



The Christian Mystery

From Pagan Myth
to Christian Mysticism

LOUIS BOUYER

TRANSLATED BY ILLTYD TRETHOWAN

'Bouyer's highly provocative, meticulously documented argument should prove to be a gold mine for students of mysticism and a rich resource for those with more general interests in Christian spirituality.'

INTERPRETATION

THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY

This page intentionally left blank

THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY

From Pagan Myth to Christian Mysticism

LOUIS BOUYER

translated by

Iltyd Trethowan



T & T CLARK INTERNATIONAL
A Continuum imprint
LONDON • NEW YORK

Published by T&T Clark International

A Continuum imprint

The Tower Building, 11 York Road, London SE1 7NX
15 East 26th Street, Suite 1703, New York, NY 10010

www.tandtelark.com

Copyright © T&T Clark Ltd, 1990

First published 1989

This edition published 2004

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0567043401 (paperback)

Typeset by Bookworm Typesetting Ltd, Edinburgh

Printed on acid-free paper in Great Britain by Antony Rowe Ltd, Chippenham,
Wilts

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Chapter One	
PRESENTING THE PAULINE MYSTERY	5
<i>The use of the word μυστήριον in the New Testament</i>	5
<i>Christian Mystery and Wisdom for the Greeks</i>	6
<i>Wisdom in the Mystery</i>	8
<i>Folly for the Greeks and Stumbling-block for the Jews</i>	9
<i>Cross, Resurrection and Divine Love</i>	11
<i>The Letter to the Colossians: Christ in us and Reconciliation</i>	13
<i>The Letter to the Ephesians: Recapitulation and Mystery both of God and of Ourselves</i>	16
<i>Mystery of the Bridegroom and the Bride</i>	18
Chapter Two	
THE PAGAN MYSTERIES: ELEUSIS	19
<i>Christian Mystery and Pagan Mysteries</i>	19
<i>Difficulty in Studying the Mysteries</i>	20
<i>The Mysteries of Eleusis</i>	23
<i>From Mysteries to their Interpretation</i>	26
<i>From Local Cult to Mysteries</i>	31
<i>The Fame of the Mysteries</i>	31
<i>Analogies and Differences between Pagan Mysteries and Christian Mystery</i>	35
Chapter Three	
FROM THE CULT OF THE MOTHER-GODDESSES TO THE MYSTERIES OF HELLENISM	37

<i>The Archaic Cult of the Mother Goddesses</i>	37
<i>The Appearance of Masculine Consorts</i>	40
<i>The Mother-Goddesses and Death</i>	41
<i>Arrival of these Divinities in the West</i>	42
<i>The First-Known Myths of the Goddess</i>	43
<i>The Cult Becomes a Mystery</i>	44
<i>The Initiation into the Mystery of Attis</i>	46
<i>The Supposed Effects of Initiation</i>	47
<i>The Mysteries of Serapis</i>	49
<i>The Witness of Apuleius</i>	50

Chapter Four

FROM DIONYSUS TO ORPHISM AND THE MYSTERIES OF MITHRAS

<i>Dionysus and Apollo</i>	53
<i>The Dionysian Expansion</i>	54
<i>Orgies or Mysteries?</i>	55
<i>From Orgy to Mystery</i>	56
<i>The Problem of Orphism</i>	60
<i>Orphic Mysteries?</i>	62
<i>Mithras and His Mysteries</i>	66
	68

Chapter Five

THE BIBLICAL SOURCES OF THE PAULINE MYSTERY: FROM APOCALYPTIC TO THE MYSTERY

<i>Summing-up Mystery Religions</i>	72
<i>Biblical Apocalyptic and Christian Mystery</i>	72
<i>From Wisdom to Apocalyptic</i>	74
	76

Chapter Six

THE BIBLICAL SOURCES OF THE PAULINE MYSTERY: FROM MYTHS TO WISDOM

<i>Myth and Divine Word</i>	81
<i>The Original Word: A Word of Action</i>	81
<i>Revelation of the Name and Revelation of the Torah</i>	84
<i>The Sign of the Passover</i>	88
<i>Royal Wisdom and Divine Apocalypse</i>	89
	91

Chapter Seven	
THE MYSTERY AND THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST	95
Chapter Eight	
THE PAULINE GOSPEL OF THE SECOND	
ADAM AND THE MYSTERY	99
<i>The Second Adam according to the Epistle to the Romans</i>	100
<i>The Last Adam in First Corinthians</i>	101
<i>Life 'in Christ'</i>	104
<i>Baptism</i>	105
<i>The Eucharist</i>	107
<i>Life in the Spirit, Filial Life</i>	108
<i>The Marriage of Christ and the Church</i>	109
Chapter Nine	
THE MYSTERY AND THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST	
IN THE JOHANNINE WRITINGS	111
<i>The Johannine Doctrine of Love</i>	111
<i>The Authority of the Johannine Writings</i>	112
<i>The Prologues of Mark and John</i>	115
<i>The Glory and the Schekinah</i>	118
<i>Seeing and Contemplating</i>	120
<i>The Light and the Life</i>	121
<i>The Glory of the Cross</i>	123
<i>Unity in Knowledge and Love</i>	125
<i>From the Schekinah to the Merkabah</i>	126
<i>The Marriage of the Lamb</i>	126
<i>The Following and Imitation of Christ</i>	127
<i>The Spirit</i>	127
<i>The Image of the Vine</i>	129
Chapter Ten	
THE MYSTERY IN THE APOSTOLIC AND	
SUB-APOSTOLIC FATHERS	131
<i>Ignatius of Antioch</i>	131
<i>Justin Martyr</i>	133
<i>Irenaeus of Lyons</i>	134
Chapter Eleven	
THE MYSTERY ACCORDING TO THE	
CHRISTIANS OF ALEXANDRIA: CLEMENT	
AND GNOSIS	138

<i>Christian Initiation</i>	138
<i>Clement's Gnosis and Philosophy</i>	140
<i>The Content of the Gnosis</i>	141
<i>The Development of the Gnosis</i>	146
<i>Deification</i>	147
<i>Apatheia</i>	147

Chapter Twelve

THE MYSTERY ACCORDING TO THE CHRISTIANS OF ALEXANDRIA: ORIGEN AND THE MYSTICAL MEANING OF THE SCRIPTURES	149
<i>The Theory of Exegesis</i>	149
<i>The Spiritual Exegesis of Inspired Scripture</i>	150
<i>From Principles of Application</i>	153
<i>Exegesis and Spiritual Experience</i>	156
<i>Paul and John According to Origen</i>	157
<i>The Representative Character of the Alexandrians</i>	158

Chapter Thirteen

THE CATECHESIS OF THE FOURTH CENTURY AND THE MYSTICAL CONTENT OF THE CHRISTIAN LITURGY	160
<i>Catechesis and Mystery</i>	160
<i>From Scripture to the Sacraments</i>	164
<i>Preaching and Catechesis</i>	167
<i>Word and Spirit</i>	170

Chapter Fourteen

MYSTICAL CONTEMPLATION ACCORDING TO THE FATHERS	172
<i>The Theology of Monasticism</i>	172
<i>Gregory of Nazianzus and the Monastic Exodus</i>	174
<i>Gregory of Nyssa and Epektasis</i>	175
<i>Mystical Contemplation</i>	177
<i>Dionysian Mysticism</i>	179
<i>The Cloud and the Mystical Darkness</i>	184
<i>Mysticism, Scripture and Liturgy</i>	185

Chapter Fifteen	
PHILOSOPHY AND MYSTICISM	187
<i>Christian Contemplation and Philosophy</i>	187
<i>Contemplation in the Philosophers of the Ancient World</i>	189
<i>Ammonius Sakkas</i>	192
<i>Philo the Jew</i>	193
<i>Plotinian Contemplation</i>	195
<i>Ecstasy in Greek Philosophy</i>	196
<i>The Posterity of Plotinus</i>	200
<i>The Development of Apophatic Language</i>	201

Chapter Sixteen	
THE DEVELOPMENT OF MYSTICISM IN THE	
CHURCH OF THE FATHERS	206
<i>Augustinian Contemplation</i>	207
<i>Origen and Gregory of Nyssa</i>	210
<i>Evagrius of Pontus</i>	216
<i>From Pseudo-Denis to Maximus the Confessor</i>	222
<i>Divinization</i>	227
<i>Learned Mysticism and the Experience of the Simple</i>	229

Chapter Seventeen	
THE DEVELOPMENT OF MYSTICISM IN THE	
MEDIEVAL WEST	231
<i>Cassian</i>	231
<i>Gregory the Great</i>	234
<i>Light from the East</i>	236
<i>William of Saint Thierry and his Influence</i>	237
<i>William and Bernard</i>	239
<i>Hadewijch of Antwerp</i>	240
<i>Master Eckhart</i>	244
<i>Ruysbroek the Admirable</i>	245

Chapter Eighteen	
MODERN TIMES: MYSTICISM AND	
PSYCHOLOGY	248
<i>The Problem of Saint Teresa's Mysticism</i>	250
<i>Saint John of the Cross and Theology</i>	253
<i>Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus</i>	257
<i>Elizabeth of the Trinity</i>	258
<i>Edith Stein</i>	258

Chapter Nineteen

MYSTICISM AND NON-CHRISTIAN

CONTEMPLATION	260
<i>Decadence and Resurgence of Mysticism</i>	261
<i>Limitless Extension of the Term 'Mystical'</i>	262
<i>Phenomenological Study of Various 'Mysticisms'</i>	265
<i>Mysticisms of the Self and Cosmic Mysticisms</i>	268
<i>The Double Problem of Buddhism</i>	270
<i>Protestant Mysticism</i>	274
<i>Jewish and Islamic Mysticism</i>	275
<i>Conclusion</i>	276

CONCLUSION

EXPERIENCE, MYSTERY AND SACRIFICE, THE MARRIAGE FEAST OF THE LAMB AND OUR FILIATION

<i>Mystical Experience, But in What Sense?</i>	278
<i>The Nature and Meaning of Sacrifice</i>	287
<i>Nuptial Mysticism and the Mysticism of Essence</i>	292
<i>From the Divine Paternity to the Virginal Maternity and The Marriage Feast of the Lamb</i>	293

Biblical Index (and reference to Judaica)	296
<i>Index of Ancient Authors</i>	299
<i>Index of Modern Authors</i>	301

INTRODUCTION

Many years ago, and almost at the same moment, two intuitions about two apparently independent topics took possession of my mind. Getting to the bottom of them was to become the chief object of my studies. But as one of them sorted itself out and changed its character while the other, clarifying itself, became enriched, it became obvious to me that there was here only one problem.

On the one hand, the discovery of the work of Dom Odo Casel, the great liturgist, theologian and spiritual guide of the Abbey of Maria Laach, had at once filled me with delight. I can compare this only with what Newman had to say about his own initiation into the philosophy of the great Christian thinkers of Alexandria, Clement and Origen. Casel's notion of a 'mystery religion' developing spontaneously as Greco-Latin paganism became ready for the revelation of the Gospel, becoming at once a sort of envelope for rites as well as for ideas, and so enabling humanity to make fully its own God's utterly supernatural gift, this notion not only filled me with enthusiasm but literally dazzled me.¹

At the same time all my thinking about books such as Bergson's *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*² and Père Joseph Maréchal's *Studies in the Psychology of the Mystics*³ (the

¹ On the controversy aroused by Dom Casel's ideas see Theodore FILTHAUT, *La Théologie des Mystères, Exposé de la Controverse*, Paris, 1954.

The best study of the connection between Christian mystery and pagan mysteries remains that of Hugo RAHNER, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery*, tr., London, 1963. On the methodology there are excellent comments by Bruce M. METZGER, *Considerations of Methodology on the study of Mystery Religions and early Christianity* in *Harvard Theological Review*, January 1955. But these works give only an introduction to the subject and are outdated by recent investigations.

² London, 1935.

³ London, 1927.

title does not do it justice) brought me to the conclusion that there is a Christian experience which, not alongside Christian faith, still less going beyond it, leads to a personal meeting with God, a union with God in Christ.

This last intuition became only clearer and fuller as time went on. Casel's view of things, on the other hand, was not so much contradicted as reorganized on a quite different level.

But the simultaneous pursuit of these two enquiries gradually produced the certainty that mystery and mysticism can be rightly explained only by one another in their wholly Christian and ultimately transcendent reality. For the mystery of Christ, irreducible to any other, is the only true object of the only mysticism rightly so called: Christian mysticism.

This last conclusion was the most unexpected discovery to which these enquiries and reflections led me. For at least a century nothing has been more generally accepted, among the learned, than that what is called 'mysticism' is found, as one and the same thing, in all the great religions of the world. Furthermore, many theologians, chiefly but not exclusively Protestants, from the founder of the most modern doctrinal liberalism, Albert Ritschl, to his most powerful opponent, Karl Barth, are in agreement that mysticism not only has nothing particularly Christian about it but is even opposed to the heart of the Gospel and indeed of the whole Bible. And, in Catholicism itself, there is even a religious belonging to the same Order as the great Rhenish mystics, and moreover himself an excellent authority on Greek thought, Père Festugière, who has supported this opinion.

Hasn't Friedrich Heiler, in his famous book *Prayer*,⁴ established the fundamental heterogeneity between what he calls 'mystical' prayer, turning away from the world so as to cleave only to God, and 'prophetic' prayer, turning to God only to contribute, by intercession, to the world's salvation? The same Heiler, typical in this of the inconsistency of Catholic 'modernism' at the beginning of the century, admired the synthesis of these two kinds of prayer in Christian mysticism. Later, however, Anders Nygren in his ingenious study *Eros and Agape*⁵ set himself to show in high

⁴ London, 1937.

⁵ London, 1957.

relief all the unnaturalness of any such alliance. For, according to him, the only love of God known to the New Testament is a love of which only God can be the subject, and the world the object: *Agape*, whereas the Greek Eros, so splendidly celebrated by Plato, is just the opposite, only a love of desire, proper to all imperfect beings, from which, therefore, the gods cannot suffer.

It is particularly noteworthy that Nygren himself thought it necessary to support his position by claiming to find already in the New Testament, especially the Johannine writings, the beginning, if not the principle, of this pagan influence, disastrous in his eyes, which was to introduce into Catholic spirituality as a whole a fatal internal contradiction – and into much of Protestant spirituality as well.

In fact, despite these arrogant certainties, which here again have won the agreement not only of Barth, Ebeling and many other Protestants, even the more or less neo-orthodox, but also of a growing number of Catholic (or supposedly Catholic) theologians, one of the most important tasks of this book must be to show that a mere semantic study of the Greek adjective *μυστικός*, referring to a certain kind of spiritual experience, completely undermines such insistent claims. At the moment it must be enough to remark that, despite the statements of so many learned (or semi-learned?) people, the term has never been used in this sense by any Platonist or neo-Platonist, and, better still, is never found in the works of Plotinus (or, if anyone prefers, in those of Porphyry, to whom we owe the texts).

And this too must be insisted upon: in those Christian writers to whom this unprecedented usage of the word is due, whether or not they are familiar with Greek philosophy, it never occurs in connection with anything which they might be thought to derive from this source but always with evident relation to what Saint Paul calls 'the mystery', that is, the salvific character of the Cross of Jesus.

As for the proposal that the Pauline mystery itself is described as such only through the influence of the pagan mysteries, it is, according to the best contemporary historians of the religions in question, an illusion which the most careful critical enquiries have already dissipated. That is not to say that the study of the pagan mysteries is without interest for Christian theology and

spirituality. But all that it can show us, taken together with the most assured discoveries of modern depth-psychologies, is that at all times the human spirit has confusedly realised that the meaning of life can be found only in some mysterious meeting (and how true this is!) between death and love. That is what only the Gospel of Jesus, as the apostles understood it and handed it on, could reveal to us. And that is what it is the business of the continuous tradition of the Catholic Church, of East and West, to elucidate and to transmit to us, in the experience of her Saints and the thinking of her Doctors.

CHAPTER ONE

PRESENTING THE PAULINE MYSTERY

The use of the word *μυστήριον* in the New Testament

Apart from a single instance in the Gospels, common to the three synoptics (but with an interesting difference in the case of Mark), and three in the *Apocalypse*, the use of the word in the New Testament is confined to the Pauline letters, where it appears quite often. So it is Saint Paul whom we must first consult to discover at its source the specific meaning of the word for the oldest Christian tradition.

After that comes the most exacting question raised by our task in this first part of the book: how did the apostle come to give this word the meaning, made increasingly precise in his letters as time passed, which he handed on to his successors?

However, as we shall see, the references to the theme in the synoptics and the *Apocalypse*, brief as they are, are a test of the plausibility or implausibility of the answers offered by the critics to this question about its origin for Saint Paul himself.

Let us leave aside, for the moment, the use of the word by the apostle which is no doubt the earliest we have, in *Second Thessalonians* 2, 7, where he speaks of a 'mystery of iniquity', something quite different from the meaning of the word in all other cases. Later it appears in *First Corinthians* with at least a pretty complete sketch of the meaning which he will always give it in the future.

According to certain manuscripts and to some ancient versions, the word appears at the beginning of the second chapter:

When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the mystery of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing about you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.¹

Verses 1 and 2.

However, it seems that *μυστήριον* here is a copyist's error, and a most significant one, for it shows a recognition, not only of the importance of the theme for all that follows, but also of its essential connection with the cross of Jesus. But, according to better evidence, we must read not *μυστήριον* but *μαρτύριον*, not 'the mystery' but 'the witness' of God.

In the letter's first chapter, concerned with divisions among Christians at Corinth, it is already clear from what the apostle says that they are attached to their typically Greek love of fine language and more or less ambitious speculations. At once, then, in the first words of the second chapter, the apostle contrasts with this a preaching (his own) which has no use for eloquent words or pretentious wisdom, concentrating instead upon Christ and upon him seen above all else as the crucified one.

Christian Mystery and Wisdom for the Greeks

The verses which follow work out the implications of what has just been said:

And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling; and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, that your faith might not rest on the wisdom of men but on the power of God.²

So the contrast from which everything begins is clear: on one side, a wisdom of the Greek kind, with high-flown ideas beautifully expressed; on the other, an announcement, like that of a herald who is himself of no account – hence this consciousness of personal weakness, this fear and trembling of a representative, not so much before those whom he addresses as before him whom he represents: God. So for a wisdom that is only an affair of words, or at best of abstractions, there is substituted a demonstration of the Spirit and power, that is, the manifestation, accompanying the delivery of the message, of the higher power which is that of the divine Spirit. This power declares itself in

² Verses 3 to 5.

'signs', more or less prodigious, which have put their warrant of truth on what was proclaimed by the herald.

Is that to say that there is here no manifestation of wisdom? On the contrary, Saint Paul goes on at once to say. But it is wisdom that has nothing to do with this world's wisdom: it is the wisdom of God which is contrasted in what follows with the proud but, in the end, derisory wisdoms of men.

Yet among the mature do we impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and mysterious (*ἐν μυστηρίῳ*) wisdom of God. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for, if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written,

'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the heart of man conceived,
that God has prepared for those that love him'.³

So now it is clear which wisdom the apostle rejects and which he sets forth. The wisdom on which the Corinthians, like other Greeks, pride themselves belongs only to this world. More precisely, it belongs entirely to 'this age', to the phase of history in which God, the one true God, remains hidden, unknown. But this phase is coming to its end, and it is already clear that with the appearance of Jesus its emptiness becomes obvious. Along with the rulers of this present time, whose reign is on the point of being abolished, this worldly wisdom is doomed to disappear. This merely human wisdom, which belongs to the powers of this world and whose worthlessness will be shown up in their imminent ruin, is opposed by another wisdom: the wisdom that is mysterious, that is still hidden for the moment, but divine.

It is plain that the Cross and God's revelation are all one, since, if the 'rulers' of this age had known this wisdom, they would have been far from crucifying the Lord of glory.

Why? Of course because the Cross of Jesus, a seeming defeat, will be in fact his triumph, and this triumph must mean, with

³ Verses 6 to 9. The quotation combines *Isaiah* 64, 3 and *Jeremiah*, 3, 16.

the dispossession of the 'rulers', the complete destruction of the wisdom with which they were themselves imbued.

Here let us note what the apostle will formulate quite explicitly later on: the 'rulers' of this age, who are hastening to their own ruin, are not only its visible princes, chiefs or leaders, the powerful or wise of this world: behind them crowd to their dethronement, their disqualification, those higher 'powers', who, as the earthly sovereigns themselves maintain, inspire them and grant them their authority – those false gods, fallen angels, whose reign will come to an end with the final coming of God's Kingdom.

Wisdom in the Mystery

The wisdom, then, which Saint Paul proclaims is, properly speaking, the first and immutable design of the Creator himself, which the fall (human and more than human) seemed to have obstructed. But, eventually, this wisdom, previously hidden, is to reveal itself, in the annihilation of the usurpers and, with them, the wisdom that inspired them.

But what is to constitute both the revelation of this mysterious wisdom and the victory of the divine Kingdom over all who oppose it? Again, it is plain that it is the Cross of Jesus. It is the proclamation of it which is all one with the revelation of the spirit and of power and in which the higher wisdom of God despised but invincible, will be declared in the final reckoning at the downfall of the other wisdom. That is what all that follows will show.

Before going further, it must be further remarked, as something already discernible more than just in filigree from what has so far been said, that the opposition between divine wisdom and the wisdom or wisdoms of this world is not mere contrast between diverse wisdoms of one same type. Greek wisdom, looked at fairly and squarely, and the Jewish wisdom closing in upon itself, which will soon be touched on, are purely speculative, claiming to explain reality, even to enable us thereby to fit ourselves into it agreeably, but they cannot even make an attempt to change it. It is already obvious that divine wisdom is quite different. This, being the wisdom of the Creator of all things, envisages their radical transformation and the final perfecting of

the whole world. That is precisely why it reveals itself, not in the communication of mere ideas, but in an event: the Cross. That is what is verified by the fact that it relies not on some abstract demonstration, some more or less persuasive speech, but on what the apostle calls a demonstration of the Spirit and power. That is what the conclusion of the second chapter will explain more fully.

For God has revealed it to us through [his] Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts freely bestowed on us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught us by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truth through the Spirit himself. But the psychic man [the man who has only the resources of his created spirit, the *psychê*] does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them, because they are discerned only with the Spirit. The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. 'For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?' But we have the mind of Christ.⁴

This conclusion, itself a provisional one, refers back to an indispensable section of the previous chapter, by which it is itself further explained.

Folly for the Greeks and Stumbling-Block for the Jews

For there the apostle, speaking of divisions among the Corinthians caused by their pointless discussions, had said that he was sent to them only to 'evangelize':

and not with eloquent wisdom [literally, one 'promoting discussion'] lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the wood of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us

⁴ Verses 10 to 16 (end of chapter). The quotation is from *Isaiah*, 40, 13.

who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart'.⁵ Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.⁶

Taken together with the texts already discussed, these words and the contrast which they define gain their full meaning. The light they shed on one another leaves us in no doubt of the meaning of the whole passage or of the mystery which is the key to it.

So we have on one side the speculative wisdom of the Greeks, at best a mere affair of thought and too often a mere affair of words. But the wisdom of Israel's scribes shows the same decadence when they confine themselves to a superficial exegesis of Old Testament texts (Job had already pointed it out; the exclamation – cf. *Job*, 12, 17 – 'Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe?' no doubt refers to this), incapable as they are of seeing that these texts themselves point to a creative future. Their wisdom reduces the preparatory stage of revelation to a mere account of reality or at most a mere rearrangement of it instead of finding it in the expectation of a decisive divine intervention which will transfigure everything.

What the proclamation of the Cross involves, considered here of course as the heart of the Gospel, the 'good news' of the New Testament, is just this intervention from above, shattering not only accounts of Scripture which confine the Old Testament to itself but also the speculations of Hellenic wisdom, unable to envisage such a transcendent intervention by a creative God (of whom it knows nothing), drawing his creation from the abyss where it had sunk. That is why the wisdom of the scribes, who at

⁵ *Isaiah*, 19, 11ff and 29, 14ff.

⁶ *1 Corinthians*, 1, verses 17 to 25.

best hold to the hope of mere superficial prodigies, collides with the Cross (their stumbling-block). They counted only on a visible victory over physical enemies, whereas what happened was just the opposite. As for the wisdom of the Greeks, which claimed to settle all questions and difficulties by keeping to the way of the world, that could see in the Cross only folly.

But the power of the Spirit, evidently implied by this whole train of thought to be the fruit of the Cross, asserts that Christ, dying on the Cross precisely as God's legate, as Son of God, testifies that the (apparent) weakness of God is stronger than any earthly power. So what one side takes for folly and what scandalizes the other (overthrowing as well their own wisdom, though they claimed to be enlightened from above) makes clear that the wisdom of God surpasses and confounds all limited human wisdom. It does so, not by arguments feebly based and feebly supported, but by a fact, an event which is at first baffling but demands by reason of its consequences the recognition that God transcends every conception as well as every power belonging to this created world. So long as 'this age' lasts, God will not appear in all his power, in all his reality, except for those who accept with faith the proclamation of the Cross and find their justification in the Spirit whom they receive in virtue of it.

Cross, Resurrection and Divine Love

Two other texts of Saint Paul's will then throw light on these opposed stances.

The first, the fifteenth chapter of the same Letter to the Corinthians, shows how the Cross, far from being a defeat, is what makes the resurrection possible, Christ's in the first place and then our own. For, as this chapter explains, it is Christ's resurrection and its extension to all believers which properly constitutes the 'demonstration of the Spirit and power', the justification of the Gospel, the 'good news' of the Cross.

And the Letter to the Romans, in its fifth chapter, explains this paradoxical capacity which the Cross of Christ manifests of being the source of the life-giving Spirit, in himself and in us. For the Cross is seen as the supreme manifestation of this love of God,

a love which is not only merciful but infinitely generous, saving us both from sin and from death.

For here we read:

While we were yet helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man – though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die. But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For, if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.⁷

This development shows the possibility, or rather the reality, of what was declared in this chapter's opening words:

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing in the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our suffering, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love [the love with which he has loved us: hence the Cross and the demonstration of the Spirit and of power which is its fruit] has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.⁸

In sum, the Cross shows the love of God which saves us, and this salvation is attested by the fact that, by this very love, by the Spirit, we ourselves become capable of this same love.

After reading these passages from Saint Paul's epistles, those from *First Corinthians* complemented by those from *Romans*, let us note first that they show plainly how the Cross, looked at from the perspective of the resurrection and of the pouring out of the Spirit upon all flesh, is the supreme revelation of the divine Wisdom. As the apostle will assert in all his later teaching, it solves the prime enigma of the human condition, which baffles all purely human wisdoms including that of Job's friends, believers of the Old Testament who do not look beyond it, as well as

⁷ *Romans*, 5, 6 to 10.

⁸ *Romans*, 5, 1 to 5.

that of the Greeks: the problem of evil, that is, the sin of God's creatures and the suffering and death even of the innocent which follow from it. It is indeed the supreme Innocent who, by his own uniquely unmerited suffering, is to deliver us from death by freeing us from sin.

At the same time the authentic biblical wisdom, that which prepares us throughout the Old Testament to hope for and to accept the New Testament, is illuminated, fulfilled in a final transcendent event. Only the Cross, in other words, gives us the key to all the Scriptures, granting us what was hidden in the Old Testament but prepared for by it, that to which all the inspiration pervading it was tending. Solving the indecipherable enigma of human wisdom, the Cross, the Gospel of the Cross, is thus the ultimate revelation: the revelation of that unequalled divine love to which all previous revelation pointed.

All that will be fully shown in Saint Paul's letters written in captivity, which will take up and explore the theme of mystery in the light of the teaching already given in the early ones.

The Letter to the Colossians: Christ in us and Reconciliation

First the Letter to the Colossians will show how the mystery of the Cross of Christ is extended to ourselves and its meaning thereby deepened.

For we have here the proclamation that the mystery is, in the end, 'Christ in you, the hope of glory'. The Letter to the Ephesians, starting from this fulfilment of the mystery in ourselves, qualified as universal 'reconciliation' in the Letter to the Colossians, will expound it eventually as a 'recapitulation', that is, a returning to its source of the whole history of creation, in which is disclosed, in the mystery of God's plan for our race, the ultimate, or primordial, mystery of God himself: of that eternal love which is his life. Saint John will only be bringing this to a point in saying that God *is* love, but precisely *this* love which is revealed in the Cross of Jesus and its effects in us.

The Letter to the Colossians begins by contrasting the worship of the true God with any other directed, even if only in the second

place, to alleged Gods, who can be no more than 'the elemental spirits of the universe' improperly divinized. It goes on to show that the whole salvation of humanity has its one principle in Christ, in what we to-day call the redemptive Incarnation of the eternal Son, in the Cross which he has thus undergone for us. And, the apostle explains, this is so because, from all eternity, it is in and by this Son, as first-begotten before all creation and its origin, that the world was created and then destined to be redeemed, saved and adopted by him despite its fall. There, the Letter says, is the mystery, that of our reconciliation in and by the Son in whom and by whom we have been called into being, along with those very 'elemental spirits' which the Colossians seem tempted to venerate as having their own part in the work of creation and redemption.

The key to this new assertion, according to the apostle, is found in the fact that not only the Jews but also the Gentiles are saved, and not only *by* Christ but also *in* him, as being all eternally predestined to live in him, as it was for him to take upon himself our fallen nature and to make us live, all of us equally together, by his own life as the Son of God.

The development of the whole epistle starts with the 'blessing', the thanksgiving, which is the basis of any prayer which the apostle could make on behalf of his correspondents:

We give thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the Kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sin.

He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven or on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominations or principalities or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether in earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross . . .

. . . Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his

body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the divine office which was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.⁹

It will be seen that the final perspective has not changed since *First Corinthians*, but all its implications have been now worked out. The mystery, fundamentally, is God's eternal design of saving all things in Christ just as he was to create all things in him, reconciling them with one another as well as with himself, plainly in his eternal filiation in some sort enclosing us in himself in virtue of his Cross, living in us all, pagans as well as Jews.

Still further consequences develop in what follows:

Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ. For this I toil, striving with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me. For I want you to know how greatly I strive for you, and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not yet seen my face, that their hearts may be encouraged, as they are knit together in love, to have all the riches of assured understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.¹⁰

Clearly we are brought back here, with the whole picture before us, to the context of *First Corinthians*, the wisdom of God, manifested in Christ, pre-eminently in his Cross, over against all the false witnesses of the world (cf. the verses, following those last quoted, about 'beguiling speech' which can only mislead). But, in the meantime, we have found that the mystery in the end is that of Christ himself, not only as supremely revealed on his Cross but also as including within him from all eternity the whole plan for our race and for the whole universe, for they are destined not just for creation but for their final reconciliation.

Furthermore, as is shown above all in the verses about the fulfilment in ourselves, in our own sufferings for Christ, of his sufferings so that the whole world may be gathered into the

⁹ *Colossians*, 1, 12 to 20 and 24 to 27.

¹⁰ *Colossians*, 1, 28 to 2, 3.

Church, this mystery includes us all, each in his own way, not only in Christ but also in a cooperation, through our participating in the uniqueness of his Cross, with his own salvific work.

The Letter to The Ephesians: Recapitulation and Mystery both of God and of Ourselves

Then the Letter to the Ephesians shows that this mystery of Christ, which is one with himself, but at the same time our own, that of a destiny bound up with what is innermost in God, is therefore the supreme mystery of God.

It is the mystery of his love, which is eternal, but recognized only in the Cross of Christ. This mystery, the Letter to the Colossians adds,¹¹ is just the proper concern of apostolic preaching. Taking the same line, the Letter to the Ephesians, of which it has been said that the 'eucharist', the 'thanksgiving', which motivates and inspires the Letter to the Colossians, in this one absorbs everything into itself, starts with the following assertion:

[God] destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us. For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purposes which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to recapitulate all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.¹²

So the mystery is now bound up with the 'recapitulation' of all things in Christ, that is, their return to their source by a renewal of their history, leading them, despite the fall, to share in the sonship of Christ himself, which is what God had always wanted for them.

