed into our *life* and making it life in God.

15

ONLY IN THE LIGHT OF WHAT HAS BEEN SAID CAN WE NOW understand the meaning of this *commemoration*, which appears as a sort of verbal expression of the Great Entrance, the bringing of the eucharistic gifts to the altar. Through this commemoration we include the ones being remembered in the lifecreating memory of Christ: God’s memory of man, man’s memory of God, that diune memory which is eternal life. We return each other, in Christ, to God, and in this giving back we affirm that the one remembered and given back is *alive*, for he abides in God’s memory.

The commemoration is united with the offering, and together they constitute one whole. It is its verbal fulfilment, because Christ offered himself “on behalf of all and for all,” because in himself he offered and gave back all of us to God, he united all in his memory. The remembrance of Christ is the entry into his love, making us brothers and neighbors, “brethren” in his ministry. His life and presence in us and “among” us is certified *only* by our love for each other and for all whom God has sent into, has included in our life, and this means above all in the *remembrance* of each other and in the commemoration of each other in Christ. Therefore, in bringing his sacrifice to the altar, we *create the memory of each other*, we identify each other as living in Christ and being united with each other in him.

In this commemoration there is no distinction between those who live and those who have fallen asleep, for God “is not God of the dead, but of the living” (Mt 22:32). In this is the whole joy and the whole power of this commemoration, that, in including

the remembered ones in the lifecreating memory of God, the borders between the living and the dead are erased, for all are recognized and manifested as living in God. That is why the serving of a special "liturgy for the departed" (and in black vestments, no less!) would have been incomprehensible and impossible in the early Church—incomprehensible because in each liturgy, and precisely in this inclusion of all in God's memory, we celebrate the union of all, both of the living and of those who have fallen asleep, in the "life everlasting." In this sense, every liturgy is "of the departed," and in every liturgy the memory and love of Christ that has been given to us triumphs over death, over separation and obliviousness. "There will be no separation, O friends..."

Thus, in the commemoration of our very selves, of each other and all our life, in its return through this commemoration to God, our offering is fulfilled. The offering by ourselves of Christ, and in Christ of ourselves, makes possible and fulfils our commemoration.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Sacrament of Unity

*"Greet one another with a holy
kiss..."*

I CORINTHIANS 16:20

I

IN THE CONTEMPORARY ORDER OF THE LITURGY THE EXCLAMATION "Let us love one another!" takes up so little time that it is almost impossible for us to truly hear it—to hear it not only with our outer but also our inner ear. For us today it is just one of the exclamations that precede the symbol of faith. But in earlier times this was not so. We know from the liturgical evidence of the ancient Church that a *kiss of peace* was actually performed after this exclamation, and the entire Church, the entire gathering, took part in it. "When the time comes for the exhortation of the mutual reception of the peace," writes St John Chrysostom, "we all kiss each other." And "the clerics greet the bishop, the laymen the men, the women the women..."¹ This rite is preserved to this day in the liturgical practices of the Nestorians, Copts and Armenians, which were not exposed to late-Byzantine influences and thus often reflect an earlier form of the eucharistic celebration. And this rite is not only eucharistic, for the kiss of peace comprised an important and inalienable part of all Christian worship. Thus, it was performed after a baptism, when the bishop kissed

¹Homily on II Corinthians 18:3, PG 61:527.

the anointed with the words "The Lord be with you." At the consecration of a new bishop the entire assembly, both clerics and laity, likewise greeted him with a "holy kiss," after which he would preside over the eucharistic offering for the first time.

It is obvious from the history of this moment in the liturgy that it underwent a substantial change. From an *action*—and, moreover, a common action—it was transformed into an *exclamation*. And with this change the content of the summons contained in this exclamation also changed, at least in part. The contemporary exclamation "Let us love one another!" is a call to a certain condition, while in its ancient forms it summoned the gathering to a specific act: "greet one another." And we have evidence that this act was performed even without any exclamation: several documents describe a kiss being performed during the giving of the peace. It is obvious that, as has occurred more than once in the history of worship, an exclamation that itself was derived from an action then gradually displaced or, more precisely, narrowed the action to the sanctuary alone, where to this day it is performed between the celebrating priests and deacons.

At first glance this gradual replacement of a common action with an exclamation and all these "technical" details would not seem to present any particular interest. The exclamation itself would not require any explanation, inasmuch as everyone knows that love is the highest Christian commandment, and thus a reminder of it would be appropriate before this most important of all church ceremonies. But if so, what does it matter whether this reminder consists in a call to love or in a symbol of love (and in the kiss of peace the commentators see, of course, just one more "symbol")? One may suppose moreover that the disappearance of the action was linked with the growth of the Church, with the appearance of crowded assemblies in huge churches, where no one knew each other and where this rite, from our contemporary point of view, would be simply a formality.

But all this is so only "at first glance," when we have not yet considered the genuine and precisely liturgical meaning of these words and actions—and above all the meaning of the very expression "Christian love."

In fact, we have become so accustomed to this expression, we have heard preaching about love and the summons to it so many

times that it is difficult for us to be struck with the eternal *newness* of these words. And yet Christ himself pointed out this newness: "A *new* commandment I give you, that you love one another" (Jn 13:34). Even before Christ, however, the world in fact knew about love, about the value and height of love. Do we not find in the Old Testament the two commandments—regarding love for God (Dt 6:5) and love for neighbor (Lv 19:18)—that Christ said contain the entire law and the prophets (Mt 22:40)? In what, then, lies the newness of this commandment, the newness not only at the moment of the pronouncement of these words by the Savior, but for all time, all people—the newness that never ceases to be new?

In order to answer this question it is enough to recall one of the fundamental signs of Christian love, as it is indicated in the gospels: "*Love your enemies.*" These words contain nothing less than an unheard-of demand for love toward someone whom we precisely *do not love*. That is why they do not cease to disturb us, to frighten us and, above all, to *judge* us, as long as we have not become thoroughly deaf to the gospel. Precisely because this commandment is unheard of and new, we for the most part substitute our own cunning human interpretations of it. Already for centuries, and apparently with a pure conscience, not only individual Christians but also whole churches have affirmed that in reality Christian love must be directed toward *one's own*—that to love essentially and self-evidently means to love neighbors and family, one's own people, one's own country—all those persons and things that we would usually love anyway, without Christ and the gospel. We no longer notice that in Orthodoxy, for example, religiously colored and justified nationalism long ago became a genuine heresy, crippling church consciousness, hopelessly dividing the Orthodox East and making all of our profuse talk about the ecumenical truth of Orthodoxy a hypocritical lie. We have forgotten the other, no less strange and frightening words that the gospel contains about this merely "natural love": "He who loves father or mother . . . son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Mt 10:37), and "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers . . . he cannot be my disciple" (Lk 14:26). If coming to Christ signifies the fulfilment of his commandment, then, ob-

viously, Christian love not only is not a simple increase, "crowning" and religious sanction of natural love, but is radically distinguished from it and even contraposed to it. It is really a *new* love, of which our fallen nature and fallen world are incapable and which is therefore impossible in it.

But how can we fulfil this commandment? How can we love those whom we do not love? Is not the mystery of any love that it can never be the fruit of only the will, of self-education, of practice, even of askesis? Through the exercise of the will and self-education one can attain "good will," toleration and evenhandedness in relations with others, but not love—which St Isaac the Syrian says is even "merciful to the demons." And what then can this impossible commandment of love mean?

There can be only one answer to this question. Yes, this commandment would actually be impossible and, consequently, monstrous if Christianity consisted only in the commandment to love. But Christianity is not only the commandment but also the *revelation* and the *gift* of love. And love was commanded only because, before the command, it was revealed and given to us.

Only "God *is* love." Only God loves with that love of which the gospels speak. And only in the divine incarnation, in the unification of God and man, i.e., in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of man, is the love of God himself—or, better yet, God himself who is love—manifested and granted to human beings. In this is the staggering *newness* of Christian love—that in the New Testament man is called to love with the divine love, which has become the divine-human love, the love of Christ. The newness of Christianity lies not in the commandment to love, but in the fact that it has become possible to fulfil the commandment. In union with Christ we receive his love and can love with it and grow in it. "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rm 5:5), and through Christ we have been commanded to abide in him and in his love: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me... He who abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing... *abide in my love*" (Jn 15:4,5,9).

To abide in Christ means to be and to live in the Church,

which is the life of Christ, communicated and granted to humanity, and which therefore lives through Christ's love, abides in his love. The love of Christ is the origin, content and goal of the Church's life, and this love is in essence the only *sign* of the Church, for all the rest is embraced by it: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35). Love is the essence of the *holiness* of the Church, for it "has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit"; the essence of the *unity* of the Church, which "upbuilds itself in love" (Eph 4:16); and, finally, the essence of *apostolicity* and catholicity (*sobornost*'), for the Church is everywhere and always the same single apostolic union, "joined with the yoke of love." Therefore, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels... if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Co 13:1-3). For only love gives every "sign" of the Church—unity, holiness, apostolicity and catholicity—its significance and actuality.

The Church is a union of love—or, as Khomiakov put it, "love as an organism"²—not only in the sense that her members are united by love, but above all in that through this love of all for each other, through love as life itself, she manifests Christ and his love to the world, she witnesses to him and loves and saves the world through the love of Christ. In the *fallen* world, the mission of the Church, as salvation, is to manifest the world as regenerated by Christ. The essence of the fallen world is that division, the separation of each from all, reigns in it. This is not overcome by the "natural" love of certain people for certain others, and it triumphs and is fulfilled in the ultimate "separation"—death. The essence of the Church lies in the manifestation and presence in the world of love as life and life as love. Fulfilling herself in love, she witnesses in the world to this love. She bears it to the world and with it she "ministers to creation," which had been subordinated to the law of division and death. In it each person mysteriously obtains the power to "yearn [ἐπιποθέω]... with the affection

²A. Khomiakov, *Complete Works* 1 (Moscow, 1900), chapter 21, cited by A. Gratieux, A.S. *Khomiakov et le mouvement slavophile* (Paris, 1939) 109.

{σπλάγχνον} of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:8) and to be a witness to and bearer of this love in the world.

But then the *assembling as the Church* is above all the sacrament of love. We go to church *for love*, for the new love of Christ himself, which is granted to us in our unity. We go to church so that this divine love will again and again be "poured into our hearts," so that again and again we may "put on love" (Col 3:14), so that, *constituting* the body of Christ, we can abide in Christ's love and manifest it in the world. But that is why our contemporary, utterly "individualized" piety, in which we egotistically separate ourselves from the gathering, is so grievous, so contradictory to the age-old experience of the Church. Even while standing in the church, we continue to sense some people as "neighbors" and others as "strangers"—a faceless mass that "has no relevance" to us and to our prayer and disturbs our "spiritual concentration." How often do seemingly "spiritually" attuned and "devout" people openly declare their distaste for crowded gatherings, which disturb them from praying, and seek empty and quiet chapels, secluded corners, separate from the "crowds." In fact, such individual "self-absorption" would hardly be possible in the church assembly—precisely because this is not the purpose of the assembly and of our participation in it. Concerning this individual prayer the gospels say: "When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray . . ." (Mt 6:6). Does not this mean that the *assembling as the Church* has another purpose, already contained in the very word "assembly"? Through it the Church fulfils herself, accomplishes our communion with Christ and with his love, so that in participating in it, we comprise "out of many, one body."