¹¹ *Colossians*, 4, 3.

¹² *Ephesians*, 3, 5 to 10.

In the third chapter there is the same train of thought about this knowledge of the mystery of Christ, already briefly described, so that they may have something of the understanding which he himself has of the mystery of Christ which has now been revealed,

and which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that is, how the Gentiles [themselves] are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, of which I was made minister.¹³

And this unheard-of grace, he emphasizes again, has been given to him:

to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose which he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confidence of access through our faith in him. So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is my glory. For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, so that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.¹⁴

And here at last we can say that the Pauline mystery, still with its original outline, but now seen in all its grandeur, showing itself both as the mystery of Christ in us and as the eternal will of God for us, our eternal recapitulation in his Son, is revealed as that of God himself. It is the mystery of the eternal love that is his, with which he has always loved us in the Son who is his

¹³ *Ephesians*, 3, 5 to 7.

¹⁴ *Ephesians*, 3, 8 to 19.

'Well-Beloved', that is, his 'only' one, as Saint John will say, thus simply translating the Hebrew word.

The Mystery of the Bridegroom and the Bride

The word 'mystery' appears again with reference to marriage in the Letter to the Ephesians, in the fifth chapter. As we shall see later, this usage seems at first to return to an earlier meaning found in the Jewish Apocalypses referring to a particular image or feature or aspect of a divine plan not yet put into execution. But in fact it seems that here the two meanings come together. Isn't the eschatological meaning of human espousals that union of God with his people which all the Old Testament expressed by the image of Marriage?¹⁵ In the mystery in which the love of God is revealed, the image becomes reality because Christ, the eternal Son, espouses fallen humanity, which he raises up by the Cross to the height of his own assimilation to his creatures, and it is in this marriage of blood that his sonship becomes ours: we are all made sons with the Son, in the Son.¹⁶

¹⁵ This is already a central theme for Amos, taken up by Jeremiah and Ezekiel; it has caused the Song of Songs to be considered inspired.

¹⁶ There remains the text of *1 Corinthians*, 4, 1 which describes the apostles as 'stewards of the mysteries of God', which was very soon understood to mean 'ministers of the sacraments'. In fact, St Paul must have had in mind those charged with the diffusion of all the apocalyptic mysteries. But it is easy to understand how the catechetical development of the fourth century (cf p. 160ff.) led to the sliding of the one meaning into the other.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PAGAN MYSTERIES: ELEUSIS

Let us now see what were these mysteries of Hellenistic paganism, which have been supposed to be the origin of the Pauline Mystery.

Christian Mystery and Pagan Mysteries

It is necessary to emphasize the ambivalence or, if anyone prefers, the ambiguity of the connections made between the Christian mystery and these pagan mysteries by modern writers. For Reitzenstein¹ and all the historians or interpreters of religion who depend on him, including Bultmann and the post-Bultmannians, these mysteries were the source of the theme of mystery in Saint Paul. Thus arose the idea of a projection of what was still the picture of Christ for primitive Christianity into myth or mythology, the writers in question seeming to have had no suspicion that there might be any difference between the two.

For Dom Casel and the school of Maria Laach, the facts alleged by the reductionist critics not being contested, the interpretation, and therefore the appreciation, of them were completely different. This perverting of the Christianity of the original disciples into the form of mysteries was accepted, but with a plus sign instead of a minus one. Far from there having been a metamorphosis, not to say, in Spengler's formula, a pseudomorphosis, in other words, far from there being any travesty or adulteration of earlier Christianity, these mysteries had to be thought of as having providentially provided just that mould of expression which Christianity now required. Thus it would not only be translated in a way which fitted the mentality of the age; it would also be provided with an intellectual formulation as well as a ritual setting, which their providential

¹ R. REITZENSTEIN, *Die Hellenistischen Mysterien-religionen*, Berlin, 3rd ed., 1927.

suitability for this new content would make something of permanent value.

Before discussing these diametrically opposite accounts of one and the same historical thesis, it must be emphasized that the making of this comparison is nothing new. It was first made by the Fathers of the Church. Nor is the detection of ambiguity about it, the possible ambivalence, anything new.

In general, it is true, modern writers seem to appreciate it in a more positive way, however formulated: the mysteries are considered to have made a contribution to the development of Christianity, whether this is thought to have been a good or a bad thing, unlike the Fathers who, we are told, could see nothing in the mysteries but a diabolical counterfeit of Christ's mystery.

Actually, things are more complicated. Justin Martyr, in the second century, tended to find in the best of the philosophers a sort of parallel with the Old Testament; Clement of Alexandria, who followed in his steps, seems to have included in a similarly favourable judgment at least some aspects of the mysteries. Certainly, on closer inspection, we find, after having spoken of the Christian mystery in the sort of language that a hierophant might have used, he suddenly declares that the mysteries are, at bottom, nothing but puerility or pornography! By contrast, however negative Firmicus Maternus may seem to be at the outset in his appreciation of, for instance, the analogies, he is far from denying that they can bear witness to those invincible human questions to which the Christian mystery brings the long-awaited answer.

So the comparison which we have been considering is neither a scandalous novelty nor an incongruous suggestion of theologians who would wish to remain faithful to Christian tradition. It remains true that an unprejudiced study of the historical facts cannot support either of the theories which have in turn found favour either among certain critics or among theologians who were very far from following them at every point.

Difficulty in Studying the Mysteries

As soon as one looks into this matter at all closely, it becomes clear that all hasty judgments on it must be suspect. For one

has to start by saying that, although the ancients have given us abundant information about it, it comes to very little that is at all definite. We have to recognize at the outset, that the Fathers are, if not our sole source of all information that is at all definite, at any rate the principal one. It would be quite remarkable (as was pointed out long ago) that a throng of initiates, talkative Greeks or barbarians more or less Hellenized but eaten up with curiosity, should have kept a secret which we should know nothing important about were it not for certain Christian writers converted from paganism, who thought themselves therefore no longer bound to silence. But the little that they have told us is scanty indeed.

Hence the irreverent comment of modern critics that there could not have been anything of moment to reveal! Without going quite so far, we should certainly be well advised to keep before our minds the remark made by Aristotle, who was certainly in a better position to judge than any of us, that it was an affair more of *παθεῖν* than of *μαθεῖν*, of 'feeling' rather than of 'learning' (or, if anyone prefers, or 'experiencing').² So, if there is to be any comparison between mystery and mysteries, we should not in any case expect to find any precise notion of the latter.

So our second preliminary remark must be that an enquiry into the teaching of the mysteries has been so far, and is most likely to remain, the pursuit of a *fata morgana* which disappears the closer one gets to it. And it cannot be said too often that the secret of the mystery religions is only the secret of their rites, or, more precisely, of those thought to be the most important.

But, from classical times onward, as well-known passages in Plato show, the mysteries have been haloed with so much charm, so much prestige, that their customary language, along with the esoteric part of their imagery, has come to be applied, but no more than figuratively, to any communication of particularly elevated, or merely far-fetched, ideas. This, it is already clear in Plato, became early on the practice of philosophers in order to raise the tone of their speculations and to preserve respect for

² Quoted by Synesius (*Dion.* 48). In N. Turchi, *Fontes Historiae Mysteriorum Aevi Hellenistici*, Rome, 1930 (quoted henceforth as: Turchi).

them. The practice became progressively more popular, so that eventually Quintilian is found presenting even the procedures of rhetoric as an initiation into mysteries! St Paul himself, let us remember, provides an extreme case of this linguistic decadence when he tells the Philippians: 'I have learned the secret (he is using the technical term *μυστήριον*) of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want.'³

Taking the same line and at a very late date (about the end of the second century of our era), the Hermetic literature, in Egypt, is found offering an esoteric doctrine (itself very artificial and typical of a syncretism run to seed) as a 'mystery'. But, according to Père Festugière's excellent formula, it is no more than a literary mystery. For the treatises which use this language make it perfectly clear that there is question simply of ideas which are not only unconnected with any rite but also make the rites themselves useless and derisory!

It is only much later still, hardly before the fourth century, that the final phase of neo-Platonism will produce a ritual theurgy which it will connect with this language of the mysteries, applying it to a philosophical sense which these thinkers themselves, far from having drawn it from that source, have themselves infused into it. So Iamblicus, followed enthusiastically by Julian the Apostate, will claim to find his philosophical religion in the traditional rituals, but no one has any doubt that it does not derive from them at all.⁴

There have indeed been attempts to find before this date, either in neo-Pythagorean conventicles or in that confused medley known as Orphism,⁵ a union of a lofty religious teaching with a traditional ritual. But all these reconstructions, like that which Carcopino has tried to produce from the basilica of the Porta Maggiore,⁶ are highly conjectural. In so far as these are not the mere illusions of over-imaginative scholars, unless they are

³ *Philippians*, 4, 12.

⁴ See the Introduction of E. des PLACES in his edition and translation of Iamblichus, *Les Mystères d'Égypte* in the series of *Belles Lettres*, Paris, 1966. On the ideas which Julian takes from him, see J. BIDEZ, *La Vie de L'Empereur Julien*, Paris, 1930. On Hermeticism, see FESTUGIÈRE, *Personal Religion among the Greeks*, tr., Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1954, p. 152ff.

⁵ See below

⁶ J. CARCOPINO, *La Basilique pythagoricienne de la Porte Majeure*, Paris, 1927.

just occultist dreamings, it is only a matter of semi-superstitious and semi-intellectual sects which have no claim to be assimilated to the mysteries.

More generally, it must be said unhesitatingly that the very notion of mystery religion, even in Antiquity, is to a great extent no more than a fiction. In fact one is justified in asking whether there have ever been in the Hellenistic world any mysteries, in the original sense of the word, other than those of Eleusis . . . paradoxically the only ones never to have been more than local, in spite of their celebrity! For it is very doubtful whether this terminology ('mysteries', 'initiations' and suchlike) has been applied to any religion other than that of the 'good goddesses' except by a mere and more or less forced analogy. If there is any more to it, it can be only a case of more or less artificial remodelling, unless it is a counterfeit pure and simple.

We shall see that this is certainly the case for the mysteries of Isis, and very probably, at least in some measure, for those of Attis. As for the Orphic mysteries, to repeat, it is doubtful whether they ever existed except in pleasant imaginings. The ancient Dionysiac rites, from which Orphic ones are thought to have derived, seem never to have been thought of as 'mysteries' by those, Bacchantes or others, who celebrated and propagated them for a long time – that is only a late terminological assimilation, patently improper. For one cannot find that there was ever anything mysterious about them: were not the ancients the first to denounce them as leading rather to frantic exhibitionism?

The Mysteries of Eleusis

All this amounts to saying that one cannot discuss Hellenistic mysteries, original or developed, without having examined with all possible attention the Eleusinian ones. Not only are they the most famous of mysteries, but it is doubtful whether there have ever been any others which did not more or less take on their impress.

So, in turning to these mysteries, it is no less necessary to repeat what has been said about the poverty of our sources of information in general on this whole matter. In modern times,

especially since Creuzer's *Symbolique*⁷ in the last century, fat volumes have appeared purporting to contain learned critical discussions. But it must be admitted that, when all that is only gratuitous imagination has been set aside, nothing remains except interpretative hypotheses founded on obscure texts for which it can be said only that they do not contradict the hypotheses. There is nothing, or scarcely anything, which these texts demonstrate – still less, if possible, do the investigations of archaeologists.

These have been put together and examined with the greatest care by one of those to whom we are indebted: George E. Mylonas, professor at Washington University (St Louis, Missouri) in a book of capital importance: *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*, Princeton University Press, 1961.

The discoveries made at the sites, compared with the trivial and obscure allusions which is all that the ancient texts, pagan or (especially) Christian, provide, show in the first place the complete independence of the Eleusinian mysteries properly so-called in regard to the cult of Dionysus (to that of Zagreus still more) in which some have thought to find the source of a more or less 'mystic' (in the sense of spiritual) development of the mysteries in question. In fact it is only in connection with what are called the 'little mysteries', a purely Athenian and late preparation for taking part in the 'great mysteries' (the only genuinely Eleusinian ones), that any contact has been found between their ritual and the cult of Dionysus. And that is only a quite external connection, belonging to the places where the 'little mysteries' were performed in close proximity, which could not be just ignored, to a sanctuary in the city dedicated to this god.

If we keep to the 'great mysteries', the only ones, to repeat, which are special to Eleusis, we find only one element in their celebration of which we can be certain, although it is not itself very clear to us. The higher degree of initiation, the *ἐποπτεία*, 'the vision', involved, in the course of the night,

⁷ Published in 1810. Very influential also on the first developments of this literature was the *Agloophamus* of LOBECK, Königsberg, 1829. An essential bibliography on the whole subject of the mysteries will be found in the manual of J. LEIPOLDT and W. GRUNDMANN, *Umwelt der Urchristentums*, vol. 1, 3rd ed., Berlin, 1971. See also M. ELIADE, *A History of Religious Ideas*, London, 1979, vol. 1, p. 290ff.

sudden illumination of the ἀνάκτορον, the sanctuary where the specially holy things of Eleusis (τά ἱερά) were regularly kept, and the hierophant then disclosed them to the gaze of the initiates. But of the nature of these ἱερά we know absolutely nothing.

We can conjecture that, in connection with this 'vision', the hierophant presented the special Eleusinian symbol, not itself at all mysterious because appearing abundantly in the decoration of the neighbourhood. For certain texts refer to an 'ear of corn gathered in silence' as contemplated by the mystics.⁸

Another conjecture which seems to have some solid foundation is that the lower stage of initiation – the simple τεαετή preparatory to the ἐποπτεία – consisted of three elements: τὰ δρώμενα, a ritual representation which must have evoked the myth of Demeter searching for her daughter, Core-Persephone, carried off by Hades, the god of the lower world, of whom there will be more to say later; the λεγόμενα, not any doctrinal instruction but the ritual words which the initiates had to repeat about the δρώμενα, and finally τὰ δεικνύμενα, the showing of certain objects.

The ἐποπτεία itself seems to have been just the final phase of these δεικνύμενα, the revelation of what were normally kept hidden in the ἀνάκτορον, the heart of the τελεστήριον, the house of the mysteries. But about the objects which might have been shown at the first or the final initiation, we have only reconstructions even more fragile than those about the 'ear of corn gathered in silence' which seems to have been an essential element of the first one.

From the more than transparent allusions of the Fathers of the Church, Clement of Alexandria and Hippolytus⁹ in particular, Foucart, one of the writers who have tried with the greatest ingenuity to solve these enigmas, has thought to deduce that there were representations of female sexual organs.¹⁰ Mylonas maintains that there is no ground for maintaining this, but he himself, perhaps, by an understandable reaction, gives far too

⁸ HIPPOLYTUS, *Refutatio omn. Haeres.*, 5, 8, 39 (Turchi, no. 130, p.89).

⁹ CLEMENT, *Protrepticus*, 2, 15 and HIPPOLYTUS, *Refutatio*, 5, 8, 39 (Turchi, no. 127 and no. 130, p.89).

¹⁰ P. FOUCART, *Les Mystères d'Eleusis*, Paris, 1914, especially p.496. Cf. the discussion of MYLONAS, *op.cit.*, p.295ff and 303ff. On the dromena, legomena and deiknymena, see MYLONAS, *op.cit.*, p.261ff.

little weight to the bearing of the allusions just mentioned, which are hardly explicable unless they had some such foundation.

The least that can be said about this, in all probability, is that it is almost certain that the *δρῶμενα* included a *ιερός γάμος*, a ritual representation of the union between a god and a goddess (Zeus and Demeter, or perhaps Pluto and Core). The hierophant would have taken the part of the god and a priestess that of the goddess. But certainly it cannot be claimed that in classical times this union would have been anything more than symbolic.¹¹

Another detail of the *δρῶμενα* on which all sorts of hypotheses have been built, probably without any real foundation, but of which Mylonas himself does not doubt the historicity, is the presenting to the mystics at their initiation of the *χυκεῶν*, the mixture of water, meal and mint accepted, according to the myth,¹² by the exhausted Demeter in her vain search for her daughter. But Mylonas rightly emphasizes that there is nothing to be found in the rite analogous to Christian communion, as Loisy¹³ believed, no trace of the idea that some divinity was giving himself as food for the mystics.¹⁴

When all that has been put together, we are not only at the end of our certainties about what the Eleusinian mysteries and initiation could have been but have also dealt with many of the hypotheses about them, certainly getting to the end of all that can be conjectured without falling into mere fantasy. It must be admitted that this does not get us very far.

But it is just at this point that it must be re-emphasized that the mysteries, for those who celebrated them, were nothing but rites, simply that ritual about which we know so little.

From Mysteries to their Interpretation

The myth might give some meaning to the rites, but in fact there was never anything mysterious about it. It was known to all the

¹¹ Cf. the end of the text of Hippolytus mentioned in note 9.

¹² Cf. verses 208ff. of the Homeric hymn to Demeter (Turchi, p.70) and what is said of the mystics' repeating the action of drinking the *χυκεῶν* in Clement's *Protrepticus*, 2. 20 (Turchi, no. 122, p.85).

¹³ A. LOISY, *Les Mystères païens et le Mystère Chrétien*, Paris, 1930, p.69 and MYLONAS, *op.cit.*, p.260, note 160.

¹⁴ See L.R. FARNELL, *The Cult of the Greek States*, vol.3, Oxford, 1907, p.194ff.

world, and about the end of the sixth century BC one of the most famous of the *Homeric Hymns* presented it in all its details. It is from meditation on myth, not from the rites themselves, which constitute, properly speaking, the mystery, that the evocations, the religious aspirations which made Eleusis famous, were to come. Moreover it must be clearly recognized that the meditation was not the work of the Eleusinian priests, nor is there any indication that it was ever introduced as such into the celebration of the mysteries. It was entirely the work of independent thinkers like Plato or of poets like Pindar and Sophocles. The hierophants themselves and their various attendants may well have gained from it for the success of the growing popularity of their celebrations. But there is not the slightest evidence that they themselves took any part in it. All those fine things are not and never have been 'the mysteries of Eleusis', nor, strictly speaking, any part of them. They are only the embellishments of imaginative philosophers or inspired poets.

What remains is for us to see, or at least to try to make out, how the myth managed to detach itself from the rite and then to react upon it. That amounts to tracing, so far as that is possible, the evolution of the Eleusinian cult.

This is important because, to repeat, the cult itself has never left the village near Athens where it was born. But it is the celebrity of the myth which it has given a home, with all the power of evocation of which it soon showed itself capable, that drew the crowds, first from the whole of Greece and then from much further afield.

What is certain is that here, as everywhere, it was not the myth, still less what was derived from it, that produced the rite. It is from the rite that the myth had to emerge, long before that, in its turn, led to a burgeoning of interpretations. At the most the myth itself could react upon the rite only so far as to intensify and exalt its own power of suggestion.

For there we have a phenomenon which is an absolutely general one. Far from the truly primitive or at least the archaic rites – the only ones, paradoxically, to prove capable of gaining the interest of civilized people who have begun to feel vaguely dissatisfied with their civilization – far from these having ever been the projection of any sort of thinking, even of mythical thinking, it is these who have been everywhere at the source of

the images as well as of the thoughts on which religious experience will be nurtured.

For myth, if it can contribute, as we shall see in a moment, to the development of a rite, once it has itself emerged from it, is never at its original source. The opposite is always the case. And if it can nevertheless contribute to enrich the rite, it is still necessary for it not to give way to an excessive rationalization, for that will cause its death, and with it that of the rite itself. At least this is so in all living religions. It is only in pseudo-religions, unable to satisfy religious needs, that we find the fabrication of rites as vessels for ideas which have not sprung from them.¹⁵

What then is rite itself? How does it come to birth? The comparative history of religions and scientific ethnography have shown that it is not, as so many still suppose, an artificial, factitious activity, something apart from human life. On the contrary, it is a fundamental activity, central to human existence, to the extent that those who exercised it seem to have had from the start the impression that it plunged what is most essential to human living into the life of the whole cosmos, indeed into a super-cosmic life (a 'transcendent' one, in to-day's language), from which, it seemed to them intuitively obvious, man's life and that of the universe derive, man's life in that of the universe.

If we look at things from this point of view, what is said in connection with Eleusis about 'the ear of corn gathered in silence' will seem most probably to have been not only the apogee of the whole ritual but also no doubt its most primitive element, the original cell from which all the rest would emerge.

This must certainly take us back to the pre-Hellenic civilization as it must have developed in the peaceful valley of Rharos, sloping gently towards the sparkling sea from which juts out the fantastic blue rock of Salamis. The growing of corn must have had here one of its earliest successes on European soil, and it thus became the centre of one of those ancient religions based upon the uniquely mysterious meeting of divine powers, glittering with the light fallen from the sky of Attica, with the obscurer deities of the underworld, at the sources, or rather the roots, of

¹⁵ See the chapter devoted to this problem in my book *Rite and Man* (Indiana, 1962). We shall see later, in the case of the mysteries of Serapis, a striking example of these factitious rites which owe to quite exceptional circumstances a momentary success, which, moreover, must not be exaggerated (p.49ff. below).

vegetation. Wasn't the gesture of the harvester still earlier than the 'august gesture of the sower' and bringing it into being, not just the discovery but the apparent materialization of this meeting?

To this ritual, primitive in the fullest sense, of the first sheaf gathered at midsummer, when men had moved, here and elsewhere, from the elementary stage of mere gathering to that principle of all culture, in the widest sense of the word, which is agriculture, there must have been added hierogamy, the sacred marriage. Man, now beginning to become reflectively conscious of himself, discovers in himself a deep-seated awareness of a kinship between the fecundity of the cosmos and that fertilizing activity of which he finds himself the instigator.

But this development of an awareness, both of himself and of the world, seems to have brought with it, also everywhere, a first temptation to man, that of taking over religion and confusing it with magic, although religion asserts his fundamental dependence on the supreme reality on which the whole cosmos depends, himself included. And he persuades himself that, with magic, he can become the master of this reality for his own purposes.

We may, however, suppose that at this essentially ambiguous stage myth also arises so as to restore a sense of the divine, at that decisive moment when man might think it possible for him to humanize the world completely, absorbing into himself even those divine powers on which, up till then, he had seen himself, like the whole world, dependent.

Myth is not, properly speaking, an explanation of rite. For, if there is a sense in which it is rational, it is not that of an abstract rationality. It is not the conclusion of a mere deductive logical process; it is rather an intuitive expression, a poetic expression in its native purity, that of the divine *ποῖος* from which everything has its being, reflected and thus expressed in a human activity recognized as only an image but as on shot through with a living reflection of its model, celestial and terrestrial at the same time, the beneficent conjunction of heaven and earth, of the solar divinity and the divinity of the underworld.

Core-Persephone, the daughter of Demeter, that is, of the surface of the earth on which the heaven itself is projected and reflected, at the moment when she, like primitive man, was gathering wild flowers, saw the ground split and open.

The steeds of Erebus raise for an instant to the light of day the unknown king of the underworld, Hades-Pluto, just time enough for him to seize this earthly child of the heavenly powers and take her to his abyss below.

The distraught Demeter, searching for her engulfed daughter, came to the throne of Zeus himself and obtained from the sovereign god, with her consent to the union of Core and Hades, the regular alternation of winter, when the seed engulfed in the soil dies in order to be reborn, and of summer, when the harvest is gathered – the alternation, in other words, of Persephone's annual sojourn with her husband down below and her return to her heavenly mother when the fruitful fields produce crops for man's sustenance. And this will take visible form in the institution of Triptolemus, pre-eminently the child of Eleusis, as the first sower and reaper, with the building by his devotees, in the place where Core was lost and regained by her mother, of the temple in which they were to be honoured for ever, for and with the gifts they had given to mankind.

Here, then, we find the oldest stratum of the Eleusinian cult, in a temple where, to goddesses essentially feminine, the consecration of a priestess will correspond. Then there will arise, grafted on the crude primitive hierogamy, a tendency to humanize the ritual, decking it out with a miniature representation of the developed myth, the mystics' journey in the night, the drinking of the *κυκεὼν*, finally the luminous vision. So too we find, presumably, the growing importance of the priest, once only the priestess's consort, then becoming her equal and eventually the master of the whole sacred performance. As we shall soon see, this is simply a repercussion on the servant of the gods of what we may call the progressive emancipation of many male gods in respect of the more ancient mother-goddesses, of whom those of Eleusis are but one example among many.¹⁶

At this stage, however, there was no mystery, but just the collective worship of the whole local community, its heart-beat, so to say, inseparably both physical and spiritual.

How did the mysteries emerge from this? Perhaps their immediate preparation is to be seen in the initiation of the young, like

¹⁶ On all this again see *Rite and Man*, chapter eight, and MYLONAS, *op.cit.*, chapter nine.

Triptolemus, into the cult which has now become the soul, living and life-giving, of the local tribe.¹⁷

The mysteries properly speaking, however, will appear only with newcomers, the Hellenes who are to annex the country village of Eleusis to the rising city of Athens.

From Local Cult to Mysteries

Puzzled, no doubt disquieted, fascinated, by this strange cult which went on regardless and which the old autochthonous families of the Eumolpides and the Kerykes defended against all the world as their inalienable property, the divine pledge of their own identity, the conquerors wanted to be admitted to it as an assurance of their permanent installation in the country.

That is when the Eumolpides became definitively the stock from which was drawn the 'hierophants', 'those who show the *ἱερά*, the signs and seals of the perpetual presence, the unremitting beneficent activity of the 'good goddesses'. This concession was recognized, on both sides, as a favour granted to the conquerors by their conquered predecessors, the former being vaguely aware that their annexation of the country would not be secure and blessed for themselves unless it went with a naturalization, starting with their own consecration to the local hierophanies.

The Fame of the Mysteries

Here, however, one would be inclined to take the analysis further and to seek some deeper motive for the attraction, or rather the fascination, exercised by the 'good goddesses' of Eleusis, first on Athens and then, later, when Athens seemed to dominate, intellectually, spiritually, the Greek world and that in its turn conquered the whole world of antiquity and spread over it the

¹⁷ There is a tendency among modern historians to connect, sometimes even to confuse, the 'mysteries' of Hellenistic life and the rites of initiating adults which are to be found, in particular, among many African tribes. See especially O.E. BRIEM, *Les Sociétés Secrètes de Mystères*, Paris, 1941. Something of this is to be found even in the work of Mircea Eliade, *op.cit.* The phenomenon of an almost sudden development of 'mysteries' in the Hellenistic epoch is, however, something special which has no exact equivalent.

fame of Eleusis. Was not this widespread fascination bound up, from the start, with an unresolved contradiction? It appears from the beginning of what we call Hellenism, but it could only deepen this division within itself the more it seemed to gain the entire world.

Athens claims to be the daughter both of Erectheus and of Athena. But there was never any question of a marriage between the old blind god of the lower world and the ever-young green-eyed goddess born, without feminine interference, straight from the head of Olympian Zeus. Doesn't this mean that the divine element, spirituality, for Athens and then for the whole of Greece and eventually for the whole world, so far as it was willing to become Athenian, tended to become condensed (must we say, reduced?) to sheer intellect, in the sense of reason reasoning?

On the other hand, the realism, the human vitality, which Erectheus stood for, thrust aside and driven back, will then be thrown away, buried, literally interred, like the serpents connected with that god. The Athenians will feel the necessity, but to protect themselves from him, to keep him at a distance, much rather than to ally themselves with him, of sending victims to him periodically, turning away their eyes, throwing them down those anfractuosités which were always splitting the sacred hill crowned by the Parthenon, not daring, however to take down and clear away the primitive sanctuary, the Erectheum.

The most brilliant civilization, undoubtedly, that humanity has ever known (but which, so characteristically, chose to be the most exclusively masculine) could not, therefore, avoid a confused feeling that there was something missing, something irreplaceable. Isn't that just what Eleusis seemed to promise with its 'good goddesses', first offended by the god of the underworld and then reconciled with him – even better, in the person of Core-Persephone, but without giving up her heavenly birth, consummating a fruitful marriage with the dark Lord of the abysses? Isn't that an admission that the green-eyed virgin, despite all her prestige, will always remain, born as she was, a sterile one? She will never be more than the patroness of weavers and wise men, or those who think themselves such, who, like the weaver, will never do more than produce constructions, admirable indeed, but soulless! Or else, as we shall see, she will have

to give way before Dionysus, succumb to an enthusiasm hardly distinguishable from delirium.

At Eleusis, by contrast, where death itself can be faced without fear, in return, mysteriously (how true, indeed!) but concretely, that life will spring up again, even in the hands of men, of the grain of wheat cast into the earth, but which dies there only that it may revive as a whole ear, as an inexhaustible harvest.

All this, of course, as with all illustration, all expression, of myth, emerging from a rite grafted on to life itself and returning to life's origins, will not be expressed straightaway – indeed will never be completely expressed – in articulated thought. But it will be the ferment eventually for the best in the philosophical reflection of Socrates and then of Plato, and in the first place of the greatest of the poets, beginning with Pindar and ending with the tragedians, Aeschylus and Sophocles especially, who have taken over from philosophical thought itself, but in transfigured form, by a return to myth, which Plato thought the highest form of philosophical utterance.

What has Pindar to say to us about the Eleusinian mysteries?

Blessed are they who, having beheld them,
will go down below the earth,
for he knows how to find life indeed,
who knows the divine principle of all things . . .¹⁸

Sophocles echoes him in terms which seem directly inspired by his own, but which open for us a further perspective:

. . . Thrice blessed
those among mortals who, having seen these rites,
will go to Hades: to them alone, down there,
it is given to live, but for the rest there is only misery.¹⁹

¹⁸ Fragment 137 of Schroeder's edition (taken from Clement, *Stromata* III, 518). In Turchi, no. 151, p.97.

¹⁹ Fragment 753 of Nauck's edition (taken from Plutarch, *De Audiendo*, 4). In Turchi, no. 152, p.98.

Between the two, here is Plato:

At that time when, as members of a blessed Choir [that is, in the pre-existence of the pure Ideas in the divine world, where they were spectators of the glorious vision presented to their eyes], men saw the splendour of Beauty.

We [that is, the true philosophers], with Zeus and his train, others in the company of some other god, being the initiates of an initiation which, it is right to say, is infinitely glorious . . .²⁰

Cicero will be able to say the last word for the Hellenism now spread to the Roman world itself, the Eleusinian mysteries being open to all those who had learned Greek:

It seems to me that Athens, which has produced many extraordinary and divine things, has brought us nothing more beneficial to human life than these mysteries, by which, from a rustic and brutal form of life, we have been humanized and introduced to the true principles of life, initiated into them, as we say, and we have received a blessed way not only of living, but also of dying with a better hope.²¹

It is clear, however, that, if the celebration of the Eleusinian mysteries is the original source of all this, it is not by the mysteries themselves, that is, the secret rites, that it has become known, still less spread abroad: that is the fruit of a long labour of reflection promoted by the myth which emerged from the rites and which never had anything mysterious about it.

And this ritual affair is a mystery only in the sense that the knowledge of it was reserved to those who were eventually admitted to it by the legitimate heirs of an archaic civilization, for which those of the quite different civilization that seemed to have triumphed over them came to feel a sort of unexpected nostalgia.

But the mystery, from beginning to end, is nothing but the rites. Alcibiades, despite his services as general and statesman, was condemned for having profaned the mysteries simply

²⁰ *Phaedrus*, 250b (Turchi, no. 115, p.80).

²¹ *De Legions*, 2, 14 (Turchi, no. 154, p.98).

because he had mimicked their celebration with his band of revelers. Philosophers and poets might lend any significance to them that they liked: in the popular view, this made no difference to the mysteries.

Analogies and Differences between Pagan Mysteries and Christian Mystery

It is now obvious just where a certain analogy is to be found between these mysteries of Eleusis, the first and greatest of them, on the one hand, and the Christian mystery, on the other: first, there is hope of a life of blessedness found in a myth in which life seems to be a divine gift in the double context of love (but what love?) and death, a death in which the gods themselves can be involved but over which they triumph in the end. This life and this death, at first, are those of vegetation, but of this considered as man's sustenance, rescuing him from death. The spiritual evolution which had produced the myth in the first place will move later towards so extended a reinterpretation of it that it produced the hope, even if, as Plato says, it is only 'a happy dream in which one indulges',²² of a life of the soul surviving that of the body and disengaging itself from it only to pass beyond it.

The Christian Mystery leads towards a resurrection of our whole being, body and soul, in a transfiguration of the whole cosmos.

The mysteries of Eleusis, essentially an affair of ritual, have never claimed to produce anything but a certain association of the mystics with the divinities in question. This makes them beneficiaries of their good will which will even grant them a life modelled on their own, and gods are, by definition, immortal.

But never did anyone conclude from this, even in the boldest transpositions of poets or philosophers, to an assimilation, an incorporation like that of the Christian to Christ postulated by the Pauline Mystery. In particular, in the teaching of Saint Paul, the eucharistic communion leads to an identification of the believer with the object of his faith which itself, and not just

²² *Phaedo*, 144 *de*.

the rite, is, for the Christian, this mystery. As we have seen, there is nothing like this in the rite of the *μυστέων*. Moreover, the final victory over death, for Saint Paul as for the whole of the New Testament, presupposes a change of life here and now. Despite poetical or philosophical developments of the meaning to be given to the mysteries, the testimonies of the ancients themselves are unanimous: it is the fact of having passed through the rite of initiation on which alone rested their hopes of a future beatitude.

This is enough to show the strict limits of any parallel, *a fortiori* of any connection, between these two positions.

CHAPTER THREE

FROM THE CULT OF THE MOTHER GODDESSES TO THE MYSTERIES OF HELLENISM

The Archaic Cult Of The Mother Goddesses

Father Wilhelm Schmidt, in his enormous study of mythologies, *The Origin of the Idea of God*,¹ thought it possible to establish the primitive character of monotheism: everywhere, it seems, there can be found, behind the most diverse figures of polytheism, the apparently persistent presence of a *deus otiosus*, one who no longer does anything, an all-embracing primordial deity and at first an all-powerful one, for which reason he is thought to occupy the whole sky, even if he is not identified with it. It is from this great god, forgotten, we are told, because he seems no longer actually at work, that everything has nevertheless proceeded, the multiple gods, or more precisely those later multiplied, like everything else. However paradoxical this may be, he appears, most often, the only one to whom worship is not offered, but that is because it is now from other figures, secondary though their divinity may be, that is expected all that can be desired from those greater than ourselves.

Schmidt explains this paradox in terms of cultural evolution. The one and only god, the heavenly creator, could impose himself so long as men lived just by gathering the world's fruits. But when they moved on from this to the decisive stage of fishing and hunting, without altogether losing the original vision of a single supreme divinity behind all phenomena, beginning with life itself, their attention was concentrated on some figure nearer to themselves and their own level, thus ready to accept, even to favour, such collaboration on their part in their sustenance.

¹The last of the eleven volumes of *Der Ursprung der Gottesidee* appeared in 1955.

That will be expressed, quite naturally, in the representations of a maternal power, the essentially feminine business of bringing forth providing the perfect image of the source of life as it springs up, in man as well as in the other animals which he now makes his food.

Historians of comparative religion, nowadays, would not accept Schmidt's thesis as it stands. Monotheism, in the usual sense of the word, which comes, on the contrary, from the most evolved great religions of the world, presupposes (as with the religion of Israel, the most characteristic in this respect) a conscious and deliberate rejection of a multiplicity of gods previously accepted. But what remains true, as Mircea Eliade has shown more clearly than anyone else, is that the fundamental unity of the divine is recognized from the first as that of real being in the highest degree, from which derives all the multiplicity of beings, which could not appear except in a universe put together and controlled by this principle of unity.

But this transcendent unity of the divine, for those whom we call the primitive, remains unnamable, unrepresentable. So, if he is to be understood as in regular cooperation with men, it is inevitable that something of humanity must be projected upon him and therefore of that in which humanity itself seems capable of being not only alive but the source of life. And so we find femininity as seeming today to be the common characteristic of the most ancient divine figures.

For feminine representations abound everywhere, which are manifestly the object of the earliest cults of which traces remain for us. No less clear is an insistence, even in the most rudimentary instance, not only on the signs of femininity in general, but quite specially on the organs of female fecundity. We can follow, step by step, in one of the last works of the great historian E.O. James,² the discoveries of these figures, and of what is plainly their fundamental meaning, throughout the continents of Europe and Asia.

As he himself says: 'Exactly when and where [these cults] arose is still very obscure, but it was from Western Asia, the South Russian plain and the valley of the Don that female figurines, commonly called "Venuses", in bone, ivory, stone and bas-relief,

² E.O. JAMES, *The Cult of the Mother-Goddess*, London, 1959.

often with the maternal organs grossly exaggerated, were introduced into Eastern and Central Europe at the beginning of the Upper Palaeolithic period by an immigration in what is now known as the Gravettian culture, the former Aurignacian.³

An example of this type, discovered in France, at Lespugne (Haut-Garonne), shortly before the last World War, is a particularly well-made ivory statuette known as the Madonna of Lespugne, made famous by a poem of Robert Ganço's. It is generally agreed that the divinity thus represented must be the object of a cult connected especially with ritual dancing by people dressed to look like certain animals, which no doubt inspired the pictures on the walls of Combarelles, at Les Eyzies, and certainly those in the Tuc d'Audubert, discovered by Count Begouen, in Ariège, near Saint-Giron.

There must have been a cult, or something between cult and magic, of which the astonishing figure called (perhaps incorrectly) 'the Sorcerer', which adorns the neighbouring grotto of the Three Brothers, could well have been the officiating priest or (perhaps and) the divinity whom he addressed and no doubt also represented.

In that case, the feminine figurines, which seem to belong to the same cultural setting, indicate an established cult of a goddess of animals and of life in general, linked with the development of fishing and more particularly of hunting. That is what seems to be attested with even more precision by the dancing scene at Cogul, near Lerida in Catalonia, where female persons appear, like the ancient 'Venuses', around a very young boy, a direct representation, presumably, of human fecundity as a quasi-sacramental or even magical image of cosmic, and especially animal, vitality.⁴

It is the similarity or proximity of the divinity to humanity now felt, especially in its feminine form, which suggests that the accompanying rituals could hover between religion and magic, religion which begs and expects everything from the divinity, magic which tries to force it.

It is characteristic that the feminine deity, in the oldest of these figures, is never found with a masculine consort. To speak in this

³ E.O. JAMES, *op.cit.*, p.13.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.21.

connection of 'virginal fecundity', as even Eliade⁵ does, is surely to fall into the same anachronism as Schmidt with his primitive monotheism, for such a notion would not emerge until much later, when there was a greater understanding of the respective roles of the male and female principles in the propagation of life. For the time being, what seems more easily grasped, along with the kinship between human fecundity and animal fecundity in general, and on a larger scale cosmic vitality as a whole, is the at least relative transcendence of the latter over the former.

It is not until the neolithic age when the raising of cattle, at first simply pastoral and nomadic, became sedentary and was accompanied by an at least embryonic agriculture, that the mother-goddess is found to have a male companion.

The Appearance of Masculine Consorts

It is characteristic of this period of transition that these will retain for a long time a quite dependent position in regard to the goddess, indicated by the ambiguity in their relationship: are they sons or husbands? Such evidence as there is provides only a hesitant answer.

Is this ambiguity to be explained in terms of an ancient matriarchy, based on the view that the earliest cultures, like the first attempts to raise cattle, were feminine enterprises, men being still occupied by their hunting activities? This hypothesis has attracted many learned men, and still more semi-learned ones (like Bachoffen), but there are no proofs or even indications of it that are at all decisive.

Perhaps more probable, but still very doubtful, is a more recent supposition, relying on what may still be found in rudimentary civilizations, namely, that the masculine role in reproduction, not so obvious as the feminine one, was not clear until after the raising of cattle had become widespread.

What is well-established is that the cult of the mother-goddesses combined its physico-sacral associating of human vitality and that of the cosmos with a hope of survival after death.

⁵ Mircea ELIADE, *A History of Religious Ideas*, London, 1979, p.41.

The Mother-Goddesses and Death

Certainly a cult of the dead appears along with them. Red ochre (symbolizing blood and therefore life) is found in representations of the mother-goddess, and on the shells with which the dead were decorated at the same epoch, also on the bones buried in the rock-shelter called Cro-Magnon at Les Eyzies and in those of Grimaldi and Cavillon,⁶ among others.

In the neolithic age phallic emblems appear, in more or less distant relationship with the mother-goddess. This is especially the case in Western Asia, in Crete and in Elis, where, as James points out, the masculine gods which then appear still remain subordinate to the goddess.

In the fifth and fourth millennia before the Christian era, the figurines of Arpachyah, in the north of Iraq, prove the continuity of this development. They are found a little later in Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Iran and Turkestan.

At the beginning of the third millennium, in Baluchistan, female figures are accompanied by representations of sexual organs, male as well as female. According to Pigott,⁷ there is every reason to believe that this indicates a divinity of the lower world guardian of the dead as well as protectress of crops and in the first place of the grain of wheat hidden in the soil.

The same is found in the earliest urban civilizations unearthed in the valley of the Indus and its neighbourhood since 1926, notably at Harappa and Mohenjo Daro, going back to the third millennium and the early years of the second. At Harappa there are also male gods, but they are less common and less often associated with the goddesses. But the lingas (the phallic representations still so common in modern India) are abundant, and a famous seal, found at Mohenjo Daro, shows a striking likeness to the much later representation of the Hindu Siva. So there is the very plausible supposition, strengthened by another seal which shows a horned goddess in the branches of a fig tree, that the cult of the goddess Kali had its beginnings in this way, the cult of life and the cult of death being bound together in each case.

⁶ E.O. JAMES, *op.cit.*, p.15.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.32.

The appearance of this couple, then, in the Upanishads, as opposed to the quite different divinities of the Vedas, is only the reappearance of an archaic cult, older than all the quite different Aryan divinities which had been supposed for so long to be the earliest which India had known.

Arrival of these Divinities in the West

The same figurines of the mother-goddess are found, as we turn to the near East on our way to the West, in Egypt, notably at Hierakonpolis and Abydos, in the protodynastic period, also at Cyprus between 4000 and 3500 BC.⁸ The first city of Troy, between 3000 and 2750, represents her on a bas-relief, and she appears, about 2600, in the second Troy, on decorated vases, and in the Cyclades, where these feminine figures are abundant, in contrast with the relative rarity of masculine ones.

But it is Minoan Crete which seems to have given the cult of the mother-goddess its most complete expression,⁹ with clay figures showing all the types of South Eastern Europe, the Aegean basin, Anatolia and Western Asia, most of them squatting or seated. The goddess, at Cnossos, as at Arpachya and elsewhere, in chalcolithic, in the ancient Middle East, is accompanied by the double axe and the dove.

It is significant, in this connection, that Homer and Hesiod agree in making Crete the place of origin for the later Phrygian cult of Kybele (or Rhea), the Earth-Mother. In these Cretan representations, the Minoan goddess takes on the characteristics of the Earth-Mother, and also those of the Mountain-Mother, the Mistress of trees and wild animals. Later, around 1500, she appears formally, with javelin in hand and accompanied by lions, as the goddess of hunting.

The same goddess appears also in Malta, in an enormous form. There she is found for the first time among megalithic monuments which seem to have been originally sanctuaries and became later ossuaries. She appears too in the Iberian peninsula,

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.37.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.41.

particularly with the megaliths of Los Millares, in the province of Almeria, where she seems to frequent tombs as well as private houses, as was the case in the valley of the Indus. She seems to appear in the same way in Brittany, where the Abbé Breuil claimed to recognize her on the funeral slabs of the dolmen of Gravinis. Finally this cult seems to have had ramification in the valleys of the Oise and the Seine, and across the Armorican peninsula to the Channel Islands and the southern counties of England.¹⁰

The First-Known Myths of the Goddess

We have no express account of the idea of these divinities which those who represented them had, in the archaic periods above-mentioned, for lack of written evidence.

It is in Sumer, and then in other civilizations, Semitic or otherwise, which follow the first Mesopotamian one, that writing appears and can transmit to us something, at least, of the original interpretations of these images and of the celebrations associated with them. But these texts, in the fragmentary state in which they have come down to us, raise hardly less questions than the old ones which they help to throw light on.

The oldest document, then, which we have of a mythical expression of a mother-goddess cult is Sumerian. But we have it only in incomplete versions, hard to translate with much confidence. Some think that Innana, the Mother-Goddess, called queen of the sky, having fallen herself under the power of death, sent her son-lover, Dummu^zi, the shepherd-god (her husband is Anon, the Mesopotamian god of the sky) to win back her original status. Others believe, on the contrary, that, like her Akkadian equivalent Ishtar, who went down to the infernal abode to bring back Tammuz, the god of the spring vegetation, Innana did the same to bring back Dummu^zi.

In any case, we have here the first formulations of the idea that the alternation of the death of vegetation at the end of autumn and its renewal in the spring is connected with a descent of

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.45.

the divinities of fecundity to the lower world and their return from it, their separation from their consorts and their periodical conjunction being constantly repeated and a victory constantly won over the power of death.

In the same way the Ugaritic texts refer to Baal, the Palestinian god of furrows and fields, identified with the life-giving rain, and Ana, who wins a periodical victory on his behalf over Mot, the god of sterility and death.

We find substantially the same thing in Syria with the Syrian goddess and her consort Adonis and in Phrygia with the Great Mother of Ida, Kybele, and Attis. But in these last myths, the son-lover of the goddess, Attis or Adonis, is not simply killed by a boar, as in some forms of the myth, but, in particular in another version of the myth of Attis, he is castrated and put to death for being unfaithful to the goddess in his union with a water-nymph. In fact the priest of the Syrian goddess, like the *galloi* of Kybele, were not simply eunuchs but devoted themselves to the cult by voluntary castration in the course of it.¹¹

The Cult Becomes a Mystery

After spreading widely in Greek-speaking countries, the cult of Kybele and Attis first entered Rome in 205 BC, during the Second Punic War, through an oracle of the Sybil promising that, if 'the Mother' was brought to Italy, Hannibal would be driven out of it. This was understood to refer to the Mother of Ida, and Attalus, King of Pergamos, was asked for the black stone, Kybele's fetish, which he had himself brought from her earlier abode at Pessinus. So she was brought to the Palatine, where, after the victory, a temple in her honour was built in 191. But, until the time of Claudius, the public celebration of her barbaric cult was forbidden, apart from an annual procession to bathe the statue of the goddess in the Almo.¹²

It seems that publicity for the cult in Rome was granted by Claudius because its priest had become one of the freedmen from

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 161ff.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 168-174.

Syria who belonged to the imperial household. In any case it is from this moment that we are informed in some detail about the public performance of its principal rites.

These took place every year from the fifteenth of March to the twenty-eighth, being closely connected with nature's revival in springtime. On the fifteenth, the archpriest sacrificed a bull ten years old, probably by the Almo, from which reeds were carried to the old temple on the Palatine. Presumably they stood for the exposure of Attis at his birth among the reeds of the Gallos before his adoption by Kybele.

On the twenty-second, a pine-tree, cut down in the night by a fraternity of reed-carriers, was also taken in procession. It was covered with fillets like a corpse and crowned with violets (it was said that these were born from the blood of Attis, mutilated under a pine-tree).

On the twenty-fourth occurred the consecration to the goddess of her new priests in the midst of an orgiastic spectacle, when they mutilated themselves to the sound of flutes, cymbals and tambourines after a frenetic dance in which they scourged and wounded themselves. Then the pine-tree was lowered into a vault, where it remained until the following year.

On the morning of the twenty-sixth, *Hilaria*, there was the announcement and joyful celebration of the return to life of Attis, after a fast and funerary vigil.

It seems that, when the ceremonies became public in Rome and when everything had taken the form of a mystery, the initiations developed, if that is what the famous passage in Firmicus Maternus refers to, describing the end of a nocturnal mourning rite, before the statue of a god on a stretcher. At the end a light was brought, and then the priest anointed the neophytes (on the mouth, or perhaps the throat), murmuring: 'Be of good cheer, neophytes, seeing that the god is saved, for we also, after our toils, shall find salvation.'¹³

On the twenty-sixth there was a rest, and on the twenty-seventh there was the traditional procession of the statue of Kybele and its washing in the Almo, after which it was taken back to its temple, adorned with flowers. But the initiation, it is thought,

¹³ *Ibid.*; p.173. The formula is found in Firmicus MATERNUS, *De erroribus profanarum religionum*, 22 (Turchi, no. 209, p.239).

strictly so-called, took place on the Vatican hill, not the Palatine, in a special sanctuary, the Phrygianum.

The Initiation into the Mystery of Attis

The essential element seems to have been the Taurobolium, described in a famous poem by the Christian poet Prudentius.¹⁴ The neophyte stood in a pit under a grating through which the blood of a bull slaughtered there poured over him. This rite certainly went back to the Phrygian origins of the mystery, but it seems to have been at first a sacrifice offered with special solemnity only for the consecration of the archpriest, its effect of association with the divinities being later extended, to the emperor in the first place, and then becoming the regular rite of initiation.¹⁵

There was also a rite of eating. Clement of Alexandria as well as Firmicus Maternus mentions it, but, without telling us what the food was, gives only the formula uttered after it by the neophyte. According to Clement this was:

ἐκ τυμπάνου ἔφαγον, ἐκ κυμβάλου
ἔπιον, ἐκερνοφόρησα, ὑπο τὸν παστον
ὑπέδον.¹⁶

Firmicus Maternus, still without saying what initiation this is, says:

In quodam templo, ut in interioribus partibus homo moriturus possit admitti, dicit: De tympano manducavi, de cymbalo bibi et religionis secreta perdidici, quod greco sermone dicitur: ἐκ τυμπάνου βέβρωκα, ἐκ κυμβάλου πέπωκα, γέγονα μύστης Ἀττεως.¹⁷

How should we interpret these slightly differing quotations? One might think, with Loisy,¹⁸ that Clement gave the exact

¹⁴ *Peristephanum*, 10, vv. 1006 to 1085 (Turchi, no. 284, p. 245ff.).

¹⁵ E. O. JAMES, *op. cit.*, p. 163ff.

¹⁶ *Protrepticus*, 2, 15 (Turchi, no. 281, p. 244).

¹⁷ *De error. prof. rel.*, (Turchi, no. 282, p. 244).

¹⁸ A. LOISY, *Les Mystères païens et le Mystère chrétien*, Paris, 1930, p. 107.

formula, whereas Firmicus Maternus commented on it (which is all the more probable because it is clear that in his own Latin he is providing an explication rather than a translation).

The first two statements, in each author, are plain enough: 'I have eaten what was in the drum, I have drunk the contents of the cymbal . . .' These are the usual musical instruments of the goddess's followers here used, oddly enough, as containers of ritual food and drink (we cannot tell what they were).

But what is the meaning of 'I have carried the *Kernos* and entered the nuptial chamber'? The *Kernos* is an earthen vessel which could have been used in this ritual for carrying sacred objects. What were they? It was pointed out, in regard to the Eleusinian rites, that the supposal, originated by Foucart, that it was a matter of moving images of sexual organs seems to be without adequate foundation. But in the present case there is every reason to believe that the reference is to the sexual organs of the bull sacrificed above the neophyte. The 'nuptial chamber' is obviously applied, by reason of the union of the divinities in question, to their sanctuary, whether or not there is to be a *hieros gamos*, a ritual renewal of this union.

What we have called the commentary of Firmicus Maternus applies to the presumably purposeful phraseology which he uses in saying that 'a mortal' (literally, 'someone destined to die') 'then enters the sanctuary', in which case there must be an allusion to the fact, which certainly goes back to very early times or even the earliest, that these divinities of natural fruitfulness were also divinities of death. But that is not all: as in the mysteries of Eleusis, there is also a question of being prepared to meet them, implying some form, doubtless still vague, of a blessed immortality.

The Supposed Effects of Initiation

That is confirmed by the surviving votive inscriptions of those initiated by means of the *taurobolium* or its more modest equivalent the *cribolium*, in which a ram was put to death, at first apparently an economical substitute for the *taurobolium*, but later – in a quite Latin anxiety to keep on the safe side – combined with it.

For a long time this association with divinities who had escaped from death must have remained pretty nebulous. The inscription which mentions these deities simply as guardians of the soul and the spirit (*dii animae mentisque custodes*)¹⁹ is typical. The famous formula '*taurobolio criobolioque in aeternum renatus*', to which some have given undue importance, appears only once and very late, in AD 376. It belongs to the time when the Emperor Julian, under the influence of Iamblichus, was trying to give a quasi-Christian meaning to the rites of a paganism which he hoped to rejuvenate. Far from being the origin of the Christian idea of baptismal regeneration, it can only be a copy of it.

But this is not the most interesting thing about the matter. That lies in the analogy often pointed out between the formulas of the mysteries of Kybele and Attis and that used, still according to Clement, in the drinking of the Kykéôn at Eleusis: 'I have fasted, I have drunk of the Kykéôn, performing [the ritual acts] I have taken what was in the casket, I have carried it to the basket, and from the basket [again] to the casket.'²⁰

We know, from the detailed report of Arnobius,²¹ that Timothy of the Eumolpides was personally interested in the myth of Kybele and Attis. We also know, from another source,²² that Timothy had been asked by the Ptolemies to produce, on the basis of the ancient Egyptian ritual of Isis and Osiris, a mystery on the pattern of Eleusis, thus bringing together the Greeks settled in Alexandria with the old Egyptian population. Is it to ascribe too much to this astute Eleusinian to think that he must also have interested himself in making a similar graft of his own primordial mystery on the Phrygian cult which, at the same

¹⁹ *Corpus inscript. lat.*, 499 for the first and 510 for the second. Franz CUMONT, *Les Religions orientales dans le paganisme romain*, 4th ed., Paris, 1929, p.66, is certainly right (as against Alfred LOISY, *op.cit.*, p.118) in stating that a formula like that quoted second, especially at this date, could be influenced only by Christian ideas and terminology, not the other way round.

²⁰ *Protrepticus*, 2, 15 (Turchi, no. 281, p.244).

²¹ ARNOBIUS, *Adversus nationes*, lib. V, par. V (PL 5, col. 1088). PETTAZZONI, *I Misteri*, Bologna, 1924, p.119 and ZIELINSKI, *La Sybille*, Paris, 1924, consider, on the basis of this passage that Timothy must have remodelled the cult of Attis on that of Eleusis.

²² This is attested by PLUTARCH, *De Iside*, 28 and TACITUS, *Historiae*, 4, 83 (Turchi, no. 243, p.189 and no. 244, p.191).

period of time, was starting to spread in Greece before infiltrating into Rome?

If that is so, it seems that one could catch in the act the process by which other archaic agrarian cults came to present themselves as mysteries, and mysteries nursing, for the initiate, the same hope of immortality as Eleusis had come to galvanize in the conditions which have been described above. It was the result of a deliberate adaptation.

Something similar must have happened in the case of those mysteries which seem to have emerged from an expansion and reinterpretation of the cult of the Syrian goddess and Adonis. But the allusions to them in the Fathers are too vague for us to build anything definite on them.

The Mysteries of Serapis

When we come to the mysteries of Serapis, on the other hand, we can see how the Eleusinian tradition has not only helped to reinterpret them but has succeeded, in this case at least, in completely transforming them.

For ancient Egypt has also known mother-goddesses. The first and most important is Neith, the deity of Sais in the western delta of the Nile, at first identified with the primordial waters.²³ At the end of the dynastic epoch, she is identified with Hathor, the cow-goddess who represents the various aspects of maternity. But originally, like so many of the most primitive mother-goddesses, she is connected rather with hunting and warfare. Under the Eighteenth Dynasty, however, she is assimilated to Isis, by one of those shiftings of the attributes of ancient divinities, particularly frequent and smooth in Egypt, to the extent of persuading some Egyptologists that its gods and goddesses have never been more than local or somehow specialized manifestations of a single divinity.²⁴

Sister-spouse of Osiris, after the manner of the Pharaohs, mother of his son Horus, Isis became the supreme example of

²³ E.O. JAMES, *op.cit.*, p.60ff.

²⁴ Cf. S. MORENZ, *La Religion égyptienne*, tr., Paris, 1962, p.53 and 87ff.

conjugal fidelity and the pattern of all maternity. Osiris (god of the Nile's waters and of the vegetation produced by them), himself identified with Ra, the solar god who makes the corn spring up, was killed and cut in pieces by Seth, his brother and enemy. Isis put him together again, bringing him back to life by her magical arts, and bore Horus by him – with whom the reigning Pharaoh is thought to be identified and, when he dies, to be Osiris. Embalmment, common among the Egyptians, came to seem, first for the Pharaoh and then, gradually, for all Egyptians who could afford it, a means of being assimilated to Osiris, in his death and in his return to life.

But in all that, so far as the ancient Egyptian religion is concerned, there is no trace of any mystery. It is only under the Ptolemies that the transformation was to take place so as to bind together spiritually the controlling Greek element which they represented with the old Egyptian population. We have seen that it took shape, as a matter of deliberate policy, in the Serapeium built at that time in Alexandria, thanks to collaboration between Timothy of the Eumolpides and the poet Demetrius of Phaleron.

Its success seems to have surpassed all hopes, and at once, in all the ports where the mariners or merchants of Alexandria settled or broke their journeys. This artificial liturgy spread to more or less imposing reproductions of the sanctuary in the new capital.

What the new cult had to offer had no longer to be sought in a remote corner of the Athenian suburbs but could soon be found, almost at one's doorstep, throughout the Roman Empire.

The Witness of Apuleius

We have in Apuleius' romance, *The Golden Ass*, characterized by licentious episodes combined with a piety still more enthusiastic than it was sincere (but no less equivocal for that), a description of the results which could be obtained, in an age of crises not unlike our own, by manipulations of this sort, however artificial might be the product.

Apuleius, of course, obeying the rules of the game, reveals little of substance, since this is a mystery, about the more esoteric

details in the initiation of Lucius, his rather unattractive adept. However, what he does make him say is doubtless the most that any initiate has ever said on this subject:

Perhaps, curious reader, you will ask what was then said and done. I should tell you if it were permitted to do so. You would know, if you had the right to hear it. But, in the case of such rash curiosity, both the ear and the tongue would be guilty of the same crime. However, if your religious desire is keeping you in suspense, I am unwilling to torture you any longer. Listen, then, but believe that it is the truth. I approached the borderland of death, and, after setting foot on the threshold of Proserpine [Persephone], I was brought back through all the four elements. At midnight I perceived the sun gleaming with bright light. I came into the presence of the gods above and the gods below and adored them face to face. What I have recounted to you, although you have heard it, you are condemned to keep to yourself.²⁵

It is odd that so few wise critics seem to have caught the whiff of facetiousness which hangs about this passage, although it has elicited from a British historian, not without the sound humour of his race, the remark that such divinities were certainly not fussy about the worshippers accepted by them! The passage remains, however, with its mention of Proserpina, a witness to the water which, since that of the Ilyssos, must have flowed into the Nile to turn the old Egyptian worship into a 'mystery'. It also goes to show that the Eleusinian *epopteia* originated a showing of divine images, in a flash of light dissipating the darkness, this, no doubt, at the end of some picturing of the myth from which was drawn the hope of a salvation or an immortality, however little edifying either might seem to be.

Another item to be accepted from this account, however fabulous it may be in general, is the appearance of Lucius, the following morning,²⁶ before the awestruck faithful, in a coloured garment of linen, a mantle covered with animal designs, a crown of palm leaves, a torch in his hands. Certainly we have here a reflection of the supposed identification with Osiris returning to life, attributed originally to the Pharaoh alone, but later extended

²⁵ E.O. JAMES, *op.cit.*, p.177ff. Cf. APULEIUS, *Metamorphoses*, par. 23ff (Turchi, no. 245, p.208ff.).

²⁶ Par. 24.

to all those to whom the rite of embalmment, long before this artificial mystery, had given such hope.

This pseudo-Egyptian mystery, like the ancient religion which more or less faithfully inspired it, is the first to give to a masculine god (Osiris) a place almost as central as that of the mother-goddess (Isis in this case).

It is also revealing, both of the commercial spirit in which the propagators of this sort of religion work and of their readiness to reply to what should be the aspiration of their eventual clients, that, after this Isiac initiation, Lucius is told that, if he wants to have the conclusion to the conclusion of this mystery, he should add to it a higher initiation, in particular one to the mysteries of Osiris. He would give his shirt to receive it in the Roman Serapeum, putting the crown on what he may have received at Corinth.²⁷

But, when that is over, another prophetic dream will drive him to a third ceremony, presumably still more expensive. The poor wretch lets himself be caught again. We shall find an equivalent of this when we come to the mysteries of Mithras: a whole list of them in order of importance is spread out before his devotees.

²⁷ Par. 27 and 29.

CHAPTER FOUR

FROM DIONYSUS TO ORPHISM AND TO THE MYSTERIES OF MITHRAS

In Dionysus, even if in Crete he may have started as the companion of a goddess, as the legend of Bacchus and Ariadne¹ has been thought to indicate, we have a masculine god of vegetation, who does not seem, as a rule, to have had to free himself first from some matriarch. Much more definitely we shall find in Mithras a solar god, if not in the strict sense a heavenly one, who has been connected, from time to time, in Persia under the Achemenids, but never combined, with a goddess of fire and water, Anahita.²

It is impossible to speak of the pagan mysteries of Hellenic or Hellenistic antiquity without mentioning Dionysus (known as Bacchus through his association with the vine), although it is doubtful, as we shall see, whether his 'orgies' ever constituted mysteries in the proper sense. But there is no doubt that the last pagan mysteries to have rivalled the Christian mystery were those of Mithras, and perhaps more seriously than any others. And if there is no direct relationship between Dionysus and Mithras, the enthusiasm generated for long by the former, metamorphosed from time to time into the almost unanalyzable concoction nowadays known as Orphism, did something to prepare for the sudden and greatest wave of popularity that Mithraism was to enjoy, just before its 'invincible sun' was abruptly expelled by the 'joyful light', the 'light without decline' which the Christian mystery proclaims.

In any case, both these two male gods, free from female tutelage, may be considered to have played a special part in this religious no-man's-land between the matriarchal divinities of the ancient mysteries and the Father-God of the Christian mystery. It

¹ JEANMAIRE, *Dionysus*, p. 345ff.

² JEANMAIRE, *op. cit.*, p. 12ff. on vegetation. On Anahita, see E.O. JAMES, *The Cult of the Mother Goddess*, p. 94ff.

is perhaps not without significance that the imagery of Hermes with his ram, so much a part of what is called Orphism, but which is in many respects only a tamed, if not very refined, Dionysism, could so easily transform itself into the first icon of Christ, nor that he took over, along with solar titles so much like those of Mithras, the feast-day of the *Sol invictus* for the celebration of his own nativity.

Dionysus and Apollo

Yet Nietzsche, in the most brilliant, but certainly not the most substantial, of his ingenious notions, which drove to distraction his academic colleagues, supposed that he could contrast Dionysus, point by point, with the Crucified. These learned men could have declared still less justified, if possible, his other contrast, that between Apollo and Dionysus.

In fact, the first thing that has to be said about Dionysus is that he remains the most mysterious (in the ordinary sense) member of the Greek pantheon, despite (or because of?) the unequalled wealth of information with which Greek antiquity has provided us. That is what emerges most clearly from the labours, if not exhaustive, in any case exceptionally diligent and patient, of H. Jeanmaire in his *Dionysos, histoire du culte de Bacchus* (Paris, 1951).

The first point that his critical analyses seem to have dealt with unanswerably is the baselessness of Rohde's theory, which had succeeded in convincing even those academics most irritated by the pseudo-synthesis (or diathesis!) of Nietzsche: Dionysus, far from being a foreign importation into Greece, coming from Thrace, typically barbaric in the eyes of Greeks, was not only just as Greek as Apollo himself, but may well have been more originally so (the very name of Apollo, according to the philologists, seems to have no claim to a Greek origin!).