And thus the *kiss of peace* is disclosed to us in its full significance. I have said above that it constituted an inalienable part of the church assembly from the first day of the Church's existence. This was because for the early Christians it was not simply a symbol and a reminder of love, but a *sacred rite of love*—the visible sign and rite in which and through which the effusion of divine love into the hearts of the faithful, the vesting of each and all together in the love of Christ is invisibly but really accomplished. In our current, utterly individualistic and egocentric approach to the Church this rite is inevitably perceived as a hollow "form." I real-

ly don't know the man who is standing across from me in church; I can neither love him nor not love him, for he is a "stranger" to me and thus *no one*. And we are so afraid of this hollow form, so utterly "sincere" in our individualism and egocentrism that we forget the chief thing. We forget that in the call to "greet one another with a holy kiss" we are talking not of our personal, natural, human love, through which we cannot in fact love someone who is a "stranger," who has not yet become "something" or "somebody" for us, but of the *love of Christ*, the eternal wonder of which consists precisely in the fact that it transforms the *stranger* (and each stranger, in his depths, is an *enemy*) into a *brother*, irrespective of whether he has or does not have relevance for me and for my life; that it is the very purpose of the Church to overcome the horrible *alienation* that was introduced into the world by the devil and proved to be its undoing. And we forget that we come to church for this love, which is always granted to us in the gathering of the brethren.

This is why in antiquity the assembly of the faithful was called not to a verbal answer but precisely to an *action*. For we know that we cannot of ourselves attain this love, just as we cannot acquire the peace of Christ—which "surpasses all understanding"—forgiveness of sins, eternal life and union with God. All this is given, granted to us in the sacred mystery of the Church; and the entire Church is one great sacrament, the sacred rite of Christ. Christ is at work in all our gestures, actions and ceremonies, and everything visible becomes "the visibility of the invisible," each symbol is fulfilled in the sacrament. Thus, in the "holy kiss" we express not our own love—rather, we embrace each other through the new love of Christ. And is this not the joy of communion, that I receive this love of Christ from the "stranger" standing across from me, and he from me? And that in it we are both "revealed" to each other as participants in Christ's love, and this means as *brothers in Christ*?

We can only desire this love and prepare ourselves for its reception. In antiquity those who had had fallings out had to be reconciled and forgive each other before taking part in the church assembly. Everything human had to be fulfilled, so that God could reign in the heart. And to prepare ourselves means to ask ourselves: do we go to the liturgy for this love of Christ, do we go

as people who hunger and thirst not only for help and consolation but for the fire that burns away all our weaknesses, all our limitations, and illumines us through the new love of Christ? Or are we afraid that this love will weaken our hatred for our enemies, all our "principled" condemnations, our discrepancies and divisions? Do we not more often desire from the Church peace only with those with whom we already have it, love for those whom we already love, self-affirmation and self-justification? But if so, we are not acquiring that gift that allows us to actually renew and eternally renew our lives, we do not venture beyond the limits of our personal "alienation" and we are not really taking part in the Church.

Let us bear in mind that in antiquity the giving of the peace and the kiss of love were the first actions of the liturgy of the faithful, i.e., the eucharistic celebration itself. For they not only began the eucharist, but in a certain sense made it *possible*, for it is the sacrament of the New Testament, the kingdom of the love of God. Therefore, only when we are "clothed" in this love can we perform the remembrance of Christ, be partakers of his flesh and blood, await the kingdom of God and the life of the age to come.

"Make love your aim," says the apostle (1 Co 14:1). And where can we attain this, if not in the sacrament in which Christ himself unites us in his love?

2

THE RECITATION AND LATER THE SINGING OF THE SYMBOL OF faith was introduced into the order of the liturgy relatively late—toward the beginning of the sixth century. Up to that time its appointed place in Christian worship was in the sacrament of baptism. The "handing back of the creed" (*redditio symboli*), that is, the solemn confession of faith, concluded the preparation of the catechumens for their baptismal entry into the Church. The symbol of faith arose in connection with baptism, and only later, at the time of the great dogmatic disputes, did it more often come to be used in its capacity as a measure of orthodoxy, as an *oros*, a "limit," guarding the Church from heresy. As far as the eucharist is concerned—which, as we already know, was a closed assembly

of the *faithful*, i.e., those who already have come to believe, who have been reborn through "water and the Spirit," who have received the anointment from above—in the consciousness of the early Church it presupposed, as something self-evident, the unity in the faith of all who take part in the gathering. Therefore, the inclusion of the symbol of faith in the order of the liturgy, which became universal relatively quickly, was nothing more than the confirmation of the originally obvious, organic and inalienable link between the *unity of faith* and the Church and her self-fulfilment in the eucharist. And this link constituted the heartbeat of the experience and life of the early Church.

We must dwell on this link, however, for it comprises, if you will, the chief difference between our contemporary experience and the experience of the early Church. In our time this link is not sensed as self-evident; and neither is unity, of which so many speak and argue in our day, sensed as being rooted in it and flowing from it.

I shall stipulate immediately that formally everything remains in place, as it were, and this link abides as an immutable law for the Orthodox, protected by the canons and church discipline. Thus, in accordance with this discipline, heterodox are not admitted to participation in the Orthodox liturgy, because according to Orthodox doctrine "communion in the sacraments" presupposes unity of faith, on which in turn is founded and which expresses the unity of the Church. Thus, on the strength of this discipline, Orthodox are forbidden to take part in sacraments performed by heterodox. However, this law is all the more obviously perceived as a formality, for in our official, school theology and in the consciousness of the believers it was long ago severed from the reality from which it arose, of which it testifies and outside of which it is, in essence, unintelligible.