God of vegetation, and more generally of cosmic vitality, like the mother-goddesses, Dionysus appears, unlike them, as not being a divinity of fruitfulness at the time when the process of humanization was advancing in the rearing of cattle and husbandry. Far from that, in the life of a human society which could pride itself on having domesticated, rationalized,

in a word, colonized the cosmos to its profit by humanizing it, Dionysus arises as an irruption, even a triumphal return, of life that is divine precisely in escaping capture at the hands of men. The legend about his boarding a ship is typical: he restores its planks to their original condition, covering them with foliage.³

The *Bacchae*, the strangest masterpiece of Euripides, is no doubt our best proof of the effect, just described, which Dionysus made on the thinkers of Hellenism at its greatest period. Throughout the play he is shown as the disturber, the shocker, perhaps even the most thorough destroyer imaginable of the civilization which seems to us to-day Hellenism's greatest achievement.

Let us also note, if only to be finished, once for all, with Nietzschean notions, that Apollo, behind his more orderly appearance, is no less disturbing. He seems not only rational, but so reasonable. But he, too, is a god of 'mania', of that madness which substitutes a divine spirit for a human one, according to Plutarch, paragon of Delphic orthodoxy though he is. For this other spirit can cover over, even dispossess, the spirit of man, only so as to put itself in man himself.⁴ With Apollo, as with Dionysus, we have to recognize the invasion of a transcendence of the most abrupt kind, after the reign, renewed in the mysteries of those supremely immanent divinities, the mother-goddesses, despite their strangeness and their possible barbarity. A proof of it is that at Delphi itself Apollo could put Dionysus in his own place during the three winter months which he was supposed to spend at Delos. And Dionysus, taking his turn, far from plunging the Pythian into a paroxysm of ecstasy, sent her off for a holiday (final collapse of Nietzschean fantasies!).

All this, of course, rules out easy explanations, based on arbitrary distinctions.⁵

The Dionysian Expansion

The fifth and sixth centuries BC seem to have experienced the great wave of expansion which this cult enjoyed throughout the

³ JEANMAIRE, *op.cit.*, p.228.

⁴ See Plutarch's treatise on the Pythian.

⁵ JEANMAIRE, *op.cit.*, p.187ff.

Greek lands. The tragedy of Euripides, performed in 406, gives us the most detailed account of the myth, which, here as everywhere, having developed out of the rite, is also the best indication that we have of its primitive ritual. But how scandalous must it have seemed to the Greeks themselves when it was spreading in all directions, this religion of drunkenness and orgy!

Here we must note that this last word, which has acquired a well-known meaning in all modern languages, as it had done in ancient ones, was originally the special word referring to the ritual of Dionysus. It could have acquired the generalized sense only because the ritual, as the whole story of the *Bacchae* indicates, began by causing scandal to a people usually far from strait-laced. Didn't its unbridled character lead to the inebriation of sexual licence, even to what we should call masochism and sadism?

Its effect must have been much greater in Rome when an attempt was made to introduce it there. In 186 BC the Bacchanals were forbidden by the Senate as a mere opportunity for scandalous debauches and murderous violence.⁶

Orgies or Mysteries?

Before beginning our enquiry with the basic evidence of Euripides, a question of vocabulary must be settled. Modern translations cannot be completely trusted, even one offered and discussed at length by so critical a scholar as Jeanmaire. For they bring in all over the place the regular vocabulary of the mysteries, which is characteristically absent from the Greek of Euripides! Not only is τελετή, the general meaning of which is just 'celebration' or 'ritual', constantly translated by 'initiation', but the βάκχοι or βάκχαι become 'mystics', and the ὄργια, a special term, to repeat, for this ritual, turns into a Mystery' . . . whereas the plainest fact that emerges is that there was nothing whatever mysterious about it!

It is true that Bacchus himself tells us that only those who take part in it can know what it means. But this in no way implies

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.53ff.

that there is any question here of a 'mystery', in the Eleusinian sense, for the play, like numberless accounts from Homer to Livy, leaves practically nothing of this remarkable liturgy to the imagination. It is just because he knows everything that goes on and considers it all criminal folly that Pentheus, the son of King Cadmus, thinks fit at once to oppose its introduction into Thebes (where, according to a legend about its origin, Dionysus had been conceived of Zeus by Semele, the daughter of Cadmus, after which she took refuge in Crete to give birth to him).

To understand the description which Pentheus is going to give of what is happening, we must realize that it is in fact Dionysus himself who has come to Thebes, concealing his identity under the appearance of a prophet or preacher of his cult, with the intention of converting the women for a start.

... our women have gone forth,
Feigning a Bacchic rapture, and rove wild
O'er wooded hills, in dances honouring
Dionysus, this new god, whoe'er he be,
And midst each revel-rout the wine-bowls stand
Brimmed: and to lonely nooks, some here, some there,
They steal, to work with men the deed of shame,
In pretext Maenad priestesses, forsooth,
But honouring Aphrodite more than Bacchus,
As many as I have seized my servants keep
Safe in the common prison manacled.⁷

A little later he explains:

Men say a stranger to the land hath come,
A juggling sorcerer from Lydia-land,
With essenced hair in golden tresses tossed,
Wine-flushed, Love's witching graces in his eyes,
Who with the damsels day and night consorts,
Making pretence of teaching Bacchic rites.⁸

And at that point Pentheus alludes to that form of the Dionysian myth according to which the new god, still only a foetus, was

⁷ EURIPIDES, *Bacchae*, verse 217ff.

⁸ Verse 233ff. [The Loeb translation has been used, here and in what follows, except in the last of the lines quoted above, which has been adjusted to correspond with the French - *Tr.*]

snatched from the womb of his mother, blasted by the flames of Zeus his father, and sewn up in that father's thigh. 'A blasphemy which deserves hanging', Pentheus calls it, and he exclaims:

But lo, another marvel this – the seer
Tiresias, in dappled fawn-skins clad!
Yea, my mother's sire – O sight for laughter! –
Tossing the reed-wand!⁹

But, although the old retired king himself and the local augur seem to have been already won over, the myrmidons of Pentheus are allowed to bring Bacchus before him as a captive (still pretending to be only the god's emissary). In the course of the long dialogue which follows, we read

PENTHEUS: Wherefore to Hellas bringest thou these rites?
DIONYSUS: Dionysus, Zeus' son, made me initiate.
PENTHEUS: Lives a Zeus there, who doth beget new gods?
DIONYSUS: Nay, the same Zeus who wedded Semele here.
PENTHEUS: Dreaming or waking wast thou made his thrall?
DIONYSUS: Nay, eye to eye, his mysteries he bestowed.¹⁰

Pentheus puts the pseudo-priest in prison. It is no use, of course. He escapes and, returning to Pentheus, urges him to disguise himself as a Maenad so as to see with his own eyes what is going on. A herdsman arrives to announce what he has seen, waiting in ambush to arrest Agave, the mother of Pentheus, at her son's order.

At the appointed time
They waved the thyrsus for the revel-rites
With one voice calling *Iacchus*, Clamour-King,
Zeus' seed. The hills, the wild things all, were thrilled
With ecstasy: nought but shook as on they rushed.
. . . Down swooped they then
Upon our pasturing kine with swordless hand.
Then hadst thou seen thy mother with her hands
Rend a deep-uddered heifer bellowing loud:
And others tore the calves in crimson shreds.

⁹ Verse 244ff.

¹⁰ Verse 465ff.

Ribs hadst thou seen and cloven hoofs far hurled
 This way and that, and flakes of flesh that hung
 And dropped all blood-bedabbled 'neath the pine.
 Bulls chafing, lowering fiercely along the horn,
 Erewhile, were tripped and hurled unto the earth,
 Dragged down by countless-clutching maiden hands.
 More swiftly was the flesh that lapped their bones
 Stripped than thou couldst have closed thy kingly eyes.¹¹

But Pentheus, having reached the scene, was himself struck
 with a supernatural stupor:

Aha! Meseemeth I behold two suns,
 A twofold Thebes, our seven-gated burg!
 A bull thou seem'st that leadeth on before:
 And horns about thine head have sprouted forth.
 How *wast* thou, brute? – bull art thou verily now!¹²

Hardly had his mother caught sight of him when all the Bacchants, at the god's summons, with Agave at their head, rush to the pine-tree where he had perched and started tearing him to pieces. In vain he called to his mother for pity.

But she, with foaming lips and eyes that rolled
 Wildly, and reckless madness-clouded soul,
 Possessed of Bacchus, gave no heed to him;
 But his left arm she clutched in both her hands,
 And set against the wretch's ribs her foot,
 And tore his shoulder out – not by her strength,
 But the God made it easy to her hands.¹³

The whole troupe joins in the carnage, scattering his flesh in all directions. Finally his mother impales on her wand the head of her son.

Who can tell what Euripides, generally considered more than half a sceptic, thought of this hallucinating scene? He has kept his own counsel. Between the chorus on one side, which at once charges Pentheus to his face with sacrilege and seems to see throughout nothing but devotion in these horrors, and Pentheus on the other, whose crude rationalism soon ceases to

¹¹ Verse 723ff.

¹² Verse 918ff.

¹³ Verse 1122ff.

seem any more intelligent, Euripides is probably not at all clear where he stands, like so many other Greeks of his time, tossed like balls from Plato to the sophists and back again, but tending to a comfortable blend of scepticism and conformism.

One thing at least is clear: what he has described is a primitive form of this strange ecstatic religion which certainly did not fall short, although in another style, of the extravagances of the Great Mother and her rivals, also hailing from the Near East.

From Orgy to Mystery

Yet Euripides has not told us everything. We know from other sources that the Maenads, originally at least, not content with tearing to pieces beasts wild or tame, even human beings, feasted on their flesh and blood.¹⁴ The vision of Dionysus seen by Pentheus – Bacchus in the form of a bull, the special Semitic, and more generally Asiatic, image of divine fecundity – has seemed to many of our contemporaries as giving us the meaning of these savage rites. By eating the flesh of the divine animal, one would be assimilated to it. In fact it seems much more likely, because the collective trance was produced by the dance and the drink, subjecting them to the god's control, that the Bacchantes, at the height of their 'mania', the madness with which the god struck them, reached these excesses, which were, as we have seen, as erotic as they were murderous, indeed cannibal! It would be hard to find for Freud, in his last period, a finer illustration of the death-wish which he claimed to find at the heart, if one may so call it, of the libido.

More exactly, we are again touching on the mysterious intuition of humanity as it enters the first phase of cultivation and civilization, not only that life and death always alternate, but that death itself is inexplicably bound up with development, and perhaps especially with the propagation of life. The outbreak of this devout lunacy, in the very century of what is called 'the Greek Miracle', must have been no less disconcerting for the most intelligent of the Greeks, such as Euripides, than it is for

¹⁴ JEANMAIRE, *op.cit.*, p.253ff.

us. It is clear, nevertheless, that they did not think it possible, or perhaps even desirable, simply to stamp it out. But there is no doubt that they tried to contain within reasonable bounds what they did not dare to try suppressing. This was the case later with the Romans, except that the Greek conception of religion was a less formal one.

In the various Greek-speaking countries, it was not chiefly the magistrates, as in Alexandria and especially in Rome, who set themselves to limit the havoc. It seems that in the Dionysiac bands themselves a certain decorum was imposed. We cannot be sure whether these bands were joined voluntarily by those attracted by them or whether it was just a matter of performing a public function, a *leitourgia*, in the old sense of the word, a service, both religious and social, of an individual on behalf of the community. In any case this was an attempt to be reasonable in playing the fool. Couldn't the desire to live, to live without limit, for its own sake, manage to avoid exhaustion and disgust, not to speak of death?

Anyway the fact remains that the Greeks, particularly those belonging to the period of Hellenism considered to be the most classical, did not wish to exclude the Dionysiac madness any more than they wished to lose control of it. This, certainly, was why the eating of flesh which followed the 'sparagmos' – the tearing to pieces of living animals, even of human beings, children or adults, preparatory to the consumption of raw flesh and blood – was replaced by a choreographic imitation, or, more pedestrianly, by eating meat which had been sacrificed in the regular way and properly cooked.

Similarly the ecstatic delirium of the Bacchants was reduced to a more or less tumultuous, more or less tipsy, festivity, when an attempt was made at least not to lose one's head or one's sense of decency.¹⁵ We also know from the testimony of the priest-philosopher Plutarch,¹⁶ as humane as he was devout, that the attempt was not always successful. The possibility of ritual murders, especially infanticide, was no more absent than was debauchery or mere rioting.

¹⁵ JEANMAIRE, *op.cit.*, p.434ff.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

In any case there were risks from which it could never escape so long as it did not take on the form and the pretensions of a mystery after the manner of Eleusis. And not only at the beginning but so long as the 'orgy' of Dionysus remained altogether his own, it seems never to have counted as such.

For there can be no mystery without secrecy. And, in the *orgia*, one cannot really find that anything is hidden. A proof of this is that Euripides, and still more Aristophanes in *The Frogs*, a pure farce, could put the whole of this religion on the stage without causing the least suspicion. On the other hand, some imprudent allusions to Eleusis and its ritual, on the part of the very pious Aeschylus, nearly cost him his life.

Moreover, how could publicity have failed to attach to a ritual performed not in an enclosed sanctuary but in the open air?

It will not serve to bring up against that the reply of Dionysus, in the *Bacchae*, to the question asked by Pentheus: 'Of what nature are these orgies?', for he does not reply, as even Jeanmaire makes him do: 'their secrecy forbids disclosing them to those who are not Bacchants,' but, much more simply: 'They cannot be explained to mortals who are not Bacchants,' in other words: 'These are things which cannot be understood without experience of them.' And that takes nothing away from the quite unrestricted publicity of the *orgia*, taken for granted by the whole course of the play. It amounts to saying that it is not sufficient to be a spectator, as Pentheus goes on wanting to be, but that one must take part in what goes on.

And yet, undeniably, the Dionysiac orgies did tend, little by little, to count as mysteries, if not to become such. But, in so far as they approached that status, they were no longer Dionysiac orgies but mysteries or pseudo-mysteries, Orphic ones, or considered to be such. This leads us to the inevitable discussion of what ought to be meant by 'Orphism'.

The Problem of Orphism

It is clear that those ancient writers themselves who believed that there were mysteries of Dionysus attributed them not to him, but to Orpheus. What, then, is Orphism?

There is no problem more controverted or, doubtless, more insoluble. One can get some idea of this by noting that for one of the greatest French scholars, who devoted himself to the study of primitive Christianity and its environment, Père Lagrange, Orphism is an unquestionable religious phenomenon of outstanding importance, while for his fellow-member of the same Order, no less incontestably a learned man, Père Festugière, Orphism, strictly speaking, has never existed at all.¹⁷

The same divergences appear among German or Anglo-Saxon scholars who have pored over this problem, from Miss Harrison to Guthrie,¹⁸ or from Kern or Rohde to Wilamowitz-Moellendorff.¹⁹

Without going into the details of this controversy, we shall confine ourselves here to picking out some points which seem to have been settled and which are sufficient for shedding light on our question about possible relations between pagan mysteries and the Christian mystery.

The first concerns the myth of Zagreus and the Titans. It is not clear whether Plato, who gave it its most durable echo, received it from 'Orphics', so far as that can indicate anything definite. He seems more likely to have owed it to the teaching of the Pythagoreans, who made it an important element in their teaching.

Zagreus, a god of Thracian origin, is certainly not the original form of Dionysus, but rather his local equivalent, becoming later confused with him. According to the myth, born of the sky-god, like Dionysus, Zagreus was slaughtered, cut to pieces and then devoured by the Titans (rebellious terrestrial demigods). They were blasted by the avenging fire from heaven, and from their ashes were born men, who thus had in them a divine element, incorporated in base matter. This view of things is of obvious importance for Platonist anthropology with its theory of the

¹⁷ Cf. M.J. LAGRANGE, *Les Mystères, I, L'Orphisme*, Paris, 1937, especially p.7ff. and A. FESTUGIERE, *Les Mystères de Dionysos*, in *Revue Biblique*, 1935, p.192ff. and 366ff.

¹⁸ Cf. J. HARRISON, *Prolegomenon to the Study of Greek Religion*, 3rd ed., Cambridge, 1922, and W.K.C. GUTHRIE, *Orpheus and Greek Religion*, London, 1950.

¹⁹ O. KERN, *Orpheus: Eine Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung*, Berlin, 1920, and U. von WILAMOWITZ-MOELLENDORFF, *Der Glaube der Hellenen*, Berlin, vol. 1, 1931, and vol. 2, 1932 (especially p.187ff. of vol. 2).

body as the soul's tomb (σῶμα – σήμα). But many others besides the Platonists were to spread it around, particularly, after the Pythagoreans, the neo-Pythagoreans of the Hellenistic age, along with all those who claimed, more or less justly, to be followers of Orpheus, and who, at least in the popular imagination, appeared as specialists in eschatology, especially for their description of punishments in the lower world.²⁰

But what is to be said of Orpheus himself? There is disagreement about his historical existence (didn't Aristotle deny it?)²¹ What made his name famous and influenced religious notions was the legend, rather than the myth, for it does not derive directly from any ritual, although it was attached to the Dionysiac one. And so a conjunction had to be made between Dionysus, especially when once he had been identified with Zagreus, and Orpheus.

Everyone knows the story of the poet and musician, as such divinely inspired, set off by pre-Romantic and post-Romantic music, from Gluck to Offenbach: having succeeded, by the charm of his song, in snatching from the lower world his dearly-loved Eurydice, on condition that he walked in front of her towards the light and did not turn round until she had crossed the fatal threshold, he could not keep it up and lost her once again.

But it is to the sequel of this story that the ancients were more attached. Inconsolable, the widower incurred the wrath of the Maenads for rejecting their advances. So he was seized cut to pieces and devoured . . .

How, then, did he come to be made the founder of the Bacchic orgies? That is what is still obscure. The fact remains that this

²⁰ On the myth of the Titans, see Mircea ELIADE, *A History of Religious Ideas*, London, 1979, p.369ff. Eliade has also written one of the most brilliant recent accounts of Orpheus and Orphism (vol. 2, p.180ff.). See his critical bibliography, p.482ff. One may, however, consider his general appreciation of the reality and influence of Orphism very optimistic. In regard to this, it is good to keep in mind that of the two collections of texts which are nowadays called Orphic, the first, *The Orphic Hymns*, contains only the ideas of late Stoicism, and the other, the famous sheets of gold-leaf also called Orphic, is of Pythagorean and neo-Pythagorean provenance. There is no mention of Orpheus in either of them.

²¹ See on this LAGRANGE, *op.cit.*, p.21.

attribution, once attached to the Orphic legend, ended in a complete reversal of the meaning hitherto given to Dionysiac ecstasy. A wholly spiritualized enthusiasm, like that produced by music of the kinds approved by Plato,²² that is, essentially pacifying, cathartic music, takes the place of the drinking and lechering, to say nothing of the lunatic massacres and cannibal feasts, which, by implication, the Orphic legend certainly condemns.²³

It is possible, if not probable, that in time this state of affairs could have come to affect the meaning given to the Dionysiac orgies, once reduced to ritual leapings around a feast now quite harmless, despite whatever might remain of contagious excitement.

In this way, and by a derivation of the aura of spirituality attached to the Eleusinian mysteries, these orgies must have become known as mysteries themselves. And the members of their bands, become both respectable and edifying, would have come in the end to think of themselves as initiates. The irony of the thing is that even in such cases there was never the least suspicion of mysteries, nor was there either in the vague beliefs which then tried to become clear, or in the ritual.

One of many evidences of this is a funerary inscription (of the third century after Christ!) found at Miletus and quoted by Jeanmaire:

Bacchants of the city, bid farewell to the holy priestess: the admirable woman has well deserved it. She led you to the mountain and, laden with the requirements for the *orgia* and the sacred objects, went at the head of the whole city . . . Does a stranger ask her name? Alcmeonis, daughter of Herodion, who knew how to choose the good part.²⁴

The words underlined are enough to show that such orgies could be called 'mysteries' only quite improperly, and the tone of the whole inscription assures us that the orgy in question hardly deserved such a description. How distant from the Agave of Euripides with her band of harpies is the worthy Alcmeonis!

²² Cf. Walter PATER, *Plato and Platonism*, London, 1893, p. 17 and *The Republic*, p. 398ff.

²³ Cf. JEANMAIRE, *op. cit.*, p. 407.

²⁴ An inscription found at Miletus and dated 275 AD (to be found with a commentary in JEANMAIRE, *op. cit.*, p. 445).

Orphic Mysteries?

But this more or less Orphic flavour which the Dionysiac orgies, certainly much sobered down, acquired here or there (apart from the possibility of occasional outbreaks of primitive savagery) is not at all the same thing as a specifically Orphic mystery. Some modern historians, rather more visionary than critical, have assured us of the existence and influence of such a thing and have described in greater or lesser detail its possible rites and the teachings which emerged from them.

Demosthenes, in his speech *On the Crown*, has given us a proof, as startling as it is entertaining, that there were, in the Greek world of the fourth century BC, propagators of a more or less serious occultism who could attract, mixed up together, unsophisticated religious souls, dissatisfied by the traditional religions of the city, and mere simpletons, victims of a morbid curiosity or the crudest superstition. Plato himself confirms it.

The description given by Demosthenes of the conventicle presided over by the mother of his adversary, Aeschines, where the latter functioned as a sort of choirboy, is a choice morsel. The worshippers, it seems, put on the *nebris*, the fawn-skin of the Maenads. A bowl (of wine, obviously) also had its part to play; by way of purification, the 'neophyte' was smeared with clay and flour . . . Aeschines, having grown up, Demosthenes tells us, had the role of reader – which implies the existence of a *ἱερὸς λόγος*, written texts therefore, like those in which, rightly or wrongly, so-called Orphic teachings are thought to have been found. And it all ends in a procession along the street where Aeschines is supposed to shout at the top of his voice that these are mystics (and so there is a mystery) of Sabazios (another avatar, Phrygian this time) on the model of Dionysus.²⁵

This evidence, valuable for its exceptional precision, shows that charlatans were at work in such celebrations and (as is always the case with occultism) how suspect and factitious were the traditions which such people claimed to represent. The nearer

²⁵ DEMOSTHENES, *On the Crown*, 259. See the commentary of JEAN-MAIRE, *op.cit.*, p. 94ff.

one comes to the last years of classical paganism, the more these sects multiply with their varying degrees of seriousness.

More and more we find also, along with a deliberately fantastic ritualism, a semi- or pseudo-esoteric teaching which may well refer to Orpheus, but just as well to Pythagoras, unless it is to some other magus in an Orient where fables flourish. In such conventicles, groping enquiries are encouraged or, more exactly, excited at every degree of genuine or bogus intellectuality, as at the level of the most commonplace superstitions: searchings for a salvation conceived of still very vaguely and even more dubious in its spiritual quality.

But in the midst of other references of every sort to real or imaginary teachers, archaic divine figures more or less amalgamated, it seems hopeless to seek, as has been done too often, a continuity in some tradition claiming to be Orphic, even if the name recurs in the texts. Above all, we must be under no illusions about the limits of the relative spirituality to be found in what they expected from salvation, especially in those quarters from which Dionysus continued to recruit his worshippers.

Let us say nothing about the fantasies, almost completely unfounded, which have been piled up, for example, about the famous frescoes of the villa Itern at Pompeii (now rebaptized Villa of the Mysteries), to put it mildly, with some promptitude.²⁶ The attractive reconstructions of the prodigious investigator Jerome Carpcino at the 'basilica' recently discovered near the Porta Maggiore, however more respectable, combined, nevertheless, the dreams of a poet, not to say an illusionist, with the most extensive erudition. When for once one has the whole literary context of a fresco like that of the tomb of Vibia Perpetua, so often reproduced, one discovers how much prudence is necessary as soon as there seems to arise, in dying paganism, an approach to Christian sentiments or even some rough sketch of them.

For this Vibia belonged, apparently, to a cénacle of those same worshippers of Sabazios among whom, five or six centuries earlier, were the clients of Aeschines's mother. The hypogeum where she rests is close by the Christian catacomb of

²⁶ Cf. JEANMAIRE, *op.cit.*, p. 460ff. There are reproductions of the frescoes in the volume of illustrations in Leipoldt and Grundmann, *op.cit.*, 52-54.

Praetextatus. At first sight the hopes of a heavenly beyond which the co-religionists of Vibia entertained are just as close to those of the Christians next door. The paintings on her tombs show her to us introduced, by a personage called *Angelus bonus*, into a meadow which can be considered symbolic, like contemporary Christian representations of paradise, for there await her the guests of a Supper superficially similar to the eschatological feast of those buried beside her. But the copious inscriptions of this hypogeum leave us with no illusions about the true nature of the promised beatitude:

Manduca, (b)ibe, lude et veni ad me (her god says to her): Cum
vives benefac, hoc tecum feres . . . qui basies, voluptatem, jocum
alumnis suis dedit.²⁷

Yet the mention of the *Angelus bonus* settles the matter: we are already finding a pagan cult touched by the first biblical, if hardly evangelical, influence.

Mithras and His Mysteries

To find in a mystery religion of ancient paganism something more than the automatic effect of a ritual or the more or less vague projection upon these rituals of Platonist or neo-Pythagorean philosophy, or later of neo-Platonism, we must go to the mysteries of Mithras. These did not fully develop their attraction until the triumph of Christianity was drawing near, that is, when what was best in paganism thought it possible to survive, as we see in the case of Julian, only by a more or less close imitation of its rival. To repeat, Renan's remark that the world would have gone over to Mithras if it had not opted for Christ in the end is only a whimsy.

Mithras, under the form of Mitra, appears in the Indian Vedas as a god of light. But it is among the Persians that he obtains the role and the importance attributed to him by his followers

²⁷ *Corpus inscript.lat.*, VI, 142. The fresco is reproduced in F. CUMONT, *Lux Perpetua*, Paris, 1949, p.257.

in the Roman Empire, where his fame spreads in the second, but especially in the third, century of our era.

He came, it seems, by way of Phrygia (hence the Phrygian cap which appears, with the Persian trousers, on portrayals of him). It is in Phrygia that his sanctuaries seem to have forged their permanent link with those of Kybele. He was never accepted in Greece (where his Persian origin made him objectionable) and was first introduced into the Roman world, if we may believe Appian and Plutarch,²⁸ by Cilician pirates who had taken him from survivors of the army of Mithridates. A Persian hymn in the Avesta invokes him as god both of the dawn and of combatants. Reduced by the Zoroastrian reform to being the first of the Yasatas, the angels of the one good god, Ahoura-Mazda, fighting against Ahriman, the fallen spirit of darkness, he regained divine status under the Achemenids, along with the goddess of fire, Anahita. The magi, at the same time, combine his cult with astrological speculations of Babylonian origin.

The Cilician pirates, then, conquered by Pompey, brought him to Rome, from the first as a tutelary divinity for groups of soldiers, and it was chiefly in military circles that he was always to gain fresh adherents. Wherever there were Roman camps, in London or Stuttgart as well as in Rome or Ostia, we find a Mithraeum. The faithful referred to it as a *speleum*, and, when it is not actually a grotto but a building, this represents a grotto (Mithras was thought to have been born from a rock).

Passing through a vestibule, a sort of sacristy, we find regularly a corridor, with stone seats on either side, ending in a niche where there is usually an altar, with a double bas-relief representing Mithras sacrificing the bull, on the one side, and Mithras at table with the sun, on the other. It seems that he was considered to be the charioteer of the sun and that his myth always represented him drawing from the slaughtered bull (the special symbol of the world's life and its fecundity for all the ancient East) the whole creation as it was

²⁸ On Mitra and Mithras, see M. ELIADE, *op.cit.*, vol. 1, p. 204ff. and 471ff. The essential work on the Mysteries of Mithras remains that of Franz CUMONT with that title (Brussels, 3rd ed., 1913). On the present state of research see M. ELIADE, *op.cit.*, vol. 2, p. 307ff. and, for a bibliography, p. 527ff. PLUTARCH, *Pompeius*, 24 is clearly Appian's source on the first incursion of Mithras into the West.

when our world began. Similarly, having destroyed the world as 'saoshyan', saviour, at the end of time, to eliminate its evil (symbolized by the serpent's biting the bull's male organ), it is by this same sacrifice that he must finally regenerate the world.²⁹

We are told by Saint Jerome³⁰ that there were seven stages in the admission of candidates to the Mithraic brotherhoods. They were called the Crow, the Husband, the Soldier, the Lion, the Persian, the Messenger of the Sun and the Father. But we know nothing definite about their various attributions (except that the priests were taken from among the Fathers, and that initiation, properly speaking, began with the Soldier).

According to Tertullian (son of a centurion who may well have been an initiate), the Soldier was offered a crown on the point of a sword,³¹ which he had to refuse, proclaiming that Mithras himself was his crown. He also had to be given, as a preliminary, a ritual bath,³² and finally he received a mark on his forehead (a tattoo or branding), described by Tertullian as a diabolical counterfeit of the baptism and chrismation of Christians.

From Saint Justin,³³ we learn that an essential part of the cult's meetings, as the stone seats mentioned above suggest, was a meal consisting of bread and water (in which he himself seems to see an analogy with the Christian Eucharist).

Apart from that, we have no idea of how these rites were interpreted except for Tertullian's assurance that the admission of a soldier involved a *sacramentum*, an oath of fidelity. But the evidence agrees with what clearly remains of Mazdean inspiration sufficiently to convince us that the initiates pledged themselves to practise a high standard of morality as brothers in the struggle of the good principle against the evil one.

²⁹ Cf. ELIADE, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 529.

³⁰ JEROME, *Epist.* 107 *ad Laetam*, 2 (Turchi, no. 345, p. 291). This list is confirmed by Latin inscriptions. That, not quite identical, given by PORPHYRY, *De Abstinencia*, IV, 16, must be explained, together with other details, as indicating a possible participation of women since it is concerned with one of the first Eastern communities (See note 2, p. 159 of LOISY, *Les Mystères païens et le Mystère chrétien*).

³¹ TERTULLIAN, *De Corona*, 15 (Turchi, no. 340, p. 287).

³² TERTULLIAN, *De Baptismo*, 5. What is said about Christian unction and Mithraic marking is found in *De praescr. Laer.*, 40 (Turchi, no. 341, p. 288).

³³ JUSTIN, *1st Apology*, 66, 4.

It should be emphasized that, although the *mithrea* were numerous in the Roman Empire, they were on a small scale. From the Phrygian interlude in the history of Mithraism there resulted a close relationship with the sanctuaries of the Great Mother, where the women (who had no recognized place in this essentially masculine religion) could no doubt find what they wanted. But, contrary to what was for long believed, the taurobolium never passed from the one cult to the other. Nothing has been found in the *mithrea* to indicate sacrifice which might have been offered or perhaps the meals which would have followed them except the bones of small animals, chickens in particular.

That is almost all that can be definitely said about this very special religion which was clearly quite distinct from all the other mysteries among which they seem to have been eventually classed, for it carried with it an ethical ideal rooted in its own myth. Yet there is not the slightest indication of how they conceived the exact relationship with the god established by the ritual, except, Plutarch tells us,³⁴ that Mithras, having conquered at the end of time the evil power of Ahriman, when once the present world had been destroyed along with him, would bring back his faithful to life, conducted to the highest sphere of the stars for the time being.

³⁴ *De Iside*, 7 (Turchi, no. 327, p.282).

CHAPTER FIVE

FROM APOCALYPTIC TO THE MYSTERY

Summing-up Mystery Religions

The previous chapters have shown the rich complexity involved in working out, however confusedly, the themes which have emerged from the Eleusinian heritage. Fundamental, but so problematic, is the relation found from the beginning between life and death, more exactly between death and the expansion of life. Then there is the obscure but certainly profound significance of the union of the sexes for man's situation in the world and in regard to the divinity which he discerns behind these phenomena as the background and the source of his own existence. Above all, we find in the rites an association of both the life and the death of human beings with similar vicissitudes of the whole cosmos, to which the gods cannot be strangers, their sufferings in it appearing as decisive for man's own destiny.

Through the kaleidoscope of our enquiries, we can also imagine how the Greeks and the Hellenized Romans must have divined how much more far-reaching and mysterious than the 'good goddesses' of Eleusis had enabled them to realize was this relationship of masculine and feminine which the Greco-Roman civilization, like the Greek city-state, seemed to have disposed of simply by pretending to ignore it.

The triumphal return of maternal goddesses, along with the first mysteries, those of Eleusis and those most closely associated with them, seemed to have routed what is called to-day the 'male chauvinism' of Hellenism. On the other hand, the sudden and even savage recurrence of an aggressive masculinity with Dionysus (paradoxically, but quite typically, welcomed by the Greek women themselves with the greatest eagerness!) was

perhaps even more baffling for those Greeks whose discovery of spirituality seems not to have distinguished very clearly between asceticism and homosexuality, which consecrates the distinction of the *vir* only by making nonsense of it.

Yet it cannot be doubted that the invasion of Dionysus represents, beyond the revelation of divine immanence in the religion of the mother-goddesses, fundamentally alien to Hellas, that of a transcendence rising again from its own foundations. But what an ambiguity is there in this breakthrough of the infinite, and how much did it seem to confirm the inability of the Greek minds to distinguish this from the *ἄπειρον*, the formless, the monstrous! If Eleusis and its rivals promised, however vaguely, some victory over death, wasn't this savagely vital irruption of Dionysus going to prove fatal for any life which might still be called human in the apparent destruction of all order, all health and all beauty? And doesn't its apparent purification in what has been called Orphism, in so far as it really was a sort of decantation, seem, on reflection, to be rather an evaporation into unreality and its hyper-spiritualism to be an escape into the land of dreams and shadows? Very characteristic, as we shall see, will be the recognition by the neo-Platonists that the divine in its purity, the transcendent One, does not exist, at any rate not in a sense which has anything in common with human and cosmic existence.

So in a way we can understand the final reaction of these Romans, who had thought to find among the Greeks a more genuine religion than their own, but who now saw slipping away and vanishing into it those values of order and discipline to which, rightly, they were so much attached, and who threw themselves, in desperation, into the arms of a god standing at least for light and for victory over everything that seemed simply chaotic, a god such as Mithras . . . But what a bitter irony was in store for them, these men of order, unless Plutarch was playing a joke on them and on us, to find themselves borrowing this god from brigands!

It must be recognized, in the end, that the mystery religions, considered as a whole, could have provided a sort of paradoxical propaedeutic for Christianity, not by the hopes, however inconsistent, which they had inspired, but rather by their inability to produce even an earnest of fulfilling them.

All these problems and indeed all these themes, which will form a pattern eventually with the Christian Mystery in an unlooked-for solution, had been approached, even just grazed, by the pagan mysteries, but it was not until the former had been revealed that this could have been realized, and then, inevitably, these pseudo-solutions, not to speak of their promises, could seem only caricatures.

The fact is that these rituals, which, all of them, are the only really concrete reality of the mysteries, the rest being only insubstantial daydreams about them, bring into play only the cosmic powers, themselves the first to have fallen from grace, as the Gospels will say. How, then, could the finest promise of these mysteries – the murmur, probably, of the pitiful priests of Attis: ‘mystics, take courage, for if the god is saved, there is also an end to your pain’ – how could this fail to appear derisory? For only the Christian Mystery, its content attested by the Word of the creative God coming down, not falling down, to our level to restore us, or rather to raise us up to his, only this could rescue us from the cosmic cycle of those rebirths, which only set travellers in motion again towards death, and open to us, once for all, the way to the only true immortality, that of the eternal God.

That is why the conclusion must be that, despite analogies more disappointing even than they are striking, it is from a source quite other than those of the pagan mysteries that the Pauline mystery derives, the Christian Mystery, the mystery of the one true God which alone contains in itself the mystery of man who was still God’s creature even when he, along with the world itself, seemed to have escaped his hands.

Biblical Apocalyptic and Christian Mystery

The latest studies of this topic do not leave any serious doubt remaining that it is from the final developments of the Old Testament and their prolongations in intertestamentary Judaism, and not through any extra-biblical influence, that Paul derived and transmitted to the oldest and purest Christian tradition the conception which he formed of his own mystery, or, rather, the Mystery of Christ. For, we may say, it was from the effect produced by Christ upon the final Jewish tradition immediately

preparing the way for him that Paul extracted the idea which he was to hand on to us.

As D. Deden showed us in an article in *Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses*,¹ we find there not only the preparation of Paul's thought on this matter, but even the vocabulary which he was to use in expressing it.

Let us recall, in this connection, the methodological criterion, in this field of comparative religion, established by G. Dumézil. From the fact that human imagination has a fundamental structure present everywhere, it follows that no symbol, no image, in the discussion of any particular topic, whatever surprising analogies may follow from its use in the literature of various civilizations, can constitute a serious indication of an influence, a derivation. A failure to grasp this radically vitiates many comparisons built up in the nineteenth century. All the more does such negligence prevent our taking seriously contemporary students of comparative religion such as Kerenyi; they are blinded by prejudice.

There have been found, in America, ancient figures with a man and a woman on one side and a tree and a snake on the other. At first sight, one might be inclined to believe that the Amerindian myths either derive from the biblical tradition or reveal, in the America before the European incursions, the existence of an archaic myth, itself the source of the biblical story. In fact, it is impossible to suppose such a link between local developments, which obviously lacked any means of contact in the past. The appearance of such a dependence, on the one side or on the other, results simply from the fact that always and everywhere spontaneously and independently of one another, the civilizations known as primitive have become aware of a kinship between human fertility and that of the physical world, especially in its elementary forms of vegetation. And, at the most different times and places, the snake has appeared both as a sexual symbol and as a malignant being, for reasons too obvious to mention.

To show derivation, effective dependence, it is not enough to find here and there the same symbol or even just an accumulation of such symbols. It is also necessary that this collection of

¹ D. DEDEN, *Le Mystère Paulinien*, in *Ephem. theol. lovanienses*, 1936.

symbols should be structured in each case in the same way, in other words, that its various elements should have the same clearly defined system of relationships.

Again, as Lucien Cerfaux and the exegetical school of Louvain have emphasized, one cannot be absolutely sure that one is not faced by a mere coincidence, however striking it may be, unless it belongs to a language with a constant relationship between the same terms or terms regularly translating into a new idiom those which had been used for the first time in the idiom of the earlier system.

Our enquiries have already shown that none of these conditions are fulfilled in the case of the supposed parallels between the mystery religions and the Pauline Mystery. On the other hand, all these requirements are duly met in comparing the thought and language of the apostle with those of Jewish apocalyptic literature.

The work of Deden has the special merit of drawing a parallel between chapters 1 and 2 of the first Letter to the Corinthians and chapter 2 of *Daniel*.

This comparison is particularly interesting in that this chapter of *Daniel* shows us apocalyptic literature at an early stage, just when it is disengaging itself from the final development of sapiential literature.

From Wisdom to Apocalyptic

Wisdom, in the ancient civilizations of the Near East, goes hand in hand with royalty. More precisely, as Dom Hilary Duesberg² has clearly shown, Wisdom fully developed and systematized appears at Babylon, with Ahikar the Assyrian, as well as in Egypt, with Amen-em-ope, as the art of the 'king's people'. That is, it is the art of organizing human life, individual and collective, in the city which is formed and rests on the basis of kingship. The king, originally an essentially charismatic personage, will be considered in Egypt the divinity itself appearing in human form.

² Dom Hilaire DUESBERG, *Les Scribes inspirés*, Tournai, 1939.

In Canaan, as at Babylon, they did not go so far: the king appears only as the supreme minister of the god, but one which he can no more do without than men in general can do without the king if they would have access to him. As such, the king possesses, by direct inspiration, a communication of Me (in Aramaic) or Maat (in Egyptian), that divine vision of the world which humanity must achieve for its fulfilment.

It is also necessary that this Wisdom, though altogether heavenly in its origin, be applied to the concrete details of man's life in the city. That is the task of the 'king's people'. Guided by royal oracles, supposedly divine, they apply them systematically, making a rational selection from the mass of experience inherited from their predecessors in this office. Thus there is a concretization and a progressive organization of the wisdom of the wise of this earth.

It is highly characteristic of its most elaborated forms, like the two just mentioned, that they come up against what we call the problem of evil, and, in particular, the problem of evil, and, in particular, the problem of innocent suffering. Questions inevitably arise: can the rule of the kings be truly efficacious, and are the gods, by whom, through their intermediary, wisdom is inspired, actually all-powerful and all-wise?

It is in reply to these questions that the final developments of Wisdom, transported to Israel along with the kingship, come to suggest, as the only possible solution, its own transformation into apocalypse, that is into a direct and wholly gratuitous revelation of the pure and, in the end, the only authentic Wisdom of the only true God.

And that is what we see actually happening in the Bible, in the second chapter of *Daniel*.

The king of Babylon had a dream which so disturbed him that, when he awoke, he could not even remember what it was. The most learned of the wise men, summoned to help by trying to bring back the dream and to interpret it, begged to be excused. 'There is no man on the earth', they said to him in the end, 'who could do what you are asking for. This is the business of the gods, who do not disclose it to men.'³ The king, in a rage, gave orders

³ *Daniel*, 2, 10 and 11.

for all the wise men to be put to death. Daniel, the wise captive Jew, and his companions were to be included in this general condemnation. But Daniel proposed that they should pray with him to the God of heaven – the one true God – ‘touching this mystery’ that they might not perish with the rest.

His prayer is both quite characteristic and also instructive for our enquiry into the origin of the Pauline mystery:

Blessed be the name of the Lord from eternity to eternity, for to him belong wisdom (σοφία) and power (δύναμις). It is he who changes times (καιροί) and ages (αἰῶνες), who takes away kingdoms (βασίλεια) and establishes them, who gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have intelligence.⁴

This prayer, like all biblical *berakoth*, is a reply to a revelation already granted: ‘then *was revealed* to Daniel *the mystery* in a vision of the night and Daniel blessed the Lord.’⁵

So Daniel came to the king, told him all that he had dreamed and explained its meaning. But he began with a warning:

None of the sages, philosophers, diviners or magicians can tell the king the *mystery* that he desires to know. But there is a God in the heavens who *reveals* (ἀποκαλύπτει) *mysteries*, and it is he who has shown what must be in the last times (τὰ ἔσχατα).⁶

It is enough to compare this text with that of *1 Corinthians 2*, discussed above, along with its prolongation in *Colossians* and *Ephesians*, to be convinced that we have here the same structure of thought and the same phraseology as those in which the Pauline mystery is set forth and defined. In each case we have the same conjunction of the same ideas expressed in the same terms, as the end of chapter 2 of *Daniel* shows, in regard to the final establishment of the divine Kingdom after the collapse of all terrestrial ones; for the mystery is that of divine wisdom, inaccessible to man except by a wholly gratuitous revelation from above. And it is an affair not just of explaining man’s situation in the world but of the transformation of that world, which requires both the

⁴ Verses 20 to 21.

⁵ Verse 19.

⁶ Verse 27 to 28.

wisdom of God and his power which is inseparable from it and is his alone.

So it is essentially a matter of the mastery which God alone holds over history, of the *καιροί*, the decisive moments when one era passes into another, the *αἰῶνες*. And it is more particularly about the final issues of this history of sin, of the rebellion of created 'powers' against their Creator, τὰ ἔσχατα, when the divine Kingdom will at last triumph over the ephemeral kingdoms of unfaithful and disobedient creatures.

Once the Pauline mystery has been seen in this context, in the perspectives proper to it, those, that is, of the Apocalypses which, from *Daniel* onwards, play an increasingly great part in the last books of the Bible and multiply throughout the intertestamentary period, it is necessary, if we would grasp the full meaning of this, to see how the Apocalypses, by way of biblical wisdom from which they emerged like a butterfly from its chrysalis, proceeded, in the last analysis, from the most continuous development of the biblical word in the Old Testament.

First, it is noteworthy that chapter 2 of *Daniel*, in the original text, was written in Aramaic and that the word *μυστήριον* in the Greek version is the translation of the word *raz*, of Persian origin, which passed into both Aramaic and Hebrew.⁷ This word properly denotes the sovereign decision of a king, which he first makes known only to his innermost council and which will not be revealed to everyone until it is put into actual execution.

This council, and all the secrecy which it implies, is signified by the word *sod*, which has its equivalents in the same sense in the languages of other Semitic peoples. Like terrestrial kings, the great heavenly gods of these nations have also their secret councils, composed of the secondary gods. In the oldest prophetic literature, the image, with its own terminology, is transposed into a council of God with his angels, as we see evoked at the beginning of *Job*. And it is a standard way of describing prophetic inspiration to present an authentic prophet as introduced into the secret of this divine council. The most characteristic case is the

⁷ Cf. Raymond BROWN, *The Semitic background of the term 'mystery' in the New Testament*, Philadelphia, p.2ff.

description of Isaiah's first vision, in chapter 6 of the book which bears his name, and the question which the prophet hears 'Whom shall we send? Who will speak for us?' and his reply 'Lord, here am I. Send me.'

In other words, the idea of the mystery of the wisdom of God now revealed, touching the final triumph of his kingdom over those opposed to it, by means known to himself alone because dependent upon him alone, plunges its roots into the most original, the most fundamental, biblical theme, much older than the development of biblical wisdom itself, that of sole sovereign kingship of this God who reveals himself in his Word.

CHAPTER SIX

FROM MYTHS TO WISDOM

The ultimate sense of the mystery can be found only in its original context, its first biblical source, the divine Word as it made itself heard to Abraham, the father of believers, even before Moses and the prophets.

We can distinguish three successive phases of the Word of the Old Covenant: before the Apocalypses there is Wisdom, but before biblical Wisdom there is the Word in its purity, its primitive originality, which, from the first, is opposed to any kingship other than that of God who speaks and therefore to any Wisdom other than his own.

Myth and Divine Word

Before redefining itself in relation to human wisdoms, and well before revealing itself as transcendent of any wisdom of this world, this Word, we may say, defined itself for the first time in relation to precisely those myths whose recall the mystery religions were going to prepare for at the moment when, with their kings and wise men, the cities of the ancient world came to realize that their earlier certainties had been shattered.

We may begin by pointing out that this consideration is sufficient to make futile, because meaningless, the 'demythization' of Scripture which Bultmann and his disciples proposed to undertake. For a myth is not a story for children which an adult human being must discard like useless rubbish. To believe that would reveal an ignorance of all the developments of the history of comparative religion since the beginning of the century and a conception of myth which would

seem to specialists in this field today as just pre-scientific.¹ That is ingenuously admitted by the barbarism which the followers of Bultmann have perpetrated to describe their undertaking: *Demythologization*. 'Mythology' is a decadent, or rather moribund, form of myth which has collapsed into a children's story, or rather an old man's story. Myth, on the other hand, as explained above, when it springs forth out of ritual, represents for man a basic-grasp of adult consciousness. For the first time he comes to place himself consciously in the world, at the same time placing the world itself in relation with holy powers, with the divine reality on which everything depends.² As such, myth is and remains at the root of all civilization in its creative phase.

That does not mean that myth ought not to be criticized by man as he thinks rationally about his experience. That happens in the emergence of wisdoms, although these could never have been built up apart from the intuition to which myth has given rise. But much more radical will be the criticism to which the divine Word will subject it, although also taking its rise from it.

The first wisdoms, as we have stressed, in raising the apparently insoluble problem of evil, of its presence in a universe supposedly the work of divine powers, by definition all-good and all-wise, and especially the problem of innocent suffering, pointed out the inextricable contradictions in which all myth is involved. Only the Word will be capable of freeing us from them, without plunging us in the process into scepticism or despair. For it will do so, not by abolishing myth, but by correcting a threefold confusion explaining and, at the same time, dispelling it.

For we can say that this Word will show us that myth, confusing, for a start, the world's becoming with that of the divinity itself, ends with confusing creation with the fall and thereby leaves nothing to hope for except through a decreation.

¹ Carsten Colpe has rightly remarked that the most recent work on the history of comparative religion known to Bultmann is the last edition of R. Reitzenstein, *Die Hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen* . . . which goes back to 1927. Comment is superfluous.

² On this see above all Mircea ELIADE, *The Quest*, Chicago and London, 1969, p.72-87 especially.

Retrospectively, it will become clear that this threefold confusion arose through the fall itself. That has placed us, in the midst of the universe, like divers or the drowning, who, when they raise their eyes to the skies, cannot distinguish what is sunk in the waters which have engulfed them from what is soaring above them, in the air or up in the sky. The first page of the Bible, the account of the creation, patterning itself directly on Babylonian or Canaanite myths and borrowing all their imagery, seems to have had the rectification of this threefold error as its first objective.

God, 'the divine', whose all-embracing unity the myths translated without managing to grasp what it really was, appears in this page for the first time as absolutely transcending the whole world. Having no need of the world, it is not by plunging itself into a matter alien to it and originally hostile, nor in breaking itself up, that it has produced the universe. On the contrary, it is through a pure generosity – from which it follows that all things, including their multiplicity and even their materiality, are fundamentally good, because expressive of the boundless goodness of God, as much as and more than his inexhaustible power.

Thus it becomes a matter of course that the fall is not just the counterpart of the creation. Far from being a fall of God himself into multiplicity, far from immersing him into an obscure matter in which he would become lost, the fall is the work of some of his highest creatures. Deceived, or rather deceiving themselves, by their proximity to the sublime unity, the pure spirituality, of God, they planned to make themselves his equals. Thereby, trying to enslave the lower zones of creation, these Powers became divided against one another. At the root of their fall, their pride, the spirit of domination which it produced, hid from them the truth that the real divinity, on the contrary, is pure generosity.

And so salvation, far from abolishing the creation and returning God into a sublime solitude, will move him to condescend to the lowest of creation's levels, so as to free men from the slavery into which they had let themselves be drawn by adoring and serving the highest of God's creatures in place of the Creator.

In other words, using the very language which man had formed for himself in the poetic imagery of myth (and what language could the Word of God have used in speaking to man except that in which man spontaneously expresses himself?),

the divine Word completely remoulded myth. Thus the whole undertaking of demythization becomes unintelligible: what the Word retains from myth language, which the Word's own projection upon it had elaborated, keeps its irreplaceable value. It could not have been set aside without the divine's being lost, for man, in sheer ineffability. Yet it was enough for the Word to appropriate this language for the dispersal of the errors, the fatal confusions, which encumber all the myths.³

The Original Word: A Word of Action

It is only in a second phase of its development, a reflex one, that the Word expresses itself as a critique, or rather as a disencumbering, of myth. At the outset, and fundamentally, it is not a word which just gives information, like a professor. It is an active word, a personal intervention in the life of those whom it addresses. Its object is not just to instruct a man considered as simply an intelligence but to save a sinner, someone who has turned his free will into an acquiescence to the deceptive promises of fallen powers. They have enslaved him by suggesting to his mind the thought of egoism, a mere sensual enjoyment, in place of the adoring acknowledgement of the divine Will. Thus they have made impossible man's handing himself over to God's original plan of adopting him as his son.

Following upon his original human sin, human cities begin to arise and to be organized on a basis of taking for adoration some man supposedly inspired (but by whom?), who believes himself to be more or less divinized. So man, in order to be recovered for God, to take part in this divine reconquest of the world in which his salvation lies, must begin by being extricated from the terrestrial kings and their usurped kingdoms (which are only a disguised enslavement to the higher powers which were the first to fall).

So, according to the Bible, the first expression of the divine Word to man is the summons to Abraham: 'Go! Leave the house

³ See my book *Le Fils Éternel*, Paris, 1974, p.39ff. for this interpretation of the first chapters of *Genesis*.

of your fathers and go to the country of which I shall tell you, and you will become a blessing to all nations.⁴

Abraham, thus cast into the desert, sets out as the Letter to the Hebrews will put it, in search of the one city whose foundations are eternal, the only one of which God is the builder and is to be the king.⁵ In this command, which is the original, fontal, Word, and Abraham's answer of faith, we have at once, still implicit but already perfectly plain, the basic belief of the whole Bible: far from the kings of the earth being, as they claim, either, like the Egyptian Pharaoh, God himself taking visible form, or at least like the kings of Canaan or those of Babylon, ministers of the gods who considered themselves in fact to be the channels of their activity among men, it is the mysterious God, the God at present hidden, revealed in his Word alone, who is the only true God. For he alone can take charge effectively of man's destiny and lead him to the promised land where the mystery of evil, of innocent suffering, will be at last dissipated and transcended.

Very soon he does reveal himself: quite explicitly, from the time of Moses, the prophets will not cease to repeat that this God is not just the God of Israel. What distinguishes Israel in this respect from other nations (and this is why, by its very separation from them, it must reveal itself as a blessing for all) is that Israel alone, the children of Abraham, know him and recognize him for what he is. But God is equally the King of all nations upon earth, whether they know it or not. Better still, he is just as much the King of those heavenly powers, God's fallen angels, who seem to control the course of the world and who in any case have managed to make the other nations pay worship to them, those nations whose kings claim to be the ministers of the false gods unless, like Pharaoh, they dare to style themselves the very epiphany of those gods.

So this theme of the Kingdom, or rather of the inalienable Kingship of God, who demands the restoration of his own Kingdom in place of all those usurped by the pride-filled powers, will be the recurrent theme of the Bible, from the Old Testament to the New. But the development of this theme will require a progressive revelation of the wholly supernatural character of

⁴ *Genesis*, 12.

⁵ *Hebrews*, 11, 10.

this Kingship, in the discovery of what may be called the divine personality to which the chosen people will be summoned. This discovery will be made only in the development of an interpersonal relationship between Israel and her King.

We see a strong suggestion of this in Abraham's subsequent behaviour. The fifteenth chapter of Genesis tells us of the first announcement of it in the mysterious vision of the night in which a flame of fire comes from the cloud where Abraham, to his indescribable terror, has found himself immersed. But it just passes, along with himself, through those sacrificial victims which he has divided in two as a sign of a Covenant established between God and his own. Here, for the first time, we have the theme of the *Schekinah*, of the presence of God in the luminous cloud, which will run through all the Old Testament.

More down-to-earth at first sight, but in fact still more deeply mysterious, is the second vision, Abraham's second encounter with this God, in which he manifests himself in the form of the three Men, the three Angels, in whom the father of believers, prostrate on the ground, adores the one God. They agree to sit at his table, and after that, in the second part of this eighteenth chapter, one of the most astounding in all the Bible, they simply accept, they seem even to suggest, a prayer verging on blasphemy, on behalf of human beings, apparently wholly and irremediably corrupt, in Sodom and Gomorrah.

Yet even more remarkable than this extraordinary scene, so it will always seem, is that of the twenty-second chapter. It is generally known as 'the sacrifice of Isaac', but it is much rather the supremely prophetic intervention of God himself, as alone able to offer and to consummate the sacrifice of reconciliation in the gift of his only Son: man could only adumbrate it, for it belongs to this God alone to perform it. Israel will remain convinced that the *abodah*, the sacrifice above all others which Abraham undertook, pledged in advance the whole people which sprang from him to a total disappropriation of its own very existence. The 'child of promise', gift of God as he was, in which God pledged himself in advance to give himself in his only Son, could not himself endure save in a reciprocal abandonment to this generous will. Will not this be spoken as the last word of divine Royalty, proclaimed as the only authentic one by the divine Word?

With Moses, taken from the people sprung from Abraham in order to be sent back to it as the second and supreme messenger of the Word, the history of the father of believers is reproduced and transposed into being that of the whole people.

For this people in its entirety must enter upon the exodus, that is, upon an apparently interminable wandering here below. But for them also it begins to become clear what sort of liberation, a spiritual much more than a physical one, is involved in this exodus. For the Pasch declares, and will go on declaring unceasingly, that the Exodus, in freeing them from the Egyptians, frees them from the power of death which bondage to idols carries with it. So the Exodus will lead directly beyond the Red Sea, letting through the believers, burying the unbelievers, to the meeting-place of Sinai, a necessary stage on the road through the desert in search of that land of promise in which God will reign not just over but also along with his own people.

And, in the escape from Egypt and also, one might say, in the burning Bush, there reappears the theme of the *Schekinah*, of the special presence, in the cloud and in the fire, of God who speaks, summons, and finally gathers together his people, leading them into the desert.⁶ There the presence of God shows itself not only as their protection but also as essentially a power which sets them in motion and urges them on. So there is a second theme, which develops out of the first with Elias and then with Ezekiel, that of the *Merkabah*.⁷ The *Schekinah* (from the biblical Hebrew word *schakan*, 'living in a tent') implies that the special presence of God, which goes with the word of God's summons to his people, makes him the companion of their wanderings. But the *Merkabah* itself is, formally, the chariot of fire in which this God, the God of the Pasch or 'passage', traverses the universe. No one can stop him, bring him to a halt. And now he encourages his own to follow him. So the meeting on Sinai is only a stage, though a decisive one, on the journey to which their act of faith commits them.

⁶ See my article *La Schekinah: Dieu avec nous* in *Bible et Vie Chrétienne*, no. 20 (Dec. 1957-Feb. 1958), p. 7ff.

⁷ Gershom SHOLEM, *The Merkabah Mysticism and Gnostic Judaism*, New York, 1977.

Revelation of the Name and Revelation of the Torah

It is in this fundamental perspective of being torn away from oneself, which the Word, if received with faith, cannot but consummate, that we must envisage the revelation, a double but also a single one, of Horeb-Sinai. The revelation of the Name was to Moses alone.⁸ The revelation of the Torah, of the divine plan for the people, was to all of them, in their own meeting with God, to which and in which they were drawn onwards. But the two, in the end, are only one, for the whole purpose of the divine intervention is to restore the image of God in man, the filial image which sin had disfigured, turning it, as it were, to stone.

What really was this divine Name which resounded from the midst of the burning Bush? We do not know even how to pronounce it after so many centuries since the voice of the high priest, who alone was entitled to utter it, blessing the people on the day of Expiations, was heard for the last time. The modern version 'Yahve' is admitted to be only a guess, hardly better supported than 'Jehovah', the grotesque barbarism of the Renaissance, combining with the consonants of the unpronounceable tetragram the vowels of Adonai (the Lord), the pious periphrasis by which all possible profanation was avoided.

The sacred Name, supremely mysterious as it is, has always received, in the Jewish tradition, two interpretations side by side, much more complementary than mutually exclusive, either 'I am who I am' (that is, 'what cannot be said') or 'the Living One who gives life'. But, to repeat, the biblical account of the creation was to say that the Ineffable has made man in his own image. And later Ezekiel dared to reverse the order of these words, saying that he had seen (in his inaugural vision), on the very seat of the Merkabah, a form which presented 'something like the figure of a man'. Moreover the revelation of the Law, following upon that of the Name, will set forth as its purpose nothing less than the restoration of the lost image.

That indeed was why the 'knowledge of God' given to the prophets, the effect of the Word received with faith, begins by

⁸ *Exodus*, 3 (for the revelation of the Name) and 20ff. (for that of the Torah).

speaking of obedience to his plan for us, to what the Torah lays upon us, as André Neher has so well shown.⁹ But, as he has himself made clear, this is no servile obedience, the obedience of slaves, but a filial one. And for this to become, or to rebecome, possible, it will be necessary for the Word, seizing upon the heart, that is, the depths of the human being, to produce a union of God with his creature such as to engender reciprocally our union of conformity with all that he wills and even with his very own being. This, as Neher has admirably demonstrated, leads us directly to the theme which will become, with Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, the prophets' final theme, that of the eschatological Marriage between God and his people.

Let us note in passing that the two themes, that of filial adoption, which is not a juridical fiction but the supreme creation of God in man, and that of Marriage, go together, as chapter 16 of Ezekiel clearly indicates. It is when the union of the divine Word and the heart of man is consummated that this regenerated heart, the new heart of which Jeremiah will speak, the heart of flesh replacing the heart of stone, as Ezekiel puts it, restores in us the filial image. For then the Word, bringing us back to life, summons and draws to us the Spirit himself, the very breath of God.¹⁰

Thus, as Neher remarks in his conclusion, we reach the biblical comparison of 'knowledge' with the consummated union of man and woman, which will make her 'mother of the living'.¹¹

The Sign of the Passover

There, we may say, we have the substance of this Kingdom of God, more and more clearly hoped for, to which the Bible was moving from its first page, but which will take an increasingly definite form as the prophets guide Israel towards her final realization.

⁹ André NEHER, *L'Essence du Prophétisme*, Paris, p.101ff. and 205ff.

¹⁰ Cf. *Hosea*, 1 to 3; *Jeremiah*, 2 and 3; *Ezekiel*, 16 and 23. Also the second and third parts of *Isaiah* (ch.50, 54 and 62). On the change of heart, cf. *Jeremiah*, 31 and *Ezekiel*, 36.

¹¹ *Genesis*, 3, 20.

In this supreme sacrifice of the Hebrews, the companions of this exodus constantly repeated in the steps of Abraham, the father of the believers, which will take over and make its own all the complex ritual of holocausts, sacrifices of communion or of expiation or other offerings borrowed from other Semites in Canaan,¹² in this sacrifice the people will always see itself seized upon once more in the 'passover' of God through the lands, striking down the impious who resist him, sparing the believers who yield to him. They will be, as it were, carried in the wake of that Merkabah in which God has snatched Elias heavenwards. For this Pasch will send out, time after time, a people for ever nomadic in its search for the only city whose foundations are eternal, that which God both builds and rules.

This is what the paschal Haggada proclaims, when it makes the president of the celebration say, in answer to the ritual question of the youngest initiate at the sacrificial feast, not just: 'We recall our ancestors' going out from Egypt, their crossing of the Red Sea, their journey to the promised land,' but: 'To-day we go out of Egypt, to-day we pass through the Red Sea, to-day we journey to the desert to meet God who is waiting to take us to his Kingdom.'

For the whole ritual of Israel can be seen as concentrated, condensed, in the paschal memorial, as Joachim Jeremias has rediscovered; it is not just a subjective recalling of the past, but a pledge given by God that his grace is always present with his people. Thus the past does not only come alive for us but is also prolonged in us. And, most important of all, this pledge has been put into our hands by the Lord that it may be offered to him in return only for our gaining with confidence, in the prayer of faith, that longed-for crowning of this history of our salvation in which his intervention has transformed and transfigured the history of our fall.

That is what underlies the prayer which we may call the response of faith which the divine Word would create in the hearts of believers: the biblical *berakah*, translated by the Septuagint as *eucharistia*, a prayer in which the praise of the Almighty is mingled with thanksgiving to the All-merciful. It glorifies him both for his

¹² R.K. YERKES, *Sacrifice*, London, 1953, p.115ff.

creation and for his saving intervention which has drawn us up from the depths to which we had sunk. But, as the peak point of this glorification itself, it will beg him to achieve, in us as for us, the coming of his Kingdom, the consummation anticipated by the faith and hope which abandon themselves without further reserve to the ineffable revelation of his love as both Spouse and Father in heaven.

Royal Wisdom and Divine Apocalypse

To uncover all these perspectives more fully, we must note that the first phase of the history of salvation, that of Abraham and Moses, corresponding to the primordial form of the divine Word, that of the Exodus and the Alliance of Sinai, was followed by two others. In appearance, but only in appearance they will seem contradictory, for the settlement in Palestine is followed by the fall of the terrestrial city and the exile of Babylon. The harrowing ambiguity even of the deliverance from this exile will be stamped upon the return and re-establishment of the captives and on the reconstruction of the Temple and the holy City. But to these two new phases correspond the introduction into Israel of Wisdom and of its final explosion. This, in the Apocalyptic writings, will prepare for the revelation of the end, the New and Eternal Alliance, the definitive inauguration of the Kingdom of God, as a heavenly and no longer as an earthly Kingdom.