This reality is the primordial, absolutely fundamental experience of the eucharist as the *sacrament of unity*, and this means the sacrament of the Church, which St Ignatius of Antioch defined as the "unity of faith with love."³ "And unite all of us to one another

³Cf *Philadelphians* 4 and 6:2; *Ephesians* 4:2, 14:1, 20:2; and *Magnesians* 1:2: "I sing the praises of the churches, even while I am a prisoner. I want them to confess that Jesus Christ, our perpetual Life, united flesh with spirit. I want them, too, to unite their faith with love—there is nothing better than that." Tr. Richardson, 94.

who become partakers of the one Bread and Cup in the communion of the Holy Spirit." It is precisely this experience, engraved in these words of the eucharistic prayer of St Basil the Great, precisely this understanding and perception of the eucharist that is utterly weakened in contemporary church consciousness. But then, what can the prohibition against partaking of the sacraments of the heterodox mean, in a real, living and "positive" sense, if the eucharist has long since ceased to be perceived by the Orthodox themselves as communion and "union with each other," if not only for simple believers but also in theological definitions it has become a particular, individual "means of personal sanctification," to which each resorts or from which each abstains according to the measure of his personal and self-understood "spiritual needs," frame of mind, preparation or unpreparation, etc.? It is obvious that, if the earlier meaning of such a prohibition lay in the fact that it defended the real experience of the Church as unity of faith and, in this manner, in fact affirmed this unity and witnessed to it, then with the reduction of the eucharist, and likewise all the sacraments, to the category of one of the "means of sanctification," it became merely a prohibition alas devoid for an ever greater number of the faithful of self-evident spiritual cogency.

3

THIS WEAKENING, THIS—WE CAN EVEN SAY—DEGENERATION OF the original eucharistic experience, is, I repeat, in fact sanctioned both by our formal theology and by that utterly individualistic piety that is almost universally dominant in the Church and thus passes itself off as something age-old and traditional. This sanction is already installed in formal theology in its very method. Being borrowed from the West, and thus appearing to our learned theologians as the height of science, this method consists in the isolation of each element of faith and church tradition into a self-sufficient object, if not into a separate "discipline," as though the degree of comprehension of each of them depends precisely on one's ability not to coordinate it with the others but, on the contrary, to apportion and "isolate" it. Thus, each of the three reali-

ties of which we are speaking here—i.e., faith, the Church, the eucharist—proves to be a subject of special study in a separate “division,” removed from any ties with the other two. This, in turn, actually leads to a paradoxical result. What falls out of the theological field of vision is precisely the thing that unifies these three realities, that manifests them as a triune reality: *unity*, which in the experience of the Church constitutes the genuine content of the new life that we receive through faith, live in the Church, and are granted as “communion of the one Spirit” in the eucharist.

One is easily convinced of this paradox. Thus, for example, one of the best of our dogmaticians, while correctly interpreting faith as a “main condition of salvation,” maintains complete silence on the matter of the Christian faith itself embracing the experience of unity, the experience of faith itself as unity. Why? Because, of course, constrained by his method of isolating and apportioning—in the present case, through the reduction of faith to a “subordinate and perceived principle in man”—he proves to be incapable of recognizing in unity simultaneously the fruit and content of faith, its life, its fulfilment in man. The same thing happens with regard to the Church. “Isolating,” defining the Church as the “mediator in the sanctification of man,” school theology inevitably reduces the doctrine of the Church to its divinely established order, its hierarchical structure, as the condition and form of this mediation, but leaves out of its field of vision nothing less than the Church herself, the Church as the new life in the “unity of faith and love,” as the constant fulfilment of this unity. And, finally, isolating, on account of this hopelessly onesided and thus depraved method, the sacraments in general and the eucharist in particular into a certain self-sufficient department—“on the means existing in the Church for the sanctification of man”—this theology is simply unaware of the eucharist as above all the sacrament of the Church, as the gift and fulfilment of that “unity of faith and love,” “communion of the one Spirit,” in which the essence of the Church is revealed.

4

IF THE “DROPPING” OF UNITY FROM SCHOOL THEOLOGY IS THUS explained by the very method of this theology, torn away as it is

from the living experience of the Church, then the cause of its falling out from contemporary piety needs to be sought in the gradual dissolution of faith into what can best be defined as "religious feeling." This statement may seem strange, even senseless, to many, inasmuch as in our day these concepts have become virtually equivalent. In the Christian experience and understanding of faith, however, the differences between them are indeed enormous. Faith is always and above all a *meeting* with the Other, conversion to the Other, the reception of him as "the way, the truth and the life," love for him and the desire for total unity with him, such that "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Ga 2:20). And because faith is always directed to the Other, it is man's exodus from the limits of his "I," a radical change of his interrelations above all within himself. Meanwhile, "religious feeling," which in our day again dominates in religion, is so distinct from faith because it lives and is nourished *by itself*, i.e., through the gratification that it gives and which, in the final analysis, is subordinated to personal tastes and emotional experiences, subjective and individual "spiritual needs."

Faith, to the degree that it is indeed faith, cannot but be an inner struggle: "I believe; help my unbelief..." (Mk 9:24). Religious feeling, on the contrary, "satisfies" precisely because it is passive, and if it is oriented toward anything, it is primarily toward help and consolation amidst life's adversities. Although its subject is always the person, faith is never individualistic, for it is directed to that which is revealed to it as absolute truth, which by its very nature is incapable of being "individual." Faith therefore invariably requires confession, expression, attraction and conversion of others to itself. Religious feeling, on the contrary, being utterly individualistic, feels itself to be inexpressible and shies away from any attempt at expression and comprehension, as if it were an unnecessary and unhealthy "rationalizing," which would put "simple faith" at risk of destruction. True faith aspires to the integral illumination of the entire human composite by subordinating to itself the reason, the will, the whole of life. Religious feeling, on the contrary, easily accepts a rupture between religion and life and gets along happily with ideas, convictions, sometimes entire worldviews that are not only alien to Christianity but frequently openly contradictory to it.