Wisdom becomes known to Israel, after its settlement in Canaan, as the inevitable accompaniment of human royalty. And, in each case, the prophets will proclaim the incapacity of the people to cooperate on this earth in the establishment of the divine Kingdom to which it is destined. For this return to the land of the chosen people will mean contamination with the idolatry inseparable from Canaanite agriculture, still worse, perhaps, than the contagion of idolatry in Egypt, where they were enslaved.

That is what the prophet Samuel will at once denounce, as we see in chapters eight to ten of the first book of the Bible which bears his name. To the people's demand to have a king to lead them in all their battles, like other peoples, the prophet of course replies: 'Do you want, then, to abandon the God who delivered you from the Egyptians and brought you here?'

A remarkable double meaning is given to the granting of the people's plea to which divine inspiration leads Samuel in the end. On the one hand, this return to a terrestrial kingship implies of itself its punishment, the experience which the people will have of the inability of any kingship save that of God to lead them to the city of peace. On the other hand, if, all the same, a human king is to be given them for a time, this will be only on an express condition which overturns the very meaning of his kingship, for not only will their king not be able, of course, to claim divinity for himself, but he must not even claim to be the representative here below of a heavenly king. He will be only the representative of the people's faith in the only divine kingship and so their guide in their obedience to this faith.

That is why Saul, whose human qualities seemed to mark him out for kingship, will be put aside when his refusal to accept this dependent position is discovered. David, who will be put in his place, will not suffer this fate, not at all because he seemed a holy man, but, on the contrary, because he showed himself to be as sinful as the rest of the people but recognized himself as such and was the first to give himself to practices of penance.

This is the state of affairs when Wisdom comes upon the scene and establishes itself firmly in Israel as the natural accompaniment and practical application of all kingship. But, subjected, like kingship, to divine inspiration, it will undergo a parallel transformation. Inheriting from the first the whole tradition of rationally criticized experience, embodied by all the wisdoms of the ancient East (typical of this is the fact that whole chapters of *Proverbs* reproduce, almost word for word, chapters of the Egyptian wisdom of Amen-em-ope), Wisdom, for this very reason, will arouse, at once and for a long time, the same prophetic objections as the Kingship. But, as with the latter but still more, the prevailing inspiration of the Mosaic teaching developed by the prophets will gradually transfigure its whole meaning, putting itself in the place of the inspiration so equivocally claimed for the kings of the old world. Eventually, as has been already said, Wisdom, in Israel, shot through by the radiance of the Word, will become practically indistinguishable from the efforts of the Deuteronomists, supported by Josias, the king faithful above all others, to apply to the whole life of the people the teaching of one of the last and greatest of the prophets, Jeremiah.

This is the way in which Josias will renew the celebration of the Pasch as explicitly one of a deliverance, not simply, nor in the first place from external and human enemies like the Egyptians, but from the enemy whom Israel herself carries in her heart, her attraction to false gods rather than to the only true and living God.

That does not prevent the last kings of Judah, like those of the ten tribes of Israel after the schism, from entangling themselves in merely human policies and bringing their kingdom to irremediable ruin.

And as the best and clearest wisdom of Assyria, Babylonia and Egypt could end only in doubt and hesitancy, faced by man's inability to conquer evil at its source, so the Wisdom of Israel, with *Ecclesiastes*, falls into a pessimism, more inexorable still, if possible, about the way the world was going. In *Job* this will be taken even further by a flat denial that man, even when enlightened by Mosaic or prophetic inspiration, can dissipate that great mystery of evil, innocent suffering.

It is highly revealing (the word is especially suitable here) that apparently at almost the same moment the prophecies of the second part of *Isaiah* give us the last word of pure prophetic inspiration in the oracles of the suffering Servant, the Innocent One who sees in his inexplicable trials, accepted in pure faith, the only way to a salvation which is not just that of Israel but that of all the world.

Then *Job* also can proclaim as the last word of human wisdom, even if inspired, that wisdom, in the last analysis, cannot be the perquisite of any human being, but only that of God.¹³

At this moment, we see wisdom, like kingship, go back to heaven. In other words, God is recognized as the one true sage as well as the one true King.

But it is then also that from this human wisdom which is willing to renounce itself there emerges the apocalypse, otherwise called the 'revelation', a glimpse of divine wisdom, recognized at last as essentially mysterious.

In *Daniel*, to repeat, we catch in the scene before us the actual substitution of apocalypse for wisdom, the reaffirmation of the

¹³ *Job*, 28.

heavenly character, strictly divine, of the only wisdom which can bring down the Kingdom of God from heaven to earth, or rather raise from earth to heaven those who make up 'the people of the saints of the Most High' by their fidelity to this God even in suffering and dying.

For this 'Son of Man', appearing in the clouds of heaven, that is, truly a man, but a new man, wholly supernatural, heavenly in origin, appears at the same time as himself bringing, to restore to the 'Ancient of days', this Kingdom which is his own but must also be that of his saints.¹⁴

It is again highly significant that we find later throughout apocalyptic thinking, more or less directly inspired from above in the intertestamentary period, both in *Fourth Esdras* and in the *Parables of Enoch*, an effort to transcend the idea of a terrestrial Messiah, a human but 'anointed' (that is, inspired) king, another David, another and better 'king according to the heart of God',¹⁵ by bringing together the heavenly vision of the 'Son of Man' and the other vision, apparently so different, of Isaiah's suffering and abased 'Servant', but without ever succeeding in putting them together.

That needed the coming and living among us of Jesus and his final recognition of him by his own as the eternal Son of God made man in our history of sin so that he might turn it into a history of salvation now at last achieved. Only then could be dispelled the too human vision of a king who still belonged to this earth, although his kingship was claimed to be that of the divine Kingdom. And now the inspiration of the Old Alliance had to give way to the New and eternal one, precisely in that vision of faith which is the Pauline Mystery.¹⁶

¹⁴ *Daniel*, 7, 27.

¹⁵ Cf. *1 Samuel*, 13, 14.

¹⁶ On all that concerns the titles given to Christ, see *Le Fils Éternel*, p. 109ff. and 201ff. for more details.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE MYSTERY AND THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

The Gospel of Christ – not only the witness of the apostles to the effect made upon them by their own acquaintance with Jesus, but the Gospel which Christ himself preached – is what alone could and did bring together and synthesize all the converging figures of the Old Testament in the proclamation of the Pauline Mystery. If this mystery, as will now be clear, has its first origins in the apocalyptic writings and its preparations in all that led up to them from the beginning of the biblical tradition, it has no immediate source except the teaching of Jesus, inseparable, of course, from his whole activity and the light shed from his presence among us.

First we must note that the three synoptics agree in telling us that Jesus himself explained the meaning of the parables when he said, according to Matthew and Luke, that they enclosed 'the mysteries of the divine Kingship' (or, rather, 'of the Kingdom'), but, according to Mark, '*the mystery*', in the singular, as in Paul. There is every reason to think that it was Jesus himself who made the transition of these mysteries of the kingdom and of his coming, according to the Apocalypses, into the one mystery in which all are united and made clear together in a single revelation. For it is an essential characteristic of his preaching, according to the synoptics, that it has a double aspect, but that it is unified eventually in the threefold announcement (in all four Gospels) of the necessity of his death for the fulfilment of the divine promises which he had now brought to the point of their complete unfolding.¹

¹ *Matthew*, 17, 12 and 22; 20, 28. *Mark*, 8, 31; 9, 12 and 31. *Luke*, 9, 44; 18, 31; 24, 7. Also *John*, 3, 1; 8, 28; 12, 32.

There is, on one hand, the whole theme of the Sermon on the Mount, his basic teaching to the crowds, that we are called to be sons of God in such sort that we are to show that very same unheard-of love to which God gives witness even towards the most unworthy sinner.² But it is clear that this revelation is not that of a quality, native to ourselves but unsuspected, as Harnack thought when, in *The Essence of Christianity*, he supposed that the divine fatherhood could be simply translated into an affirmation of the infinite value of the human soul.

The parables, on the other hand, insist on the character of pure divine gift, of unhopèd-for, unimaginable grace attaching to this summons to sonship, which is all one with the coming of the Kingdom, sudden, unforeseeable, wholly beyond our grasp. Jülicher's conclusion about the parables, that they are only a disguise for commonsense truths, is without foundation. As Dodd has shown most clearly,³ they are the declaration of a wholly paradoxical event. If the mysteries, or rather if the supreme mystery of the coming of such a kingdom, was directly revealed at first only to the disciples, that was because they alone could recognize who Christ is. For in him, in him in the first place and at first in him alone, the divine sonship is revealed as truly real, in full actuality, present now in this world.

Mark tells us in the opening words of his Gospel and repeats in the last words of the centurion who witnessed the Passion 'Truly this man was the Son of God'.⁴ Better still, at the heart of this Gospel, at the culminating point when the limitation which Christ has accepted in becoming a man like ourselves was most fully declared, that is, his ignorance as deep as our own or that of the angels in regard to the final coming of the Kingdom – at that point also Mark presents him to us as 'the Son' of that God whom he calls 'the Father'.⁵

That is what will find, not its explanation, but its revelation, precisely as revelation of the Kingdom establishing itself in us and for us, in the threefold announcement of the necessity of the Passion, a necessity consummating his identification with

² Cf. especially *Matthew*, 5, 20 to 48.

³ C.H. DODD, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, Cambridge, 1935.

⁴ Cf. *Mark* 1, 1 and 15, 39.

⁵ *Mark*, 13, 2.

our humanity in all that John calls the 'weakness of the flesh' so that we might receive a likeness to that divine Sonship which is his alone. And here too we see, going beyond any claim on his part to a merely terrestrial messiahship, the initiation of the Son of man to so heavenly a messiahship that he must appear on earth only as a servant 'come not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for sinners'. Here lies the mystery of the parables of the Kingdom which the apostles had to discover before other people – and not without difficulty!⁶

Yet, still according to the synoptics, but this time as much in Matthew and Luke as in Mark, this divine sonship, communicated to us in the abasement of the eternal Son to the condition of a humbled servant, finds its deepest and richest expression in the *berakah*, the quasi-liturgical thanksgiving uttered by Jesus when the apostles returned from their first mission. And the theme of this *berakah* is just that of the Pauline Mystery.

Jesus said:

I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes . . . for no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.⁷

It is not surprising that, according to Matthew, Jesus added:

Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, for my yoke is easy and my burden light.⁸

Let us remember that these last expressions, for the most devout of the Jews, meant accepting the Law in all its demands by the faith, as joyous as it was generous, of true believers.⁹

⁶ Mark, 4, 11. On all this see R.H. LIGHTFOOT, *The Gospel Message of Saint Mark*, London, 1930.

⁷ Matthew, 11, 25ff. and Luke, 10, 21ff.

⁸ Matthew, 11, 28.

⁹ They are found notably in the prayer *Yôser hor* of the synagogal ritual where they are applied to the cult of the Angels, cf. *Seder Amram Gaon*, (ed. D. Hedegard), Lund, 1951, p.47. But *Berakoth* II, 2 applies the same formula to the recitation of the *Shema* by faithful Jews (*ibid.*, p.48).

How much more applicable are they when Jesus discloses to us the ineffable grace found in the requirements of his sonship in its extension to all of us: 'Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect'¹⁰ with the perfection of love revealed in the gift of the Only Son to and for sinners.

¹⁰ *Matthew*, 5, 48.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE PAULINE GOSPEL OF THE SECOND ADAM AND THE MYSTERY

When we have discovered Paul's preaching of the Mystery in the preaching of Christ himself, we can understand the way in which his whole Gospel goes back, explicitly or implicitly, to the Mystery. This is pre-eminently the case for the theme of Christ as the Second Adam, or rather the last Adam, that is, the heavenly Man whose radiant image, as *First Corinthians* tells us, we have to put on, even as we have borne for too long the disfigured image of the first man.

This theme can be said to underlie all the developments of Paul's thought. It will find its final expression in the christological hymn of *Philippians*,¹ which indeed is incomprehensible if this is not recognized.

Have this mind among yourselves which was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not [unlike Adam] count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, born in the likeness of men. And, being found in human form, he humbled himself still more and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him, and bestowed on him the Name which is above every name, that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.²

But this theme of Adam or of the heavenly Man is clearly only the apostle's rewording of the central theme of the preaching of

¹ See my article in *Mélanges Lebreton*, Paris, 1951, vol. 1, p.281ff.

² *Philippians*, 2, 6 to 11.

Jesus, that of the Son of Man.³ All its essential notes are repeated. But it is translated into a language more accessible to non-Jews, which explains why the expression 'Son of Man', a much too esoteric Judaism, disappears from a preaching to the Gentiles, in spite of its central place in the preaching of Jesus.

All its content has been now transferred into the figure of the heavenly Man, which Paul introduces when he contrasts with the first man another man, who is not just a second Adam, but the final Man: ἔσχατος Αδάμ.⁴

The Second Adam in the Epistle to the Romans

The theme of the two Adams makes its appearance in the fifth chapter of *Romans*. At this time, however far it may have been worked out in Paul's mind, he still confines himself to comparing the decisive action of the first man with that of Jesus and contrasting their consequences.

As by a single man sin entered the world, and by sin death, so that death spread to all men, because all have sinned . . . But the free gift χάρισμα is not like the sin. For, if many died by one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Then, as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men.⁵

This translation has left out a parenthesis so as to bring out the continuity of the basic thinking, which, to repeat, is concerned

³ See on this subject my *Le Fils Éternel*, p.135ff.

⁴ *1 Corinthians*, 15, 45.

⁵ *Romans*, 5, 12 to 19.

with the different decisive actions of Adam and of Jesus and their consequences.

We must return, however, to the parenthesis, and to its own provisional conclusion, for they contain the germ of a second development, which we shall find in the fifteenth chapter of *First Corinthians*, where it is no longer the actions of the two which are considered but rather the first man himself and he who will then be described not just as a second Adam but as the definitive man.

But first it must be pointed out that the development which has just been read represents an illustration and an anticipated justification of what was said, at the beginning of this book,⁶ about a recapitulation which appears, in *Ephesians*, as the very principle of the Mystery. It is a question, as will now be seen, of going back to the beginning of a history ill begun, lost in a blind alley, but which, once set on course again by this new man, Jesus Christ, emerges at last into the light of what Paul calls 'justification'.

The parenthesis beginning at verse 13 will now be quoted:

Sin indeed was in the world before the [Mosaic] law, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam [against an expressly formulated law], who was a type of one who was to come.⁷

The conclusion of the whole passage takes up and completes the secondary theme of the law:

Law comes in to increase the trespass; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.⁸

That it is indeed so, that life in the end superabounds in the second Adam, whereas the first had only a mortal and a dying fruitfulness, is precisely the point of the comparison taken up

⁶ Cf. p. 16ff.

⁷ Verses 13 and 14.

⁸ Verses 20 and 21.

once more and further explored which we shall find in *First Corinthians*.

The Last Adam in First Corinthians

This is where the whole reality of Christ, of the definitive humanity shown to us in him, is defined and worked out, in contrast with the fragility, the precariousness, of the figure of Adam who was only his forerunner.

In the fifteenth chapter of *First Corinthians*, Paul begins by establishing the truth of Christ's resurrection on the testimony of the apostles.⁹ Then he shows that, if it were not so, not only would Christian preaching be only a blasphemous lie but also our condition as sinners doomed to die would remain unaltered.¹⁰ So he proclaims:

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For, as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.¹¹

Immediately after the return to the theme of the two Adams, Paul seems to depart from it in describing how the general resurrection will take place. But in fact, as we shall see in a moment, the theme underlies this whole development of his thought. The objection, however, or rather the difficulty, which he here anticipates, suggests to him a fresh and richer account of the matter.

But some one will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?'¹²

He replies by contrasting the present body which is only 'psychic' (which a created soul animates) and the 'spiritual' body transfigured by the divine Spirit. The former, he says,

⁹ Verses 3 to 8.

¹⁰ Verses 12 to 19.

¹¹ Verses 20 to 22.

¹² Verse 35.

in comparison with the first, is like the kernel which must die if the ear of corn is to grow from it.¹³

The conclusion of this reply brings us back to the theme of our present concern:

If there is a psychical body, there is thus also a spiritual one. So it is written, 'the first man, Adam, became a living soul';¹⁴ the last Adam a life-giving Spirit. But it is not the spiritual which is first but the psychical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust, the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven (ἐπουράνιος), so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.¹⁵

Then the passage ends, by returning, on the basis of these declarations, to the theme of the transfiguration through which we must pass so that the corruptible may put on incorruptibility, the mortal immortality, and death may be swallowed up in victory.¹⁶

But what emerges from these last words is that Christ is not only a new beginning for humanity, but a new humanity. He constitutes in himself the heavenly humanity, and we must put it on,¹⁷ as Paul says, just as we had received from the first man a merely terrestrial humanity, which sin condemned to return to the dust from which it had been taken.

Yet there is more in these passage than meets the eye. The first point which must be emphasized here is that the heavenly man, the last Adam, is not the first one, but another who was not to appear until later, and this is something much more than the rejection of a mere hypothesis. For it was a regular supposition of the ancient myths that the primordial man was a quasi-divine being and man as he is now only a degenerate form of this being, fallen into matter and multiplicity and therefore, although divine in origin, having no longer the glory of his divinity.¹⁸

¹³ Verses 36 to 44.

¹⁴ The reference is to *Genesis*, 2, 7.

¹⁵ Verses 44 to 49.

¹⁶ Verses 50 to 57.

¹⁷ Verses 53 and 54.

¹⁸ Cf. S. MOWINCKEL, *He That Cometh*, Oxford, 1956, p.48ff.

In accordance with the biblical tradition, Paul here reaffirms that the creation of man, as a being made of body and soul, is in no way a fall, but that the fall has resulted from the sin of this man, created good in the beginning, although simply a created being. It is only for his salvation, his alone, that the second man, who alone is essentially divine, had to appear clothed in our humanity, created in that state of disgrace into which man's sin had cast him, not only in order to rescue him from death but also to communicate to him the divine sonship proper to himself alone.

And that is not all: this is an affair not just of outdated errors but of the error of the pseudo-gnostics, Jewish or Christian, which is still, we must realize, a menace and which continued to degrade Christian preaching for two centuries by returning to the ancient myths.¹⁹

Life 'in Christ'

That is still not all. The words 'the last Adam', applied to the 'heavenly man' whose image we are to put on, swallowing up in his glory not only the shame but also the inferiority of the first man, has still further implications. Whereas humanity, up to then, was not Adam's issue, not only through detaching itself from him but also in the opposition of its members to one another as well as its enmity from birth with its creator, now it must reconstitute itself, put itself together again, become reintegrated into the second Adam in such sort that it becomes more than a second beginning – for Humanity is its final goal.

That is what the theme of *Colossians* postulates, the universal reconciliation brought about not only by Christ, but in him.²⁰ *Second Corinthians* had already given given striking expression to it:

God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.²¹

¹⁹ Cf. R.M. GRANT, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity*, New York, 1966.

²⁰ Cf. above, p.13ff.

²¹ *2 Corinthians*, 5, 19.

For this was not to say just that the reconciliation was effected by God's being in Christ when he died for us, but further that our reconciliation implies henceforth our living no longer in ourselves but in him who has ransomed us. The same epistle said, a few verses earlier, that he died 'in order that those who live should live no longer to themselves, but to him who died and is risen';²² which further emphasizes the decisive statement of verse 17: 'these things being so, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature' or, better, 'a new creation'.

The expression perhaps most frequently used (a hundred and fifty times) in Paul's letters to characterize the life of the Christian is 'in Christ' or 'in Christ Jesus', as though he were the vital principle in which we should live, from which we should draw our whole renewed existence.

Better still, the words which he uses in the twelfth chapters of *Romans* and *First Corinthians*, that we are members of Christ, that we form his body, a body, as *Ephesians* will make clear, of which he himself is the head, compels us to take in all seriousness this inclusion of ourselves in Christ.²³

Baptism

This, according to Paul, is the first and the capital effect of baptism. In the sixth chapter of *Romans* he says to us:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized [literally, 'steeped' or 'plunged' with the preposition, εἰς, of movement] into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him in baptism into death, so that, as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For, if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united [as one plant] with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is freed from sin. But, if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die

²² Verse 15.

²³ *Ephesians*, 1, 22.

again: death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Jesus Christ.²⁴

The 'old man' of this passage is obviously the survival in us of the first Adam, just as Christ living in us is the definitive 'new man'. But the parallel passage of *Galatians* is even more formal in its declaration that, as the result of our baptism, we are united with Christ:

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ . . . you are all one with Christ.²⁵

It must be emphasized that we have here not the neuter *ἐν* but the masculine *ἐν*, which means that we are all in a single collective person in Christ.

This image of clothing, following upon that of grafting, recurs, still in immediate connection with the resurrection, in the fifth chapter of *Second Corinthians*:

For we know that when the earthly tent we live in [our body inherited from Adam] is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Here indeed we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling, so that by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent we groan under its weight, because we would be not unclothed but clothed upon, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.²⁶

In the same perceptive the apostle shows the Ephesians the ultimate goal, the final realization of the mystery:

. . . we shall all come together in the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God [so as to constitute] a perfect man, having reached the mature fullness of Christ.²⁷

and again:

²⁴ *Romans*, 6, 3 to 11.

²⁵ *Galatians*, 3, 27 and 28.

²⁶ *2 Corinthians*, 5, 1 to 4.

²⁷ *Ephesians*, 4, 13.

We are to grow up in all things in the truth of charity into him [again εἰς, indicating movement] who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by all that builds it, grows strongly up, according to the proper measure of each member, to its own completion in charity.²⁸

And this is again linked by the apostle with 'rejecting your old way of life, which belongs to the old man who is corrupted by the lusts of his falling away, so as to be renewed in mind by the Spirit and to put on the new man, created in the likeness of God in the justice and the holiness of truth'.²⁹

The same perspective of the last Adam, the final man who is to be formed and completed in us by reason of our inclusion into Christ, explains another contrast, that between the outer man who is corrupted and the inner man who must grow, despite the apparent contradiction with the image of reclothing (notoriously, the superficial incoherence of his images is no worry to Paul).

In the preceding chapter of *Ephesians* we find him saying:

May the Father from whom all paternity on earth is named . . . grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened mightily by his Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts, through faith, rooted and grounded in love . . .³⁰

There is the same mention of the inner man, who rejoices in the law of God, in *Romans* (7, 22), and *Second Corinthians* (4, 16) will contrast him in his renewing which goes on from day to day with the outer man who decays.

As the texts already quoted show, in which Paul uses many verbs with the prefix σὺν to show our dynamic association with the life of Christ, corresponding to the solidarity with us in which he came to live among us, it is plain that this incorporation into Christ, which is the heart of the mystery, is a matter not just of a mere presence of ourselves in him, and of his Spirit in us, which would be only something static, but of a dynamism at work, a

²⁸ Verses 15 and 16.

²⁹ Verses 22 to 24.

³⁰ *Ephesians*, 3, 15 to 17. For commentary on all these last texts, cf. J. DUPONT, ΣΥΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΩ, Bruges, 1952.

life being always actually communicated to us, always renewed and developing.

The Eucharist

It is undoubtedly on this basis that we must understand Paul's teaching on the Eucharist. We may say that our continually renewed communion with the body and blood of Christ given up for us is the heart-beat of this life of Christ which feeds our existence with his own. Thus once for all inserted, grafted by baptism, into Christ who died and rose again, whenever we eat this bread or drink this cup we proclaim the death of Christ until he comes again.³¹

As Jeremias has shown,³² this means precisely that, in representing to God in the Eucharist, day by day, the salvific death of his Son, we hasten his final coming. And it is this eschatological orientation, corresponding to the picture in *Ephesians* of Christ completing himself in us,³³ that, as *First Corinthians* puts it, 'the cup of blessing which we bless being a participation in the blood of Christ and the bread which we break a participation in the body of Christ, because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.'³⁴

Finally, in this assimilation to Christ, in his broken but glorified body, with the blood of his immortal life in our veins, we are made sons in the Son, we love the Father as he loves us in him, and we love one another with the very love with which he has loved us.

Life in the Spirit, Filial Life

This identification of the life of the Spirit in us with our life as sons in the Son is made also by Paul in *Romans*:

³¹ *1 Corinthians*, 11, 26.

³² Joachim JEREMIAS, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, London, 1966, p. 253.

³³ *Ephesians*, 1, 23.

³⁴ *1 Corinthians*, 10, 16 and 17.

You have received the Spirit of sonship in which we cry 'Abba, Father!', the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God,³⁵

or, the other way round, in *Galatians*:

Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of the Son into our hearts, crying 'Abba, Father!'³⁶

as though it were a matter of indifference whether we consider the gift of the Spirit as the cause or as the effect of the sonship received from the Son, or, more exactly, 'in the Son'.

Thus we find in the third chapter of *Second Corinthians* the contrast between the New Alliance and the Old, under which the Hebrews could not endure even the reflection of the divine glory in the face of Moses when he had spoken face to face with God. Now, for us, made like to Christ as he has been made like to us, the veil which saved the Hebrews from being struck dead by this radiance, even though seen only indirectly, is no longer needed. As the apostle says:

Now we all, with unveiled face, reflecting the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are being changed from glory to glory into his own image, for this comes from the Lord who is now Spirit.³⁷

In this transfiguring vision of Christ's glory, made possible for those who have been grafted on to him by baptism in his death and resurrection, nourished day by day by his body and blood, glorious and life-giving, we see the final development of that knowledge of God to which the prophets were pointing. This knowledge, to repeat, is essentially an assimilation of our life to his, founded on a union of him with ourselves which requires the reciprocal union of ourselves with him.

And this leads to that other biblical theme of the marriage between God and his people, which now reaches its own final realization in the marriage union of the Word made flesh with the Church, and in it with each of the faithful.

³⁵ *Romans*, 8, 15 and 16.

³⁶ *Galatians*, 4, 5.

³⁷ *2 Corinthians*, 3, 18.

The Marriage of Christ and the Church

For the nuptial theme reappears in Saint Paul in the same relationship with the theme of our knowledge of God as the final word of the Mystery. The conclusion of the thirteenth chapter of *First Corinthians* is that our knowledge of God becomes in the end equal to the knowledge which he, from all eternity, has of ourselves. The whole context of the chapter requires that this eternal knowledge of us that God has, clearly in his Son, is a loving knowledge, a knowledge of love. It follows as the conclusion of the whole chapter that our reciprocal knowledge of God must be the fruit of the full development in us of his own ἀγάπη, this unparalleled love which he has shown to us in giving over to death his own Son and which he has spread abroad in our hearts by the gift of the Spirit.

That is what the fifth chapter of *Ephesians* implies in showing Christian marriage to us as 'mystery' (plainly in the primary sense of the Apocalypses, a sign of a particular aspect of the final coming of the Kingdom), and in specifying it 'in relation to Christ and the Church'.

Here we have a last proof that the Pauline Mystery (like that of the synoptics and, of course, the Johannine Apocalypse) finds its source in the apocalyptic writings. But in this text of *Ephesians* it appears that the last special 'mystery' of divine Wisdom to be revealed to us in Christ is just the final fulfilling of the supreme Mystery, that of Christ in us, the hope of glory, finally disclosing itself as the mystery of Christ perfectly completing himself in us.³⁸ As we shall soon see, that is what Origen was to grasp and to develop with such magnificence.

³⁸ Cf. note 33.

CHAPTER NINE

THE MYSTERY IN THE JOHANNINE WRITINGS

At this point we can recognize in all the rest of the New Testament, but especially in the Johannine writings, a final and most profound fathoming of the Mystery distilled by Saint Paul from the whole of biblical revelation and its consummation in Christ.

The Johannine Doctrine of Love

Although John himself never uses this word 'mystery' in his Gospel, he gives us the finest summary of its meaning. We find it in the statement which ends the conversation at night between Jesus and Nicodemus:

God so loved the world that he has given his only Son so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.¹

This is further brought out in another Johannine phrase from the discourse after the Supper, following the line which we have traced to its conclusion in the Pauline letters:

Eternal life is our knowledge of you, the one true God, and our knowledge of [that is, in knowing] him whom you have sent, Jesus Christ.²

It can be said that the heart of this knowledge of God in Jesus Christ is found in the first Johannine letter in these words, so peculiarly packed with meaning:

¹ *John*, 3, 16.

² *John*, 17, 3.

In this we have known love that he has given his life for us³
and in what follows from it, affirmed at once:

and so too we ourselves ought to give our lives for our brethren.

It is in the light of these three sentences, bound up with one another, that we must read, if we are to understand, the final declaration of this same letter which takes up and incomparably elucidates the concluding developments of the Pauline mystery in the third chapter of *Ephesians*:

he who does not love has not known God, for God is love⁴

and again:

God is love, and he who lives in love lives in God and God in him.⁵

To grasp all the implications of these passages which are the high points not only of the Johannine writings but of all revelations in the Old and New Testaments, it is necessary always to see them in the context of a double development, John's Gospel and Apocalypse.

The Authority of the Johannine Writings

Before beginning a study of these writings, which will bring to a conclusion what has already been said about the origin of mysticism in the Mystery, it is important to underline the complete change of attitude towards them which the latest critical examinations have made necessary. At the beginning of the century, according to the evolutionary views of the school of F.C. Baur,⁶ it was generally accepted by exegetes that these writings, far from transmitting at first hand the profoundest

³ 1 John, 3, 16.

⁴ 1 John, 4, 8.

⁵ 1 John, 4, 16.

⁶ See my *Le Fils Éternel*, p.160ff.

teachings of Jesus himself, are only a reinterpretation of the Gospel, a synthesis made no earlier than the second half of the second century of our era. The whole body of these writings, it was supposed, betrayed a radical Hellenization of Christianity.

It is very characteristic of our time that, at the very moment when there seemed to be almost unanimity among Christian exegetes in favour of such views, specialists in the history of Judaism at the time of Christianity's birth regarded this whole reconstruction with the greatest scepticism. It must be enough to mention the opinion of Israel Abrahams,⁷ who had no hesitation in declaring that no New Testament writing seemed to him more deeply rooted in Palestinian Judaism than John's Gospel. The discoveries at Qumran, of course, have confirmed this opinion, while the papyri discovered in the last half-century make it impossible to put the composition and diffusion of the Fourth Gospel later than the last quarter of the first century.

Moreover, the most truly independent exegetes to-day tend to agree that the Johannine tradition on which all these writings were based seems to have an origin even more primitive than that which produced the synoptics. To mention only two of them, Oscar Cullmann and Joachim Jeremias have reached this conclusion.⁸

Markus Barth goes further, and he is not the only one:⁹ for him, the Fourth Gospel, not one of the synoptics, is the earliest that we have.¹⁰

In addition, the literary analyses of Fr John Gerhard, taken up and pursued with even more precision by Peter F. Ellis, seem to demonstrate that the supposition according to which, even if there were a primitive foundation in John's Gospel, it was completed, even changed, by several later layers, are totally inadmissible. Such a hypothesis has become absurd in view of

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.318.

⁸ Cf. Oscar CULLMANN, *The Johannine Circle*, tr., London, 1976 p.21-25 [I find no reference to this in the work of Jeremias, mentioned in n.32 of the previous chapter, to which we are here again referred in a French translation. Tr.]

⁹ See the remark of J.A.T. ROBINSON, *Redating the New Testament*, London, 1976, p.102f. Cf. his *The Priority of John* (London, 1985).

¹⁰ This was expounded by M. Barth in a course given recently at Chicago and Bâle.

these last analyses, which show that the whole text which the manuscripts of this Gospel give us is structured on a pattern of chiasmic parallelisms, of the type a b c b' a', which the slightest addition would have ruined, and there is no sign of any such thing.¹¹

This being so, we have to accept, perhaps even more emphatically than Jeremias did himself, his conclusion that Jesus, in addition to his public teaching to the crowds, had also another, private to the Twelve and perhaps some other trusted disciples. The Fourth Gospel uses chiefly the latter, the synoptics the former. The synoptics themselves show that they are aware of this other teaching, not only Matthew and Luke when they quote the great *berakah* on the knowledge which the Father and the Son have of one another (it has been called a Johannine aerolith), but Mark as well, as we have seen in connection with the parables and their interpretation, when he affirms explicitly the existence of these two teachings and the distinction between them.¹²

This does not mean, of course, that John, any more or less than the other Evangelists, refrained from glossing the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus in his account of them. But it is most probable that he, like the others, did so only in following the lines laid down by the Master, and, for the most part no doubt, in commenting on them only in bringing together and synthesizing the various explanations which he himself had given of the essential points in several years of preaching and teaching.¹³

We have already seen how directly Paul's teaching about the Mystery proceeds from the very expressions as well as the central content of the Master's. So, in reflecting upon it once again, in the light of the Johannine writings, we have every reason to think that we are doing no more than basing the Pauline mystery still more securely on the foundation laid by Jesus.

¹¹ Peter F. ELLIS, *The Genius of John*, Collegeville (Minnesota), 1984.

¹² Cf. *Matthew*, 13, 11; *Mark*, 4, 11; *Luke*, 8, 10.

¹³ On the transmission of the teaching of Jesus by the disciples to the Evangelists, see Birger GERHARDSSON, *Memory and Manuscript and Tradition and Transmission*, Uppsala, 1961 and 1963, most succinctly summed up in *La Préhistoire des Évangiles*, tr. fr., Paris, 1972, also Harald RIESENFELD, *The Gospel Tradition*, Philadelphia, 1970.

The Prologues of Mark and John

That conclusion seems to be verified by the very first page of Saint John's Gospel, which has seemed to timid or superficial critics still more metaphysical than the rest of it. More than thirty years ago, R.H. Lightfoot, in his two commentaries on Mark and John, so instructively comparing them, vindicated the following thesis. Far from Mark's Gospel, supposedly the earliest one, being, as according to Baur, more historical and less dogmatic, the fact, shown by Günther Dehn¹⁴ more than seventy years ago, that it is entirely controlled, just like John's, by the firmest belief in the divine Sonship of Jesus, put out of court this basic opposition between dogmatism and historicity. But Lightfoot's study showed in addition that the whole of the Johannine prologue is already in germ in Mark's very first words:

Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ θεοῦ

Since the last four words certainly make up a single complex attribute and not a cascade of possessives (impossible even for the very worst Greek) attached to the first one (εὐαγγέλιον), we must translate the whole: 'the beginning of this Gospel *which is* Jesus Christ the Son of God.' In other words, for Mark, Jesus is already identified with the Gospel, the good news which he brings, and which the whole New Testament, as Kittel has shown in his article λόγος in *Theologisches Wörterbuch*, considers to be the divine Word in its fullness. This is the 'beginning', or rather the principle, of all God's revelation of himself and of his work, creative or salvific. And for Mark, as for John, the affirmation that Jesus is the Word of God, complete and definitive, goes hand in hand with the affirmation that he is *the* Son, as God is *the* Father.¹⁵

Let us note in passing that Mark, like the author of the Fourth Gospel, seems to have been, not a pure Galilean like the other

¹⁴ Günther DEHN, *Le Fils de Dieu, commentaire à l'évangile de Marc*, tr. fr., Paris, 1936.

¹⁵ R.H. LIGHTFOOT, *The Gospel Message of Saint Mark*, London, 1930 and *Saint John's Gospel: A Commentary*, London, 1956.

original disciples, but an occasional resident, or at least someone well-known, in Jerusalem. We are told in *Acts*¹⁶ that he bore also the name of John. The question arises whether these two Evangelists, so long believed to be so different, so unlike one another in their mental attitudes, may not have been closely related. In any case they seem to have belonged to a generation distinctly younger than that of the apostles in general.

Whatever one may think about these relatively minor matters, it is noteworthy that the Christologies of Mark and John, radically metaphysical as they are, are also no less definitely incarnational: there is the same insistence in each of the complete and quite concrete humanity of Jesus.

There is another point, equally important, that they have indubitably in common: for each, the divine Sonship of Jesus is shown in his entering deliberately into a fight to the death with the power of the devil, the prince of this world.

What could be more explicit than Mark's statement that the Spirit came down upon Jesus at his baptism in visible form and (literally) 'threw' him into the desert to confront the devil?

In the Fourth Gospel this takes the regular form of a struggle between the light and the darkness, which cannot master him and will be finally overcome in the paroxysm of the Cross, when its triumph over him seemed to be complete.

The fully Jewish and Palestinian character of this view of things is strikingly attested by the discovery at Qumran of a piece of writing called *The Struggle of the Sons of Light with the Sons of Darkness*. And it is noteworthy that Paul is not only familiar with the conflict in question but also finds in the supreme Mystery this decisive victory won by the reign of God, despite all appearances, over the reign of the demon. There is no stronger expression of his conviction than the famous text of *Colossians* which says of Jesus:

He has despoiled [by his Cross: cf. the preceding verses] Principalities and Powers and made a show of them before the face of the world, dragging them along in his triumphal procession.¹⁷

¹⁶ *Acts*, 12, 12 and 25.

¹⁷ *Colossians*, 2, 15.

But it is a development special to John to see in this light another aspect of life, which also has its source in the filial Word. He tells us in his prologue:

In him was life, and the life was the light of men.¹⁸

He also puts it the other way round, saying that the light is 'light of life', explaining that those who have received it (in faith) have gained thereby not only the power but the right (ἐξουσία) to become children of God.¹⁹

This again brings Paul at once to the heart of the mystery, that the Son takes upon himself our whole condition as mortal men so as to make us sons in him. That is what John expresses in his own way by saying that the Word became flesh,²⁰ the whole context making explicit the mortal combat joined with the darkness which would take over the light but could not (this meaning is necessary for κατέλαβεν in 1, 5, in view of the parallel in 12, 35).

But there is a difference in expression between Paul and John: whereas Paul calls us 'sons' as well as Jesus, even calling him πρωτότοκος, first-born,²¹ and so heir to all that belongs to the Father, while we are only co-heirs in that respect, John not only reserves the title of Son to Christ, calling us only 'children',²² but in the prologue calls him the 'only Son' (μονογενής).²³ And it seems that the better reading is μονογενής θεός: 'God the only Son'. On the other hand, John's first letter does not fail to point out that our adoption is not just a juridical one, emphasizing that 'we are not only called children (τέκνα), but are such!'²⁴

What this amounts to, as Athanasius was to see so clearly, is that Jesus must be Son of God in the strongest sense if he is to communicate to us a sonship which, although wholly dependent on his own, is no less a true one.

¹⁸ John, 1, 4.

¹⁹ John, 1, 12.

²⁰ John, 1, 14.

²¹ Romans, 8, 29; Colossians, 1, 15 and 18.

²² Cf. John, 1, 12 and 11, 52; 1 John, 3, 1, 2, 10; 5, 2; 2 John, 1, 4 and 13; 3 John, 4, where Paul seems to use indifferently 'sons' and 'children'.

²³ John, 1, 18.

²⁴ 1 John, 3, 1.

That is why it is hard to choose between two readings of verse 13 of the prologue, that of the Greek manuscripts in our possession, that the children of God who we are 'are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God', or that of the old versions and the patristic quotations of equally early date which use the singular: 'he [Jesus], who was born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God' – which seems to fit the context better and thus, in view of the virgin birth attested by Matthew and Luke, seems more satisfactorily applicable to Christ than to ourselves. Thus Loisy, far from traditional faith as he was when he wrote his commentary on John, together with a growing number of modern exegetes, including non-Catholics, seems to support this view.

With the final stretch of the prologue, on the fullness of Christ from which we have received grace upon grace,²⁵ we must connect the verses in the Letter to the Ephesians about the Church as 'the fullness of him who fills all in all' and 'the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ' to which we must all attain in him.²⁶

But what dominates this part of the prologue is the vision of the Son's glory which has been given to us.²⁷

The Glory and the Schekinah

This word 'glory' runs like a golden thread throughout John's Gospel. But it is specially in view as the Passion draws near and in close relation with it, so that the prayer of Christ:

The hour has come, Father, to glorify your Son . . . glorify me with the glory which I had with you before the world was²⁸

comes to express his acceptance of the Passion. It may be said that the paradox of the mystery, already so much emphasized by Saint Paul, reaches here its apogee.

²⁵ *John*, 1, 16.

²⁶ *Ephesians*, 1, 23; 4, 13.

²⁷ *John*, 1, 14.

²⁸ *John*, 17, 1ff.

It is clear that this glory is the glory of God himself. As A.M. Ramsey²⁹ has shown so well, this divine glory presents, throughout the Old Testament, the double character of expressing the sovereign reality of God (as opposed to the emptiness of the false gods) and of manifesting itself in a burst of dazzling light, blinding the impious, illuminating and exalting the faithful. To this double character correspond, on one side the Johannine 'life' and 'light, which have proved to be one, and, on the other, the juxtaposition, in verse 14 of the prologue, of grace (the gift of God in which he gives himself) and the 'truth' which, in John, means not only the fidelity, as in the prophets, but the unique reality of the deity.

But it is to be noticed, above all, still in connection with the theme of 'glory', that 'the Word was made flesh' in verse 14 is made concrete in the words 'and dwelt among us'. This dwelling (ἐσκήνωσεν) evokes the mysterious presence of God in the tabernacle, the *Schekinah* in Rabbinic Hebrew, for it is obviously not by chance that John has chosen this Greek word, coming from the same root, which means precisely 'to live in a tent'. It is from this *Schekinah* that the glory shines out.

The importance of this theme, in its application to Christ by John, is shown by its reappearing in the last chapter of his Gospel in a specially significant way. The sight of the two angels, one at each end of the empty tomb, could not fail to evoke in the minds of Jews the invisible presence of the *Schekinah* 'between the cherubim' on the propitiatory.³⁰

In fact, for John, Jesus, in his flesh delivered up to death but brought back to glorious life, is our propitiation, he who, in other words, is the Christ of the Pauline Mystery, as John's first Letter will precisely say.³¹

But here we must return to the text of the first Letter, about our adoption by God, of which so far only the opening words have been quoted. The reason which John there gives for the reality of our final assimilation to the Son is that 'we shall see him as he is':³²

²⁹ A.M. RAMSEY, *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ*, London, 1967 p. 10ff.

³⁰ *John*, 20, 12.

³¹ *1 John*, 2, 2 and 4, 10.

³² *1 John*, 3, 2.

We are already sons of God, but what we shall be has not yet been made known. But we know that, when he is manifested, we shall see him as he is.

This brings us back at once to the verse of the prologue where we broke off, which ends with these words (after 'the Word was made flesh'): 'and we have seen his glory'. And, a few verses on, the passage ends with these words:

No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son who is in the bosom of the Father [compare *πρὸς τὸν θεόν* in the first verse], he has made him known to us.³³

Seeing and Contemplating

These last words of the prologue introduce one of the most characteristic Johannine themes, but one which consists only of a development of the theme, 'mystical' if any is, which we have already met in discussing the final words of the third chapter of *Second Corinthians*, about the veil which hid from the Hebrews the shining reflection of the divine glory on the face of Moses but was removed with the coming of Jesus.

It is essential to the Johannine conception of faith and its development that it moves from the mere 'seeing' the signs of the divine reality hidden in the humanity of the Saviour to a transforming 'contemplation' which assimilates us to him who is its object. 'It is my Father's will,' Jesus said, 'that whoever *sees* the Son and *believes* in him has eternal life.'³⁴ Let us recall in this connection the text already quoted: 'eternal life, that is, to *know* you, the one true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.'³⁵ It is clearly the same thing for Jesus to say: 'If you believe, you shall see the glory of God.'³⁶ Hence the reply to Philip: 'He who sees me, Philip, sees the Father who sent me.'³⁷ Hence also the final prayer of Jesus: 'I would that those whom you have given

³³ *John*, 1, 18.

³⁴ *John*, 6, 40.

³⁵ *John*, 17, 3.

³⁶ *John*, 11, 40.

³⁷ *John*, 12, 45.

me may be with me, so that they may see my glory, the glory which you have given me because you have loved me before the world's creation.³⁸

That is what explains why all the first part of John's Gospel, after the prologue, followed by the testimonies of John the Baptist and the first disciples, is divided into two quite distinct sections dominated respectively by the theme of life (chapters 3 to 7) and the theme of light which emerges from it and leads back to it (chapters 8 to 10).

The Life and the Light

The first is centred on the sign of the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda (chapter 5), the second on the parallel sign of the healing of the man born blind (chapter 9). What is to be noticed is that these miraculous signs are only leading up to other signs, at first sight more obscure but for faith far far more rich, baptism and the eucharist.

From chapter 3 to chapter 5, there is always water about: water of baptism in the talk with Nicodemus at dead of night (chapter 3), the source of 'living water' contrasted with that of Jacob's well in the talk with the Samaritan woman (chapter 4), the pool of Bethesda made supernaturally life-giving (chapter 5).

The conclusion of this whole section is given in 7, 37, on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles (when the pavement of the Temple was sprinkled with water drawn from the fountain of Siloe, which symbolizes God's life-giving presence in the midst of his people).³⁹ It is then that Jesus cries:

If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink: he who believes in me, as Scripture says [referring to the text which the rite recalled], 'out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'⁴⁰

But in chapter 6 we had already been invited to see in Christ himself 'the living bread which came down from heaven', the

³⁸ *John*, 17, 2.

³⁹ Cf. *Isaiah*, 12, 3; cf. 8, 6, and *Jeremiah*, 2, 13.

⁴⁰ *John*, 7, 37.

only bread which sustains for eternal life,⁴¹ and that followed immediately upon the multiplication of the loaves at the approach of the Passover. In the first half of the discourse in question Jesus has already revealed himself as the bread of life for those who simply believe in his word as coming from the Father. But, after that, it becomes clear that it is especially in the eucharistic communion that he actually reveals himself as such, in the eating of his flesh and the drinking of his blood (for the Jews, traditionally, blood is life).⁴²

These instructions on the sacraments teach us about them, one after the other, corresponding with what has been said already about seeing Christ with the eye of the flesh as leading to faith and so as preparing for that contemplation of divine glory which is one with eternal life.

The talk with Nicodemus shows that baptism is our birth to eternal life⁴³ because it confers, with the water, the divine Spirit. And in the same way the discourse in the synagogue of Capernaum, after the multiplication of the loaves, explains that, although eating the flesh of Christ in the Eucharist has so great an effect, in itself the flesh profits nothing, but it is 'the Spirit that gives life'.⁴⁴ And it is again most notable that this explanation is given at the moment when Christ has just compared with the difficulty of believing his eucharistic teaching the still greater difficulty of accepting that the Son of Man can 'ascend to where he was before'⁴⁵ – by his death, but leading to resurrection and ascension. For this announcement is in its turn parallel with what he had said to Nicodemus: 'If I have told you earthly things [baptism] and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.'⁴⁶

The parallelism calls for two comments bound up with one another. The first is that it is a sign of early date for John's work that, whenever he makes mention of the Son of Man, as was

⁴¹ *John*, 6, 27ff.

⁴² *John*, 6, 35 to 50.

⁴³ *John*, 3, 1 to 21.

⁴⁴ *John*, 6, 63.

⁴⁵ *John*, 6, 61ff.

⁴⁶ *John*, 3, 12ff.

the case with all the Apocalypses of the Old Testament and of the intertestamentary period, he asserts at once the supernatural, 'heavenly', character of this figure. But it is no less Johannine (and brings us back in the process to the centre of what, for Paul, constitutes the 'mystery'!) that he always sees the ascension of Christ as following upon his descent, in other words in the prolongation, the further side, of the Cross.

Nothing is more typical, from this point of view, than the three successive announcements, parallel with those of the synoptics, of the inevitable death of Christ, in the terms in which John formulates them. The first two are the respective conclusion of his teachings on baptism and the eucharist. In each case, using a literary device of which he is fond, he alludes to the death of Christ with a verb which could express equally well either disgrace or glory. To Nicodemus he had said: 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.'⁴⁷ In the same way, the conclusions of the eucharistic discourse, on the difficulty of believing in Christ when he is seen *going up* towards the Father, implies that this ascension will take place by way of the Cross. Reciprocally, the Cross itself implies ascension, when in the second announcement it is said: 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he.'⁴⁸ The third announcement, on the eve of the Passion, is perfectly explicit: 'I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself' with the Evangelist's comment: 'He said this to show by what death he was to die.'⁴⁹ There had been a sort of anticipated echo of this in the pronouncement made by Jesus just before: 'Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out.'⁵⁰

The Glory of the Cross

This brings us to the culminating expressions of the truth that the glory of Christ is in his Cross. The pronouncement which has just been quoted followed from the prayer of Jesus:

⁴⁷ *John*, 3, 14 and 15.

⁴⁸ *John*, 8, 28.

⁴⁹ *John*, 12, 32 and 33.

⁵⁰ *John*, 12, 31.

Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name!

and the voice was heard from heaven (what the Rabbis called a *bath quôl*): I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.⁵¹

This explains the paradoxical way in which Jesus, in the priestly prayer of chapter 17, expresses his own acceptance of the Passion, saying:

Father, glorify your Son so that your Son may glorify you.⁵²

Especially, in the whole of the passage, we see that the consecration of Jesus to his death implies his glorification. And it carries with him the disciples who believe in him so that they may pass with him through suffering and death into glory: 'For their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth.'⁵³

At the start of that last prayer he had specified that he had begun to glorify the Father here below in carrying out the work for which he had been sent by him, to make his Name known to them (plainly the name of Father, paternity in regard to Jesus himself, but with the desire to include them all in him).⁵⁴ This is to repeat that the glorification of Jesus, which is all one with his glorification of his Father in his death, is equally all one with the transmission to the disciples of his own glory as Son:

The glory which you have given me I have given them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.⁵⁵

Here we pass to a final development in which unity, the presence of the one in the other, mutual knowledge and mutual love, come together.

⁵¹ John, 12, 31.

⁵² John, 17, 1.

⁵³ John, 17, 19.

⁵⁴ John, 17, 16.

⁵⁵ John, 17, 22ff.

Unity in Knowledge and Love

First comes the petition which has been already quoted and discussed:

Father, I would that those whom you have give me may be with me where I am, so that they may see my glory which you have given me because you have loved me before the world began.⁵⁶

In the remainder of this prayer, all the perspectives which have been opened up, and which correspond exactly with those of the Pauline Mystery, receive a final illumination from the taking up of themes which were already those of Christ's prayer as found in Matthew and Luke, the Johannine character of which was pointed out.

It will be remembered that it was the perfect reciprocal knowledge of Father and Son which it called to mind and its actual communication by the Son, according to the Father's eternal will, to all those to whom he willed to reveal it.

In the priestly prayer of *John* 17, this theme of reciprocal knowledge is illuminated by its comparison, and indeed identification, with the two complementary themes of the presence of the one in the other and their union in a love of one another, that wholly divine love of which John agrees with Paul in saying and repeating that in the end it is revealed to the world only in the Cross. 'There is no greater love', said Jesus in John, 15, 13, 'than to give one's life for those whom one loves.' And in the first Letter, in the third chapter, beginning with verse 16, it is made quite explicit that only in that sense of love can it be said that God is love. Saint John's Gospel, completed or rather reverberated by all his first Letter, leads us in the end to the centre, or rather the axis, of what the *Apocalypse* teaches us, that the faithful Christian is he who follows the Lamb wherever he goes, plainly to the glory by way of the Cross, the glory found in the Cross.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ *John*, 17, 4.

⁵⁷ *Apocalypse*, 14, 4.

From the Schekinah to the Merkabah

We have seen that the Fourth Gospel begins and ends by calling to mind the Schekinah, God's special presence to his people to whom his Word is spoken, a presence in a cloud, but one from which his glory shines. And this presence in the Tent is that of the God who moves on and draws after him those who hear his voice. Hence the second theme of the Merkabah, the chariot of fire on which the God of heaven flashes through the universe and brings us with him, after him, beyond what the old poet called so well the 'flammantia moenia mundi'.

So the following of Christ, that journey in his wake from earth to heaven, through the Cross to glory, evokes in its turn this other theme of Jewish mysticism, apocalyptic in its immediate origins, but going back also to the oldest strata of biblical revelation, the visions of Ezechiel, the snatching up of Elijah and the raising to heaven of Enoch, 'who walked with God and was found no more'.⁵⁸

The Marriage of the Lamb

The Johannine *Apocalypse* also rejoins Saint Paul and develops suggestions of his which take us back to the parable of the wedding feast in the Gospels,⁵⁹ in particular what he tells the Corinthians about the bride who must be purified before being presented as an unspotted virgin,⁶⁰ in the vision of the bride of the Lamb, prepared for him by passing through the same ordeal on earth but coming down, like him, at the end of time, from the presence of God as she whom he destined for himself from all eternity.⁶¹

⁵⁸ *Genesis*, 5, 24.

⁵⁹ *Matthew*, 22, 3.

⁶⁰ *2 Corinthians*, 11, 2; cf. *Ephesians*, 5, 27.

⁶¹ *Apocalypse*, 21, 2.

The Following and Imitation of Christ

But our perspectives must be still more widened. For here we come back to an interpretation of sacrifice common to all the New Testament writers. For the apostolic writers in general, but pre-eminently for John and Paul, the sacrifice of the only Son, foreshadowed in the abortive suffering of Isaac, in which Christ involves us all along with him, is in the end only the passage to life, eternal, divine, life through the acceptance of death.

The Letter to the Hebrews also declares this, in a particularly formal way, when it tells us that Jesus has appeared 'as our fore-runner in entering beyond the veil' to the heavenly sanctuary – the veil which he had to cross, or rather to tear down, being only 'that of his flesh' – and that it is in this that he reveals himself as the high priest 'according to the order of Melchizedek'.⁶²

Peter tells us this yet more simply, at the end of that other baptismal and eucharistic instruction at the centre of his first chapter,⁶³ teaching us that 'Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in his steps.'⁶⁴

The Spirit

The last point on which we see the Johannine writings, the Gospel especially, confirming and explaining the Pauline teaching, is the heart of the mystery, the gift of the Spirit, which forms the content or the very substance of our participated sonship and so of our union or, better, our unity, in Christ.

In the farewell discourse of Jesus to his own, in John's account, the Spirit is that other Paraclete who had been *with* them up to then, in Jesus on whom he was seen to rest at his baptism,⁶⁵ and who is now coming to dwell *in them*.⁶⁶ This corresponds to the double testimony which the Spirit gives, according to Paul, to the Father and at the same time to our own spirit, namely that

⁶² *Hebrews*, 7; 10, 20; cf. 5, 6 and 10 and 6, 20.

⁶³ See F.L. CROSS, *1 Peter, a paschal liturgy*, London, 1954.

⁶⁴ *1 Peter*, 2, 21.

⁶⁵ *John*, 1, 32.

⁶⁶ *John*, 14, 16 and 17.

we really become God's children.⁶⁷ For the Greek παράκλητος has the double role of the advocate who both defends his clients before the judge and supports them throughout their trial.

It can be said that John's Gospel sees the descent of the Spirit upon us as the counterpart to Christ's raising up on the Cross and in glory. It is in this sense that it is good for us that Christ should go away, for otherwise the Spirit would not come.⁶⁸

The Spirit, furthermore, in John as in Paul, represents, by the gift that he is, the anticipation of eschatology. In Paul, this is the combination of the two images of pledge (certitude about the future) and first-fruits (the first substantial foretaste of the future). In John, where continuity rather than opposition between the Cross and glory is so marked, we have the images of unction and the seed.⁶⁹ That is well shown by a statement like the following:

Whoever is born of God does not commit sin, for his seed dwells in him and he cannot sin, being born of God.⁷⁰

These words, taken from the first Letter, develop the Gospel's affirmation to Nicodemus about baptism as a second birth, a birth *from on high* (ἄνωθεν, in a double sense), because one of water and the Spirit.

It is to be noticed that, for the ancients, the seed gives birth to the ear of corn only by its death:

Unless he grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies it bears much fruit.⁷¹

So we have always the perspective of the Mystery: we cannot reach the life of the resurrection except through death. But what, in Paul, appeared as reparation, compensation, is now declared to be fulfilment, the fulfilment of the divine love in its infinite generosity.

⁶⁷ *Romans*, 8, 16.

⁶⁸ *John*, 16, 7.

⁶⁹ Cf. *Romans*, 8, 23 and 2 *Corinthians* 1, 22, on the one hand, 1 *John*, 1, 20 and 27, also 3, 9, on the other.

⁷⁰ 1 *John*, 3, 9.

⁷¹ *John*, 12, 24.

The communication of the Spirit, then, is, as in Paul, what consummates our union with Christ, in our unity in Christ. The first part of the Gospel ended with the vision of Christ as the door and the shepherd of the flock,⁷² that is, as his discourse explains, he shows himself as the light which reveals the way to us and leads us in it, and at the same time the life which, little by little, is communicated to us. 'The good shepherd gives his life for his sheep . . . ' He knows them: and thus it is that they know him.

It can be said that we find again here the two declarations occasioned by the liturgy of the Feast of Tabernacles. The first we have already mentioned, that of Jesus about the source of life which he would make to spring up in his disciples, corresponding to the libations of the waters of Siloe in the week of the Feast (*John*, 7, 30). Its echo is found in the declaration in chapter 8, verse 12: 'I am the light of the world, and he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.' The occasion for this was the special illumination of the Temple each night of the Feast. Jesus had declared himself to be the true Temple, at the beginning of the Gospel, when he purified the Temple of stone and appeared as the Shepherd leading us to divine life, bringing into our darkness the shining of its splendour.

The Image of the Vine

The consummation of unity, in and with Christ, which Paul, in working out all the implications of the Mystery, had expressed in the image of the body of which we are all members, Jesus being the head, appears in John as actually becoming identification, in the image of the vine, which begins the second part of the discourse after the Supper.⁷³

Let us note, following Westcott (the first to recognize all the connections of these texts with the liturgy of the Temple), that this resumption need cause us no surprise despite the apparent finality at the end of the previous chapter of the words 'Come, let us go hence.' For it was a regular practice of the Jews when

⁷² *John*, 10.

⁷³ *John*, 15.

celebrating the paschal Feast at Jerusalem to go for a moment's silent prayer to the Temple, the courts of which remained open all night.

So it was standing in front of the golden vine which Herod had put on the pediment of the sanctuary, facing the East and so fully illuminated by the paschal moon, that Jesus said:

I am the true vine . . . of which my Father is the vine-dresser,

while all that follows implies the identification of the *true* vine (the special sense of 'truth' for John must be remembered) with his disciples. This amounts to saying that we are called not only to live in Christ, as Paul said, but also to be one with him. We may say that only here is the theme (so 'mysterious' in the sense of the Pauline Mystery of the ultimate Man, the second Adam) pursued to its last consequences.

Hence the claim, 'Without me you can do nothing',⁷⁴ springing from this resumption of the discourse, by way of the definitive absolute, statement: 'I am the vine, . . . and you are the branches.' In its apparently negative form, it is the most radical confirmation of Paul's cry: 'I can do all things through him who strengthens me!'⁷⁵

⁷⁴ *John*, 15, 5.

⁷⁵ *Philippians*, 4, 13.

CHAPTER TEN

THE MYSTERY IN THE APOSTOLIC AND SUB-APOSTOLIC FATHERS

It is still too often a catch-phrase of Protestant commentators that 'the Gospel of Paul' seems missing in the teaching of the early Fathers, both in the apostolic Fathers, those of the generation following the apostles, and of their immediate successors. This impression is bound up with the fact that, as Albert Schweitzer had the honesty to recognize, critics attribute to Paul the 'justification by faith' which the Reformers of the sixteenth century had already subjectivized, whereas, for Paul, it is not subjective faith that justifies but its object, the 'mystery', as we have been describing it. And this mystery, even when it is not explicitly formulated as such, is always present in these writers, for it controls their whole outlook.

It must be added that in Justin and Irenaeus there appears increasingly, if not yet a meeting between the Christian Mystery and the pagan mysteries, certainly a comparison.

Ignatius of Antioch

The word *μυστήριον* itself appears, in the works of the apostolic Fathers, only in Saint Ignatius of Antioch. But, for all of them, there can be no doubt that faith in Christ who died and rose again is central, precisely as communicating his life to us at the price of his death. In Ignatius this theme is the heart of all his expositions, and in particular in the theology of martyrdom and of the eucharist which fills his Letter to the Romans. But the two passages in which he uses the word *μυστήριον* have a special importance.

The first occurs in the Letter to the Magnesians.¹ It is the first theological explanation known to us of the substitution of Sunday for the Jewish Sabbath.

If, then, he says, those who had been brought up in the ancient practices have come to a renewal of hope, they celebrate the Sabbath no longer, but live according to [the meaning of] Sunday, when our life was raised up by him (Christ) and his death – denied by certain people – by him, through whose mystery we have been given our belief. And if it is for that reason that we live in patience so as to be found his disciples, how could we live in separation from him?

This passage does not need much commentary; brought together with the many instances in Ignatius of the expression 'to be found in Christ', it shows clearly how, for him as for Paul, it is here that we find the true fulfilment, the final meaning, of the Mystery, as saving mystery of the Cross of Christ, leading us to risen life with him.

The other passage shows the first instance known to us of an application of the word 'mystery', not directly to the Cross, but to the Incarnation, seen as containing not one mystery but a whole series of them.

This is found in the Letter to the Ephesians:²

Hidden from the prince of this world were the virginity of Mary and her giving birth, just like the death of the Saviour, three mysteries destined to be proclaimed (μυστήρια κραύγης), which had been worked out in the silence of God.

This may seem the first instance of the later tendency to see in each article of the Christian faith a particular mystery. In fact, it is rather a return to the vocabulary of the Apocalypses, the mysteries which mark the stages of God's economy of salvation. But the Pauline perspective is preserved, since this economy always culminates in the Cross. Equally Pauline is the idea that all must now be published abroad which was, until its fulfilment, God's secret plan.³

That is again what Ignatius implies at the end of the same paragraph when he says that Jesus is the Word of God by which he has come out from his silence. Attempts have been made to connect this manner of speaking with the idea, which is to be found in

¹ *Magnesians*, 9, 2.

² *Ephesians*, 9, 1.

³ Cf. *Ephesians*, 3, 10.

various heretical gnostics, of the Word (λόγος) emanated from the silence. But, in the context of Ignatius as well as that of Paul, it is always a matter of the apocalyptic notion of the secret plan of salvation which only God can reveal and which he reveals by carrying it out. Even if, which is far from being clear, there is an allusion to the 'sacred silence' of Hellenism, on which the 'gnostics' liked to pride themselves, underlying these words, this would only be to contrast with it the Christian Mystery which must be revealed to all men.

Justin Martyr

It is only when we come to Justin that we find for the first time a Christian writer who actually mentions both the Christian mystery and the pagan mysteries. But, although he sees analogies between them, they are deceptive ones, and there is no doubt that he regards them as two independent realities. It is certainly no accident that he avoids the use of the word *μυστήριον* to refer to both together in the same context.

Using the Jewish and the early Christian meaning of the word, he will speak of the events or the oracles of the Old Testament as 'mysteries', but always with reference to Christ, and, as a rule, to his Cross. He will say, for example, that the Jewish Pasch was 'the mystery of the Lamb, the type of Christ'.⁴

Conversely, taking up the Pauline idea in *Ephesians*, of Christ having his fulfilment in ourselves, he will say elsewhere that 'God has had compassion on believers of all races through the mystery of him who was crucified'.⁵

We have already seen how Justin compares the Christian eucharist, in which bread and wine are offered, with the mysteries of Mithras, in which, by a diabolical caricature, bread and water are offered.⁶ He has mentioned, without comment, that wine is used in the mysteries of Bacchus.⁷ He points out the use of the serpent as a sexual symbol and mystery in the mysteries

⁴ *Dialogue with Trypho*, XI. Cf. XXIV, XLIV, LXVIII, LXXIII, LXXXV, LXXXVIII.