It is precisely "religious feeling," and not faith in the original Christian perception of the word, that dominates if not altogether reigns in contemporary Orthodox piety. Its gradual substitution for faith usually goes unnoticed, because externally, on the surface of church life, it often appears as the most absolute, one-hundred-percent bulwark of genuine "churchliness" and "true Orthodoxy." In its Orthodox variant it expresses itself, to be sure, chiefly in a uterine attachment to rituals, customs, traditions—all the outward forms of church life. And here, thanks to this outward "churchliness" of religious feeling, so many do not understand that the conservatism inherent to it is in fact pseudo-conservatism, deeply alien—one can even say inimical—to the original Christian tradition. It is a conservatism of form, but one that not only fails to relate the form to its content—i.e., the faith incarnate in it, revealed and granted through it—but in fact denies the very presence of such content. If religious feeling is so "conservative," so devoted to form that any, even the most insignificant change in the latter troubles and irritates it, then it is precisely because it is bewitched by the form, "form-in-itself," its immutability, sacredness, beauty. It is nourished by the form, it finds in it that gratification, the quest of which is its very essence. And thus it is even more troubled and irritated by any attempt to comprehend the form, to seek the truth incarnate in it and manifested by it—and quite rightly so, for here religious feeling can smell the mortal danger that hangs over it from the judgment of faith.

In reality, the newness—the absolute and eternal newness—of Christianity lies *only in faith*, only in the truth, which is ascertained through faith and transformed into salvation and life. Therefore, without referring themselves to faith, without a constant "identification" of themselves as the incarnation and fulfillment of faith, no "forms" in Christianity are real, all the more so in that they themselves become idols and idolatry, for they create a violation of the worship of God "in Spirit and truth" that was commanded and granted to us by Christ. It is not difficult to demonstrate that Christianity has created no new forms, but has embraced and inherited the "old" forms present in human religion and life from time immemorial. However, in this is its eternal newness, that it not only filled the ancient forms with new

content, new meaning, but indeed transformed and eternally transforms them into the very manifestation, the very gift of truth, into communion with it as the new life. But this transformation, I repeat, is accomplished *only* through faith. "It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail" (Jn 6:63). Only through faith, because it is from the Spirit and knows the truth, is given the power to create life out of the flesh of the form, to transform it into "communion of the one Spirit."

But "religious feeling" does not know this transformation above all precisely because it *does not want to*. It does not know and does not want to know because in its very essence it is *agnostic*. Not oriented toward the truth, it is nourished and lives not by faith, as knowledge and possession of the truth, as the life of life, but by itself, by its own self-delight and self-sufficiency. The best witness to this is the startling indifference to the content of faith, the complete lack of interest in what *faith believes*, on the part of the overwhelming majority of people who call themselves believers and who are most sincerely devoted to the Church. The radiant revelation of the triune God, of the trinitarian divine life, of the mystery of Christ's God-manhood, of the union in him—"without confusion, without change, without division, without separation"—of God and man, the descent of the Holy Spirit into the world, and in the Spirit "the beginning of another life, new and eternal"—everything by which the early Church literally lived, in which she rejoiced as the "victory that overcomes the world," and which therefore became the subject of strained attempts at comprehension and passionate disputes—all this holds no interest for the contemporary "religious man." And this is not the result of a sinful laziness or weakness. The content of faith, the truth to which it is directed, holds no interest for him because it is not necessary for his "religiosity," for that religious feeling that gradually substituted itself for faith and dissolved faith in itself.

But then, of what *unity of faith* can one speak? What can this very concept—so important, so central to the early Church and to her understanding of tradition—mean? To what experience can it correspond? If both theology, in its formal, rationally and juridically saturated form, and piety, in its thorough reduction to "individualized" religious feeling, are "not occupied" with unity, for

it dropped out of their field of attention and interest, then what is the content of this concept, which nevertheless remains one of the chief poles, the chief nerves of Christianity?

Actually, there is much talk today—in all likelihood immeasurably more than in times past—about Christian unity, about the unity of the Church. But here the whole fact of the matter, I am not afraid to say, lies in the *heretical* temptation of our day, that this unity is something *other* than the unity that constituted the heartbeat and chief joy, the very content of Christian faith and Christian life from the first day of the Church's existence. Almost imperceptibly to religious consciousness, a substitution has occurred, and in our day this substitution manifests itself all the more obviously as a betrayal.

The essence of this substitution lies in the fact that, instead of understanding, recognizing and experiencing the Church as simultaneously the source and gift of a unity that is always new—for it is a unity neither extracted from the world nor reduced to its level—the Church has herself come to be perceived as the expression, form and “sanction” of an already existing, earthly, “natural” unity. Or, to put it another way, the Church as *unity from above* has been replaced by the Church as *unity from below*. When, in the service of this unity from below, the chief, if not the only, calling and purpose of the Church becomes the expression and preservation of this unity of flesh and blood, the substitution becomes a betrayal.

I am convinced that, precisely in our day and precisely because our epoch, as no other, is literally possessed by the cult and pathos of “unity,” this substitution is especially dangerous, threatening to become betrayal and heresy in the full meaning of these words—although this is something to which the majority of believers and “church” people are blind. They are blind to it because they neither have nor know any experience of unity and, consequently, they do not want it, for the heart can only want that which, though only partly—“in a mirror, dimly”—it has sensed, gotten to know, come to love and already cannot forget. But here, not knowing, not remembering, they want and seek unity from below. To it they transfer man's unquenchable thirst for unity. And they fail to understand that, outside the unity from above given to us by Christ, any unity from below not only

becomes inwardly senseless and useless, but inevitably becomes an idol and, strange as it may seem, draws religion itself, Christianity itself, backward—into idolatry.

Therefore the Church—and first of all Orthodox theology—now has no more urgent and pressing task than the elucidation of the experience and knowledge of unity from above, i.e., the very essence of the Church, which sets her apart from everything in “this world,” but which therefore manifests her as the salvation of the world and mankind.

5

THE LOFTIER THE WORD, THE MORE AMBIGUOUS IT IS, THE more insistently it demands from Christians who use it not simply its most precise definition but also its *liberation*, exorcism and cleansing from the lie that perverts it from within. The discernment of spirits, to which the apostle John the Theologian calls us, is above all a differentiation of words, for not only did the word, with the world and all creation, fall, but the fall of the world began precisely with the perversion of the word. Through the word entered that lie whose father is the devil. The poison of this lie consists in the fact that the word itself remained the same, so that when man speaks of “God,” “unity,” “faith,” “piety,” “love,” he is convinced that he knows of what he is speaking, whereas the fall of the word lies precisely in that it inwardly became “other,” became a lie about its own proper meaning and content. The devil did not create new, “evil” words, just as he did not and could not create another world, just as he did not and could not create anything. The whole falsehood and the whole power of this falsehood lie in the fact that he made the *same* words into words *about something else*, he usurped them and converted them into an instrument of evil and that, consequently, he and his servants in “this world” always speak in a language literally stolen from God.

This is why all attempts to reduce the question of words, their content and meaning, to a question of their definition are vain. For in any case, a definition is made up of words, and this means that it does not and cannot escape from its own vicious circle,

which enslaves all fallen creation. Therefore the fallen word, like all of the fallen world, requires not definition but *salvation*, and it awaits this salvation not from itself and not from other words but from the cleansing and revivifying power and grace of God.

Theology, whose essence lies in the search for “words appropriate to God” (θεοπρεπεῖς λόγοι), is called to be such a salvation of words through the power of God. But it fulfils its mission not with the help of definitions, not through “words about words,” but by referring words to that reality and to that experience of it that is more primary than the word itself and in relation to which the word is a *symbol*: manifestation, gift, partaking, possession. For it is precisely as a symbol—i.e., not as a definition of reality, which in the end is undefinable, but as its manifestation and gift, as partaking in it and as possession of it—that the word was created. Through the symbol the word frees itself from its fall and rises to that encounter with reality and that reception of it that we call faith.

The flaw of contemporary theology (including, alas, Orthodox theology) and its obvious impotence lies in the fact that it so often ceases to refer words to reality. It becomes “words about words,” definitions of a definition. Either it endeavors, as in the contemporary West, to *translate* Christianity into the “language of today,” in which case—because this is not only a “fallen” language but truly a language of renunciation of Christianity—theology is left with nothing to say and itself becomes apostasy; or, as we often see among the Orthodox, it attempts to thrust on “contemporary man” its own abstract and in many respects “archaic” language, which, to the degree that it refers neither to any reality nor to any experience for this “contemporary” man, remains alien and incomprehensible, and on which learned theologians, with the aid of all these definitions and interpretations, conduct experiments in artificial resuscitation.

But in Christianity, faith, as experience of an encounter and a gift received in this encounter, precedes words, for only from this experience do they find not simply their meaning but their power. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Mt 12:34). And thus words that are not referred to this experience or that are turned away from it inevitably become *only* words—ambiguous, easily changed and evil.

6

ALL THAT HAS BEEN SAID RELATES IN THE FIRST PLACE TO A truly key term for Christianity: *unity*. I am convinced that there is no word in human language more divine—but therefore also more diabolical, in that it has fallen and has been “stolen” from God. And this is true because in this case both the primary meaning and the substitution, the “theft,” concern not something related to life but *life itself*, genuine life in its quintessence.

The word “unity” is divine because in the experience of Christian faith it is *referred* above all to God himself, to the revelation of divine life as unity and of unity as the content and fulness of divine life. God revealed himself in his triunity and triunity as his life, and this means as the source and principle of all life, as truly the life of life. Perhaps nowhere is the Church’s *knowledge* that this unity is far above any reasoning and definition better and more fully expressed—incarnated—than in that icon of icons, Rublev’s *Holy Trinity*, the miracle of which lies in the fact that, while being a representation of the three, it is in the deepest sense of the word an icon, i.e., a revelation, manifestation and vision, of unity as divine life itself, as the Real.

Because the entire Christian faith, in all its depth, is directed toward the triune God—the knowledge of God in his triunity—through this knowledge it knows also the creaturely life created by him. It knows it in its *original state*, it knows it in its *fall*, it knows it in its *salvation*. First of all, this is knowledge and experience of creation, i.e., as created by God and granted life as unity with God, and in him, only in him, with all creation, all life. Secondly, this is knowledge and experience of the fall, i.e., of the very essence of evil and sin as division, separation from God and therefore the disintegration and decomposition of life itself, the triumph of death in it. Finally, this is knowledge and experience of salvation, i.e., the restoration of unity with God and in him with all creation, in which lies the essence of the new and eternal life, coming in power but already granted, already anticipating the kingdom of God: “that they may be one even as we are one” (Jn 17:22).

This means that to the Christian faith, unity is not something

important and desired but nevertheless "supplementary," distinct from faith, as if there could be faith without "unity," and as if unity were not contained, manifested and living by faith. In unity is the very essence, the very content of faith, which also is entrance into unity, the reception of the unity forfeited by the world in its fall, and the experience of unity as salvation and new life. Thus it is said of faith that "He who through faith is righteous shall live" (Rm 1:17), that "He who believes in the Son has eternal life" (Jn 3:36) and "shall never die" (Jn 11:26). Faith is the partaking of the *unity from above*, and in it of the "beginning of another life, new and eternal." And the Church is manifested in this world as the gift, the presence, the fulfilment of this *unity from above*, and thus of faith. The Church is not something "other" in relation to faith, although linked with faith, but precisely the fulfilment of faith itself—that unity the reception of which, the entrance into which, the partaking of which, is faith. In the Christian tradition and experience, faith is that which leads us, which introduces us into the Church, which *knows* the Church herself as the fulfilment of faith, as the new creation and the new life. The man who says, as is so often the case in our day, "I am deeply faithful, but my faith does not need the Church," may possibly believe, and even deeply, but his faith is something *other* than that faith that from the first day of Christianity was the thirst for baptismal entry into the Church and the constant quenching of this thirst in the "unity of faith and love" at Christ's table in his kingdom. The whole life of the Church is "illuminated by the Holy Trinity in a mystic unity" (first matins antiphon, tone 4). Conversely, there is no life of the Church that does not shine through and commune in this divine unity. It is through this light that an ascetic such as St Serafim of Sarov, in his "remote hermitage," in an external sense distant from the Church's "visible reality," can nevertheless live in the Church and through the Church. At the same time, a man fully immersed in this "visible reality," in the externals of church life, may not live by this light. For the whole order of the Church, her whole "structure," her whole "visible reality" is alive, real, lifecreating, only to the degree that it is referred and related to this divine *unity from above*, and related not only as a "means" to an ultimate end, when "God will be all in all" (1 Co 15:28), but as the image, gift, light and

power, *here and now*, of the kingdom of God, as truly the visibility of the invisible and the realization of that which is anticipated.

It is *only* through this unity from above, in which we find the Church's genuine life and grace and the newness of this life, that the Church is separated from "this world," and it is only through the knowledge and experience of this unity that she knows it as the "fallen world," whose image passes away (1 Co 7:31) and which is doomed to death. For, if the "visible" Church, in her members and in her whole "external" life, is flesh of the flesh and blood of the blood of "this world," then in her genuine life—invisible to the world, for it is "hid with Christ in God" (Col 3:3) and recognizable only to faith—she is, in relation to it, of an entirely *different nature*. It is "this world" because its fall consists in this: that through sin its life was torn away from this unity from above and in this rupture became itself corruption, decay and hopeless enslavement to death and time, which reign upon earth.

It is precisely this comprehension of the Church's being of a different nature in relation to "this world," of her essence as unity from above, that discloses to us the genuine meaning of that substitution we spoke of earlier: that the chief and most frightening danger poisoning contemporary church consciousness is the substitution of *unity from below* for unity from above.

7

IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THE DEPTHS OF THIS DANGER AND its genuine horror, one must first of all sense the essence of what we have termed "unity from below," in contradistinction to the "unity from above." It is that unity that, however much it is fallen, dead and "lying in evil," lives to the same degree that "this world" lives and that, however much it obscures and distorts, is placed in it by God. The devil could turn man, and in him, the world, away from God, he could poison and enfeeble life through sin, permeate it with mortality and death. One thing he could not and cannot do: change the very essence of life as unity. He could not and cannot because only God is the creator and giver of life. Only from him is there life, the law of which, however much life is perverted by sin, remains the law of unity. Everything that

lives, in every pulse of life, lives through unity, awaits it and strives toward it.

The substitution, the victory of the "prince of this world," however, lies in the fact that he has torn this unity away from God, its source, content and goal, and thus has made unity an end-in-itself or, in the language of faith, an *idol*. Unity, which is *from* God, has ceased to be unity with God and in God, who alone fulfils it as genuine unity and genuine life. Unity becomes its own content, its own "god."

Here, on the one hand, because unity is *from* God, it continues to shine in "this" fallen world and to create its life: in family and friends, in the sense of belonging to a particular people and of responsibility for its fate, in love, compassion and charity, in art, its flights and transports to the eternal, heavenly and beautiful, in the highest quests of the mind, in the divine beauty of goodness and humility—in everything, in other words, that exists in man and in the world from the image and likeness of God, darkened but not destroyed. And, on the other hand, to the degree that it ceases to be unity with God and in God and is transformed into an end-in-itself and an idol, it becomes not only "easily transformable," unstable and easily shattered, but also the generator of every new division, evil, violence and hatred. Itself being turned *downward*—to the earthly and natural, to things below—and regarding flesh and blood as its principle and source, this unity from below begins to divide in the same measure that it unifies. Love for one's own, unity among one's own, revolves around enmity toward the "foreign," what is not one's own, and separation from it, so that unity itself proves to be above all a type of chauvinism, self-affirmation and self-defense *against* something or someone. Everything in the world lives through unity, and everything in the world is divided by this unity and constantly divides itself into collisions and struggles of "unities" that have become idols. And nowhere does the truly diabolical essence of this substitution become more apparent than in those *utopias of unity* that constitute the content and inner motivation of all contemporary *ideologies* without exception, both "left" and "right"—ideologies in which the diabolical lie sells itself as the ultimate dehumanization of man, as the offering of man as a sacrifice to the "unity" that has become a complete idol.

Here is why the ever more obvious penetration into the Church of the temptation of "unity from below," its gradual poisoning of church consciousness, is so horrible. We are not talking about outward changes, about some revisions of dogmas or canons, about a "reappraisal" of tradition. On the contrary, in contrast to western Christians, who spontaneously "capitulate" to the spirit of "our time," the Orthodox remain deeply conservative, attached to everything covered by the halo of antiquity. Moreover, in this time of a profound spiritual crisis, provoked by the triumph of secularism, of impersonal and inhuman technology, of ideological utopianism, etc., this nostalgic attraction to "antiquity" is growing stronger in Orthodox "religious feeling," becoming itself its own form of a utopianism of the past.

We are speaking of the inner orientation of church consciousness, of that *treasure*, of which the gospels say that there where the heart is, man's treasure is also (Mt 6:21), and which comprises the inner nerve, the inner inspiration of church life. For the Church of Christ, the kingdom of God, i.e., the unity from above, unity with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, has always been, always will be and cannot but be such a treasure. It is only to manifest it in "this world" and through it to save the world that the Church remains and "sojourns" on earth. Her witness and proclamation concern only the kingdom, her life is only in it. We can even say further that the coming of Christ and, in him, of the unity from above into this world, his commandment to the apostles, and thus to the Church, to preach the gospel to all creation, baptizing them "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," and thus, to enter into the Church and to create it, brought into "this world" the final and ultimate *division*—"not . . . peace, but a sword" (Mt 10:34). "For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; . . . and a man's foes will be those of his own household" (Mt 10:35-36).

But the whole power of this truly saving division, the whole absolute, radical distinction between it and the destructive division brought into the world by the devil, which comprises the very essence of sin and the fall, is that it is the *exposure* (and I mean this in the literal sense of this word: the manifestation, revelation, the "unmasking") of the devilish substitution, the lie, the conver-

sion of the “unity from below” into an idol, and the service to it in idolatry, in separation from God, in the division of life, in destruction and death. Only because the divine unity from above came into the world, was manifested and granted and abides in it, can man finally come to *believe* in it, i.e., to see, to accept its entire essence, to love, to know it as the heart’s treasure and the one thing needful, but in the same manner to see and comprehend the utter depths, the entire horror, the whole dead-end of the fall, of the “unity from below” that the devil has kept secret from us under cunning and seductive makeup. The *conversion* that necessarily lies at the foundation of Christian faith is first of all a conversion from the “unity from below” to the “unity from above,” the rejection of the one for the reception of the other, for without renunciation it is impossible to receive, without “repudiating the devil and all his angels and all his service” the baptismal unity with Christ is impossible. “And a man’s foes will be those of his own household.” What are these words about if not the “unity from below,” any “unity from below,” i.e., unity that has become an idol and idolatry, existing in itself, self-oriented and consequently a division of life? “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world” (1 Jn 2:15-16). What is this commandment of the apostle of love about if not the renunciation of “unity from below” in the name of the “unity from above,” of “this world,” which has become an idol, in the name of the world as communion in the divine unity from above, as life in God?

Here is why the unity from above, in which the salvation of the world lies, comes into the world through the cross and is granted to us as the cross, through which, in the words of the apostle Paul, “the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Ga 6:14), as a real struggle with the temptation of “unity from below,” which has permeated all life, both the most private, most “personal,” and the most “external.” But just as death—which God did not create and which the apostle calls the “last enemy” (1 Co 15:26)—is destroyed in its very “mortality” in the free death of Christ, fulfilled only through love, only through self-sacrifice, and the tomb is thus made a bearer of life, so also

the division brought into the world by Christ, since he is the expositor of the devil, the liar and the divider, destroys the devil's work, for through this division the one real (for it is divine) unity enters into the world, and reigns in everyone who receives and lives by it. Through it every division is overcome and shall be fully conquered, so that God may be all in all.

Yet Christians do not bear this gift, they do not endure their lofty and saving calling in "this world." This unity from above is all that is necessary; the world itself, without knowing it, hungers and thirsts for it from the Church. And all people have always wanted—for ages!—to compel the Church herself to serve all manner of "unities from below," to bless, to consecrate, to "religiously" sanction them, to be their expression and justification. Precisely these "unities from below"—natural, national, ideological, political—have become the treasure of the heart, although the substitution is also often hidden from the very ones who accomplish it, for this treasure is clothed in church vestments and speaks so often in a particularly traditional, particularly "Orthodox" language. But here, even if bewitched with churchliness, antiquity and all their splendor, the heart that has given itself over to this treasure will not utter words that resound with such joy—and above all such self-evidency—as, for example, those in the early Christian *Letter to Diognetus*: "Every foreign land is their fatherland, and yet for them every fatherland is a foreign land."⁴ Such a heart does not find Christians to be a "third race," wanderers and strangers on earth—for they have already come to know, already beheld the full joy of the homeland of the heart's desire. Such a heart will not breathe by this freedom in Christ that alone bears the transfiguration of the world, the return to God of all "unities," all "values," which have been estranged from him by the devil.

8

ONLY NOW, HAVING SAID THIS, CAN WE RETURN TO THAT *confession of faith* that from the first day of the Church was and remains the condition of the baptismal entry into church life and

⁴5:5, tr. Richardson, 217.

which in the current order of the liturgy introduces, as it were, the eucharistic canon, the very sacrament of thanksgiving and oblation.

"For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved" (Rm 10:10). We spoke earlier of the decisive significance of the *word* for the Christian faith. Christianity itself is above all the *good news*, the proclamation of the Word of God, and thus the salvation and revivification of the word, its transformation into what God made it to be: into the word not only about reality but word-reality, word-life, word as manifestation, gift and "great power." The confession of faith in words and through words is thus so fundamental in Christianity that the "unity from above," which constitutes the essence of the Church herself as the "unity of faith and love," is realized, granted and received above all through its *naming*, through its genuine manifestation and incarnation in the word. If the entire life of the Church and the entire life of each of her members is called to be a confession, then the principle, the source of this confession is always in the word, for in it and through it God's gift to us—and our acceptance of this gift, the communion, the unity that also constitutes the essence and life of faith—is identified, named and fulfilled. As the evangelical word about Christ manifests and grants to us Christ himself, the incarnation of the Word of God, so the confession of faith in words—the naming of the divine truth, to which faith is directed and of which it is the knowledge—is, by the same token, the gift of and communion in the truth. Therefore the Church never ceases, never tires of, again and again, and each time as if the first, "with one heart and with one mind," pronouncing the most astonishing, the most inexhaustible of all human words: "I believe"—and thus identifying, naming that divine truth, through the knowledge and light of which she lives. Therefore, being the very realization of the "unity of faith," the confession of faith contains and grants the joy of this unity: it is a joyful rite of the Church. And thus, finally, it is precisely this naming of the unity from above that introduces us into the sacrament of this unity, that itself begins the eucharistic ascension to the table of Christ in his kingdom.

But the confession of faith is likewise a judgment of the Church, and of each of us who are members of the Church. "For

by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned" (Mt 12:37). In it is the criterion and in it is the indictment of all of our substitutions and betrayals. In it is the un-failing test of where and in what is the treasure of our hearts, the test of our faith itself.

Everything in the Church, all her forms and structure, and even worship and piety, can be "reinterpreted," for there is no limit to the guile and cunning of the "prince of this world"; everything in the world—even religion, even "spirituality," even visible splendor—can become an idol and idolatry. But as long as the Church, and each of us with her and in her, repeats the *confession of faith* and by it judges herself and again and again is enlightened by the truth, the "gates of hell" shall not prevail against her, shall not dry up the eternally revivifying, the eternally healing power of her life, "illumined by the Holy Trinity in a mystic unity."