⁵ *Ibid.*, CVI, Cf. LXXIV, XCI, CXXI, and *First Apology*, XIII.

⁶ *First Apology*, LXVI.

⁷ *Ibid.*, LIV.

of Adonis.⁸ He denies that there is anything in Christianity like the representations of sexual union in these pagan mysteries⁹ and still more that there is any place among Christians for homicidal rites like those of Cronos.¹⁰

Irenaeus of Lyons

It is not until we come to Irenaeus that we find, in Christian writings, a meeting and a sort of interpenetration between the terminology of the Christian Mystery and that of the other mysteries. But, in the case of Irenaeus, these mysteries are no longer the pagan ones but those of the heretical *gnosis* (knowledge). And from the quotations which he makes from these, it seems to follow that they themselves find the origin of their terminology, not in the vocabulary of what are called 'mystery religions', but, like the Pauline Mystery, in that of apocalyptic Judaism . . . even in Paul himself!

Before going into details about this, it is necessary to remember that, for most of Irenaeus's treatise *Against the Heresies*, we have only a Latin translation. As will continue to be the case for a long time in Christian Latin, this translation uses '*mysterium*' or '*sacramentum*' indifferently for *μυστήριον*, and it is impossible to find any shade of meaning by which to distinguish them. So, speaking of what he himself calls (following 1 *Timothy*, 6, 20) the *ψευδώνυμος γνώσις* (the pseudonymous knowledge) of the heretics, he will say, for instance, that, according to Carpocrates, Jesus spoke to his disciples 'in mysteries'.¹¹ But he rejects the idea that the apostles would have known '*recondita mysteria*', hidden mysteries which they would not have transmitted to us, as the gnostics claimed, priding themselves on having inherited them.¹²

He will also speak, however, of the *sacramenta* which the prophets knew, that is, characteristic details of the Passion, and

⁸ *Ibid.*, XXV and XXVII.

⁹ *Ibid.*, XXIX.

¹⁰ *Second Apology*, XII.

¹¹ *Adv. Haer.*, I, XX, 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, III, iii, I.

contrast them with the *gnosis* which Punica, the maternal oracle of the Valentinians, was supposed to have provided for them.¹³

It is to be noted that, as a rule, when Irenaeus uses the word 'mystery', it is in a quotation or a reference to this hidden *gnosis* with which the heretics whom he attacks claimed to be associated. This is perhaps the source, in regard to *μυστήριον*, of the reticence which will soon prevail in some Christian circles, in regard to the term *γνώσις*, both words having been improperly employed. However, no more in Irenaeus than in Paul, as Dom Dupont¹⁴ has demonstrated in the latter case, do we find any disposition to give up the use of these terms to the heretics. On the contrary, Irenaeus makes it clear throughout his book that he reproaches the 'pseudo-gnostics' for taking from the Scriptures, and from Paul in particular, both *μυστήριον* and *γνώσις* and giving them a meaning and a context foreign to this source.

For him, the 'mystery', in the pagan and traditional sense in Christian society, is the Pauline Mystery. In a particularly revealing passage he tells us:

Having for our rule truth itself and the witness given directly by God, we ought not to hunt around for answers to questions of this kind by turning this way and that, rejecting the sober and authentic knowledge of God. We ought rather to build our reply to these questions on the basis of that, trying to answer them by studying the mystery and the economy of the God who is, and growing in the knowledge of him who has done and continues to do such great things for us.¹⁵

This passage alone, if only by its characteristic connecting of 'mystery' and 'economy', that is, God's salvific plan, shows how faithful Irenaeus is to Pauline thought in the meaning which is for him the true orthodox Christian meaning of the word 'mystery'.

The same passage is also a particularly striking witness to the fundamentally authentic sense of the word *γνώσις*, and

¹³ *Ibid.*, IV, LVII, 3.

¹⁴ J. DUPONT, *Gnosis, La Connaissance Religieuse dans les Épîtres de Saint Paul*, 2nd ed., Paris, 1960 (reproducing, with a new preface, the text of 1949).

¹⁵ *Adv. Haer.*, II, xli, 1.

especially of the expression γνῶσις θεοῦ, in primitive and patristic Christianity, according to the pure biblical tradition. It would suffice to show clearly that this orthodox γνῶσις, for Irenaeus and Paul, is the knowledge and understanding of the Mystery of Christ, as *Ephesians* puts it.¹⁶

Continuity is established by the quite central place, in all Irenaeus's thought, of what he calls ἀνακεφαλαιώσεις, the taking up and reconstituting of all human history and its evil involvements and bringing it to its glorious destiny.¹⁷ It goes without saying that this is, in Irenaeus, simply a faithful development of *Ephesians*, 1, 10, which we have seen to be an early stage in the development of Paul's own eventual theology of mystery.

It is impossible to go further here into the matter of γνῶσις, the knowledge of the true God. An outline has been already sketched in *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*,¹⁸ and another volume on the subject may be expected before long.

But there is one passage in Irenaeus of capital importance which must be quoted here in full, for it leads directly into the developments made by the Alexandrians, Origen in particular. It gives us as the basic character of this orthodox γνῶσις that it makes us read the whole Bible in the light of the Pauline Mystery, discovering, as we go on, all its implications. For this true knowledge

is directed upon all that is said in parables so as to fit in with the hypothesis of the faith (οἰκειοθὲν τῇ τῆς πίστεως ὑποθέσει). It shows the patience of God in the apostasy of the angels and the disobedience of men; it announces for what reason the only true God has made temporal beings and eternal ones, terrestrial and celestial ones. It understands why he, though invisible, has yet appeared to prophets, not only in one form but in many. It shows why alliances have been concluded with man and teaches us what is characteristic of each of them. It plumbs the motives of God's shutting up all [men] in unbelief, so as to have mercy on all. It gives thanks that the Word of God was made flesh and underwent the Passion. It announces why the appearance of the Son of God took place at the end of times, which amounts to saying that the Principle appeared at the end. It reveals the end and the things to

¹⁶ *Ephesians*, 3, 3 and 4.

¹⁷ See in particular, *Adv. Haer.*, I: all chapter XX.

¹⁸ London, 1963. See all chapter X of the Second Part.

come, so far as they are to be found in the Scriptures. It does not conceal the reasons why the nations who had not been known [by God] have been made by him co-heirs, bound up together in one body and co-participants with the saints. It announces that this mortal flesh will put on immortality. It publishes abroad that 'not my people' is to be called 'my people', and 'unloved' the 'best-beloved', so that 'more numerous shall be the children of the barren than those of her who had a husband'. It is for all that and all other like things that the apostle cried: 'O the depths of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God (σοφίας καὶ γνῶσεως), how deep are his judgments and how unsearchable his ways!'¹⁹

This fine passage is the best proof of the centrality of the Pauline Mystery in the whole of Irenaeus's theology. It is to be noted that what he calls the 'hypothesis of faith', according to paragraph 20 of the first chapter of this first book of *Adversus Haereses*, is the vision of Christ and his works, transmitted, he tells us, by the sole authentic tradition of the Church, which enables us to read and meditate all the Scriptures, seeing what gives them their proper perspective and their living unity. Equally it emerges from what we have read that this vision of Christ corresponds with the truth of which only the Pauline Mystery gives us spiritual understanding. For it articulates, in all the basic details of the history of salvation, of its total development, the unity of the economy, God's salvific plan, which is centred in the mystery of Christ and his Cross. Especially worthy of emphasis is the insistence, so characteristic of the final development of *1 Corinthians*, 15, on the fact that the heavenly Man, the last Adam, in whom everything is to be brought together and saved, although the principle of the whole divine plan, is revealed only at the end of his fulfilment. A further important point is the close following of Paul's idea, in the Irenaeian *gnosis*, that the mystery is revealed pre-eminently in the unreserved generosity of the love with which God, from all eternity, has loved us in his Son.

It can be said that this passage suffices to root in the biblical and Pauline tradition the most elaborate speculations of the Christians of Alexandria, Origen in particular, to whom we now turn.

¹⁹ *Adv. Haer.*, chapter IV of book I.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE MYSTERY ACCORDING TO THE CHRISTIANS OF ALEXANDRIA: CLEMENT AND GNOSIS

We have seen in Justin a certain connection indicated between the pagan mysteries and the substance of the Christian Mystery, as shown to us by Saint Paul, if only by way of a caricature, considered diabolical, on the part of the former. But we have noted that, at this stage, there is never any resemblance, still less fusion, between the terminology proper to Paul's mystery and that which stamps the pagan mysteries, with all their characteristic expressions and evocations: they speak of initiation (τελετή), and initiates (μύσταις), and more particularly, they use the adjective μυστικός, which, in the pagan mysteries, applies first to ritual and then is 'caught', like a disease, by those who take part in these rites and thus gain the favour of the gods. Here Clement breaks fresh ground (if anyone ever did!) and will spread himself in a big way.

Christian Initiation

Like the Greek philosophers before him, and from his own point of view, that is, a plan of salvation, in which the Saviour's role of revealer of God and his plan for us has pride of place (he is regularly called Pastor or Teacher), Clement presents as supremely 'mystical' the doctrinal initiation into Christianity, to which his *Protrepticus* shows the way and in which his *Paidagogus* seeks to guide the neophyte.

In our own time it has been pointed out quite often as an extraordinary novelty in early Christianity with what satisfaction, from the beginning of his *Protrepticus*, Clement evokes

pagan fables and especially myths which were produced to throw light on the mysteries. But what has been too often overlooked is that, in the end, all this is only the *captatio benevolentiae* of a fashionable preacher putting his hearers at their ease. Not only will he suddenly cut short these poeticized stories, after beginning by praising their charm, with plain words:

How can you believe empty legends and suppose that music tames savage beasts, while only perhaps the glorious countenance of truth seems to you made up and receives only hostile looks?

But, better still, when he turns to details in these myths, he denounces them, with no more reserve than Justin (or Firmicus Maternus in his *De errore Profanarum Religionum*), as nauseous.¹

All the same, like the Greek poets and philosophers, he will go on exploiting the prestige of the mystical vocabulary, but, just as they applied it especially to their highest religious or ethical hopes, in particular to those speculations by which Platonists tried to explain and justify them, he gives us the Christian *gnosis* as the object of all his teaching, transposing his mystical language in that sense.

Come, then, madman! (he imagines himself speaking to Pentheus after his seizure by Dionysus), no longer leaning on the thyrsus, nor crowned with ivy, throw away the fawn-skin, come to your senses! I shall show you the Word and the mysteries of the Word, expounding them after your own fashion. This is the mountain beloved of God, not the subject of tragedies, like Cithaeron, but consecrated to dramas of the truth – a mount of sobriety, shaded with forests of sanctity; and there revel, not the Maenads, the sisters of Semele, who was struck by the thunderbolt, practising in their initiatory rites unholy sharing of flesh, but the daughters of God, the pure lambs, who celebrate the holy rites of the Word, forming a choir that is enlightened (σώφρονα).² This choir is that of the just; the music is a hymn to the King of the universe. The maidens strike the lyre, the angels give praise, the prophets speak; the sound of music issues forth; all run and pursue the jubilant band; the elect make haste, eagerly desiring to receive the Father

¹ *Protrepticus* X, I, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, revised by A. Cleveland Coxe. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1971, vol. III, p. 197-201 (p. 171-2, for the indented passage in the text above).

² Note the play on words: ἀρνάδες (lambs) and μενάδες.

. . . O truly sacred mysteries! O stainless light! I am lighted on my way by torches for the ἐποπτεία of the heavens and of God; being now initiated, I become holy. The Lord is the hierophant and seals the mystic in illuminating him (φωταγωγών), presenting to the Father him who has believed, to be kept safe for ever. Such are the revelries of my mysteries. If it is your wish, be initiated also; and you shall join in the choir along with the angels around the unbegotten and indestructible and only true God, which the Word of God (or God the Word) sings with us.³

Clement's *Gnosis* and Philosophy

But what is this *gnosis* which Clement offers? Isn't it essentially different from what we have seen Irenaeus recommending, in his direct and exclusive concentration on the deep and final meaning of the Scriptures?

That is what people have said and are still saying, because Clement, not content with using the language of the mysteries, which Hellenistic poets and thinkers had taken over, sometimes seems to give this *gnosis* a philosophical content.

This seems to be found, for instance, in an often-quoted passage in Book VI of the *Stromata*, in which he proposes to the gnostic Christian who is his ideal, or rather to someone approaching it, to use for his purpose the ἐγκύκλια, the encyclopedic knowledge which, according to late Greek philosophers especially, constituted the indispensable preliminary of their discipline, embracing music, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy – and eventually philosophy itself!

But it must be explained that this in itself does not constitute the *gnosis*; it is only a preparatory education for it. Clement himself is the first to emphasize in conclusion that there should be no question of getting oneself lost in this area, which is only 'preparatory to the full grasp of the truth'. These questions his gnostic

will not study for themselves; he will regard them, although necessary, as secondary and accessory,

³ Cox, p.205.

And this final point is made, that 'what the supporters of heresy use misleadingly, the gnostic will use for good.'⁴

The passage goes on to show that this preparation has a double function: to save the study of Scripture from crude, uncritical, use of it, a source of endless nonsense, and to accustom one to see in material realities a mere image or suggestion of spiritual ones.

Content of the *Gnosis*

The content of Clement's *gnosis*, however, is nothing but the discovery of these spiritual realities themselves and, it must be emphasized, for Clement as for Irenaeus, they are revealed only in the Scriptures, according to what Clement calls 'the ecclesiastical canon' (rule).⁵ And it is Christ who gives them to us, reading them with us, clarifying them by his own word.⁶

Thus those spiritual realities which the 'gnostic' study of material ones should reveal to us, when we read the Bible with Christ in the school of the Church, are *not* the pure ideas of Plato, but in fact the Angels, present invisibly behind the whole of cosmic reality. That is what will lead us in the end to the discovery of Christ as dominating the whole history of their fall and our own, leading it to our final redemption.⁷ As Clement himself says, the *gnosis* looks beyond the world to the intelligibles, but beyond them to realities which are still more spiritual.⁸

So we find the declaration that

gnostic souls, passing by the community (πολιτεία) of each of the angelic orders, one by one, reach the higher places themselves.⁹

⁴ See the whole text of *Stromata*, VI, X, 80-83 (ed. Stählin, t. II, p.471ff.). Cf. XI, 90-93 [Stählin gives the Greek text only (published in Leipzig, 1905-1936). Corresponding passages in Coxe can be traced without much difficulty, *Tr.*]

⁵ *Stromata*, VII, CIII, 5 (St., t. III, p.73). Cf. *Stromata*, VI, CXXV, 3 (St., II, p.495).

⁶ *Stromata*, IV, CXXXIV, 4 (St., II, p.308). Cf. *Stromata*, VII, XCV (St., t. III, p.66).

⁷ Cf. *Stromata*, IV, CLIII, 4 (St., t. II, p.37, lines 15ff.).

⁸ *Stromata*, VI, LXVIII, I (St., t. II, p.465, lines 35ff.).

⁹ *Stromata*, VII, XIII, I (St., t. III, p.10, lines 6ff.).

These higher places are, of course, the very place of the deity, the heavenly sanctuary into which Christ has entered as our fore-runner, as the Letter to the Hebrews says.

Clement's *gnosis*, therefore, despite the intellectualism with which he associates it, as its preparation or its critical instrument, is not just an intellectual knowledge. As he says:

Here are the three notes which characterize our *gnosis*: first contemplation, then carrying out the precepts, lastly the instruction [given] to good men. When these qualities are united in a man, he is an accomplished *gnostic*. But if one of them is lacking, his *gnosis* falters.¹⁰

Let us consider these notes more closely. And, first, what is this contemplation (θεωρία)? It is in this connection that he introduces the whole vocabulary of the mysteries, and it is this which has caused so many commentators, even Père Lebreton and Père Camelot, to believe that it was a matter of some esoteric knowledge, like the *gnosis* (or, rather, as Irenaeus called it, the pseudo-*gnosis*) of the heretics. It must be admitted that Clement is not without responsibility for this confusion by his affection not only for mystical language but more generally for a whole manner of more or less occultist speaking much favoured in philosophical circles of a religious tendency to which he presumably belonged and which have been rather too readily lumped together under the heading of Orphism. But it is necessary only to avoid stopping in one's reading at a few lines isolated from their context, as Völker has shown, for the mistake to clear up.

So we read in the *Stromata* (Miscellanies) in the first chapter of the first book:

The Lord granted a share of these divine mysteries and of this divine light to those who are able to receive them. So he did not disclose to the many what did not belong to the many, but to the few to whom he knew that they belonged, who were capable of receiving them and being moulded according to them . . . Otherwise, why do not all know the truth? Why is not justice loved if justice belongs to all? But the mysteries are transmitted mystically (μυστικῶς) as they are in the mouth of the speaker, or rather not in his voice, but in his understanding.¹¹

¹⁰ *Stromata*, II, X, 46 (St., t. II, p.137).

¹¹ *Stromata*, I, I, 13 (St., t. II, p.9-10).

These statements by themselves are enough to suggest that we are here concerned with a knowledge which requires a personal effort, an adaptation of the knower to the known, rather than an esoteric one.¹²

It is objected that there are statements of which this, from Book VI of the *Stromata*, is the most important: 'The *gnosis* has been transmitted from the time of the apostles to a small number, by a succession of masters, and not in writing.'¹³

However, Gustave Bardy said rightly years ago:¹⁴ 'It would be wise not to go beyond the proper bounds in basing oneself on these statements.' And, in order to keep within these bounds, it is sufficient to notice the concrete examples given by Clement himself of the gnostic tradition which he is upholding. It then appears, as Völker has demonstrated,¹⁵ that the content of this tradition, in accordance with the principles which we have seen stated by Clement himself, is precisely what he calls 'the ecclesiastical canon', that is, the vision of Christ and his mystery as the key to the Scriptures. Anyone who doubts it has only to acquaint himself with what Clement declares in his *Eclogae Propheticae*, which certainly gives us his deepest thought:

As the sea belongs to everyone, but one swims in it, another trades by it, another catches fish, and in the same way, the earth being common property, one travels over it, another works it, another hunts on it, another exploits its mines, while yet another builds on it, so, when we read Scripture one takes from it simply the faith, another is moved to guide his conduct according to it, and yet another draws devotion (*θησιαια*) from it, thanks to the *gnosis*.¹⁶

Even if we do not come back here to the three tests of the authentic *gnosis*, we are not far from them. *Theoria*, the gnostic's

¹² *Stromata*, I, XII, 55-56 (St., t. II, p.35-36).

¹³ VII, 61 (St., t. II, p.62).

¹⁴ *La Vie Spirituelle d'après les Pères des trois premiers Siècles*, ed. Paris, 1934, p.98. It is astonishing that Père Camelot, in his otherwise stimulating work, should continue to accept these interpretation which a mere reading of Clement's works in their entirety is enough to refute (*Foi et Gnose, Introduction à l'étude de la connaissance mystique chez Clément d'Alexandrie*, Paris, 1945, p.90-94).

¹⁵ Walther VÖLKER, *Der wahre Gnostiker nach Clemens Alexandrinus*, Berlin - Leipzig, 1952, p.33-34. All the present chapter owes much to this excellent work.

¹⁶ *Eclogae propheticae*, 28 (St., t. III, p.145-146).

contemplation, which seems to be the heart of it all, certainly has as its supreme object 'knowing God'¹⁷ or, better still, 'seeing God',¹⁸ to take up again Paul's word, recognizing¹⁹ him and, in the end, 'possessing' him.²⁰

The peak point of this contemplation is found in what Clement calls *θεωρία ἐποπτική*, leading, as was the case with the great mystery of the higher initiation, to the *ἐποπτεία*, which is, according to him, the 'science of being itself' (*τῷ ὄντι ἐπιστήμη*).²¹ But this language, which combines the terminology of the mysteries with a philosophical vocabulary, should not mislead us: all these developments gravitate around the great Pauline and Johannine texts which we have associated with the Pauline Mystery.

Let us take the opening of chapter 10 of Book V of the *Stromata*, in which, after passing in review in chapter 9 the Greek philosophers from Pythagoras to Aristotle and to the Stoics and Epicureans who presented their profoundest doctrines as 'mysteries', Clement comes to Saint Paul:

So the inspired (*θεοπέποιος*) apostle rightly says 'By revelation the mystery was made known to me, as I wrote before in brief, so that when you read this, you may understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it is now revealed to his holy apostles and prophets.'²² There is, then, an instruction of the perfect of which he says, writing to the Colossians: 'we do not cease to intercede and to pray for you that you may be filled (*πληρωθῆτε*) with the knowledge of the will of God in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, so that you may walk worthy of the Lord in all that is pleasing to him, being fruitful in good works, and growing in the knowledge of God, strengthened with all might according to the power of his glory.'²³ And again, 'according to the dispensation of God which has been entrusted to me, that you may fulfil the word of God, the mystery hidden from ages and generations, which is now manifested to his saints to whom God wished to make known what are the riches

¹⁷ *Stromata*, II, XLVII, 4 (St., II, p.138, line 12). Cf. *Stromata*, III, LI, 2 (St., t. II, p.242, line 25); *Stromata*, VII, LXVIII, 4 (St., t. III, p.49, line 17).

¹⁸ *Stromata* VII, XLVII, 3 (St., t. III, p.35, line 19).

¹⁹ *Paidagogus*, I, 25 (St., 25 (St., t. I, p.105, line 2); *ibid.*, I 53, 3 (p.122, line 5); *ibid.*, II, 14, 6, 6 (p.164, line 6).

²⁰ *Protrepticus*, CVI, 3 and 13 (Coxe, p.201 – near end). Cf. *Stromata*, VII, VIII, 6 (St., t. III, p.6).

²¹ *Stromata*, II, XLVII, 4 (St., t. II, p.138, lines 11ff.).

²² Quoting *Ephesians*, 3, 3-5.

²³ Quoting *Colossians*, 1, 9-11.

of the glory of this mystery among the pagans.²⁴ So, on the one hand, there are the mysteries hidden until the time of the apostles, handed on by them as they had been entrusted with them by the Lord, and, concealed in the Old Testament, 'now manifested to the saints', and, on the other, 'the riches of the glory of the mystery among the pagans', which is faith and hope in Christ,²⁵ which he calls elsewhere 'the foundation'.²⁶ And again, as one eager to divulge this knowledge, he here writes of 'nourishing all of man with all wisdom, so as to present all of man [as] perfect in Christ' – not just every man, because then there would be no unbelievers, nor even every believer as 'perfect in Christ' but 'all of man', that is, man in his entirety, as sanctified in body and in soul, since he adds that 'all do not have the *gnosis*'²⁷ and explains fully what he means by adding: 'growing in love and in all the riches of the intelligence raised to its fulness, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God in Christ in whom are hidden all the mysteries of wisdom and of knowledge'.²⁸ 'Be steadfast in prayer, watchful in thanksgiving.'²⁹ the thanksgiving which bears not only on the soul and spiritual goods, but also on the body and bodily good.³⁰ And he makes it still more clear that *gnosis* does not belong to all by adding: 'praying with me and for me to proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison, that I may make it known as I should.'³¹

The capital point in this passage and in many others, as Völker again emphasizes, is that Clement develops his idea of *gnosis* in function of his teaching on prayer. And, according to him, prayer is essentially 'talk with God' (ὁμιλία). He seems to have been the first to have given us this definition of prayer, which all Christian spiritual writers will adopt after him. And he means by it, of course, a meditation on the divine word rousing our response.³² That is why our prayer culminates in thanksgiving, εὐχαριστία for the *gnosis* itself, an allusion to the great text of *Matthew*, 11 and *Luke*, 10, on which we have commented at length.³³ As it tends

²⁴ Quoting *Colossians*, 1, 25-27.

²⁵ Quoting *Colossians*, 1, 26.

²⁶ Quoting *1 Corinthians*, 3, 10.

²⁷ Quoting *Colossians*, 1, 28.

²⁸ Quoting *Colossians*, 2, 2-3.

²⁹ Quoting *Colossians*, 4, 2.

³⁰ Cf. *1 Corinthians*, 8, 7.

³¹ Quoting *Colossians*, 4, 3.

³² *Stromata*, VII, XXXIX, 6 (St., t. III, p.30).

³³ *Stromata*, VII, XXXI, 7 (*ibid.*, p.23 line 26) and XXXV, 3 (p.27, line 18).

to become interiorized,³⁴ becoming silent prayer,³⁵ it becomes gradually one with the whole of life:³⁶ constant prayer. 'When that point is reached', Clement says, 'the gnostic is the equal of the angels.'³⁷

The Development of the *Gnosis*

But how does the development of the *gnosis* follow the development of prayer? At first sight, what Clement tells us about this in various places may seem to make him contradict himself. In Book IV of the *Stromata* we read that 'the *gnosis* is built on the foundation of the holy triad, faith, hope and charity,³⁸ and in Book VI that 'the *gnosis* becomes impregnable through charity.'³⁹

In fact there is no contradiction, for the *gnosis* assimilates those Christian truths our faith in which is the object of our hope, so that Clement can say just as well either that charity is fulfilled by the *gnosis*⁴⁰ or that it is itself produced by the *gnosis*,⁴¹ while 'it is what *gnosis* gives us as lovable (*ἐραστόν*) that leads on to contemplate God himself (*ἐαυτου θεωρίαν*) one who wholly gives himself up to this contemplation through love of the *gnosis*.'⁴² In other words, there is a sort of symbiosis between the development of the *gnosis* in contemplation and that of love, which both arouses it and is expanded by it in return.

So the goal of this progress is to know the God of love in loving him as he loves:

God is love and is knowable (*γνωστός*) only for him who loves . . .
We must enter his intimacy by the divine *ἀγάπη* so that like may be known by like.⁴³

³⁴ *Stromata*, VII, XXXVI, 5 (p. 28, line 13).

³⁵ *Stromata*, VII, XXXIX, 6 (p. 30, lines 16ff.).

³⁶ *Stromata*, VI, CII, 1 (St., t. II, p. 485, line 6), and *Stromata*, VII, XXXV, 6 (St., t. III, p. 30, line 16).

³⁷ *Stromata*, VII, LVII, 5 (*ibid.*, p. 42, line 10).

³⁸ *Stromata*, IV, 54 (St., t. II, p. 275).

³⁹ *Stromata*, VI, IX, 78 (*ibid.*, 470).

⁴⁰ *Stromata*, II, IX, 45, (*ibid.*, p. 136).

⁴¹ *Stromata*, VII, LIX, 4 (St., t. III, p. 43, line 17).

⁴² *Stromata*, VII, X, 3 (*ibid.*, p. 9, line 9).

⁴³ *Stromata*, V, I, 12 (St., t. II, p. 334).

Deification

This is the context in which Clement appears as the first Christian writer to use the word *θεωποιεῖν*, to divinize, which, in classical Greek, meant fabricating idols and, later, the apotheosis of emperors, but which begins life here in a spiritual sense.

Clement has already said in his *Protrepticus* that 'the Word of God was made man so that we might learn how men may become God.'⁴⁴ A little later he explains that 'by his heavenly doctrine he deifies man.'⁴⁵ That the word is still used in the sense of the fully real filial adoption of the New Testament is proved by a sentence in Book VI of the *Stromata*: 'Those who know the Son, he calls sons and gods.'⁴⁶

Apatheia

A consequence of this spiritual development, as described by Clement, is perhaps what has led to the most absurd interpretations of his teaching. He claims that the fully mature gnostic attain to *ἀπαθεία*. This does not mean any kind of insensibility (it was already a caricature of the teaching of the Stoics, the first to use the expression, to interpret them in that way). It is simply a matter of no longer being passive to extraneous influences but of dominating them, thus avoiding all passion which inhibits or enfeebles our liberty.

In the case of Clement, it is simply the victory of Christian *ἀγάπη* over anything opposed to it. His most explicit passages about it shows at the same time how conscious he is of what Nygren was to insist on, that *agape* is distinguished from the Greek *eros*, however much spiritualized, by its being not desire but instead pure generosity:

If the gnostic has no more desire, some say, he can make no further efforts to become like the perfect. And if all intimacy with the good is realized in virtue of a tendency, how, they ask, could he

⁴⁴ *Protrepticus*, I, 8, 4 (Coxe, p.174, near top).

⁴⁵ *Protrepticus*, XI (Coxe, p.203, at foot).

⁴⁶ *Stromata*, VI, XVI, 146 (St., t. II, p.507).

who tends towards the good remain apathetic? But these people seem not to grasp the divine character of *agape*. For it is not just a tendency of him who loves; it is a loving intimacy which establishes the gnostic in the unity of the faith so that he no longer depends on time or space. Already established by love in the goods which he will possess, having gone beyond hope through the *gnosis*, he tends towards nothing, having everything towards which he could tend.⁴⁷

That this implies no extinction of what is human in us, but rather the unification of it where it is caught up, transfigured, had been already explained in the preceding lines:

He loves God always if he is turned entirely towards him alone, and therefore he hates none of God's creatures. He has no envy, for nothing is lacking for his assimilation to what is good and lovely. He loves nothing and nobody with a common love (*κοινὴν φιλίαν*), but cherishes his Creator through his creatures: he is not exposed to desire or appetite, lacking none of the soul's goods, being united by love with the Beloved to whom he belongs through his own deliberate choice.⁴⁸

If further explanations are needed, there are these formal statements from Book VII of the *Stromata*:

The gnostic who has acquired the habit of well-doing is more of a doer of good than a talker about it: he seeks to condole with his brethren for their sins; he prays for the conversion in faith and in life of those near to him; he wants to share his own goods with his dearest friends – that is, with all his friends! . . . He gives God continued thanks like the living creatures who glorify the Lord in the allegory of Isaiah;⁴⁹ he is patient in all adversity: 'the Lord,' he says, 'has given, the Lord has taken away!' Such was Job, who accepted the loss of exterior goods, even that of bodily health, for the love of the Lord.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *Stromata*, VI, IX, 73-74 (*ibid.*, p. 468).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 71-72 (p. 467-468).

⁴⁹ Cf. *Isaiah*, 6.

⁵⁰ *Stromata*, VII, XII, 80 (St., t. III, p. 57).

CHAPTER TWELVE

ORIGEN AND THE MYSTICAL MEANING OF THE SCRIPTURES

When we move from Clement to Origen, we are certainly in a different atmosphere: the former, though so strongly drawn to the spirituality of the Scriptures, is still an eloquent thinker, while the latter is a fervent disciple of Paul and of John, a rigorous ascetic, and in the end a priest ripe for martyrdom. Moreover, all that is more or less diffuse in the genial humanism of Clement is found, in Origen, concentrated on the Pauline Mystery. Hans Urs von Balthasar has shown that this mystery is the key to the very demanding sort of spirituality which Völker was the first to establish as the basis of Origen's theological explorations.

Origen, in fact, finds the whole of Christian spirituality springing from a biblical exegesis controlled by the mystery of Jesus who died and rose again for us. Although much less imbued than Clement with the phraseology and imagery of the mysteries, he will nevertheless retain the regular use of the adjective *μυστικός*, firmly applied to what he calls equivalently the 'spiritual' exegesis of the Scriptures, seen entirely in the perspective of this mystery of Christ.

The Theory of Exegesis

If Origen makes abundant use of *μυστήριον* along with *μυστικός*, it seems at first sight, from the exhaustive analysis of the texts made by Père Crouzel, that this use is confined to instances

of exemplarism: *mysterion* is the spiritual reality of which the material reality, in particular the *historia* given by a biblical text, is the image. But to leave it there is only to see Platonist exemplarism at work and not Origen's very special employment of it. Crouzel emphasizes (p.29, against R.P.C. Hanson, *Origen's Doctrine of Tradition*, London, 1954, p.113, note 1) that, even when it is a question of the Pauline mystery, Origen takes the word in the sense which it regularly has in his own work (that is, this exemplarism). That is true on the face of it, but, as the rest of Crouzel's book shows so admirably, not in the last analysis. For his use of exemplarism in relation to the 'spiritual' interpretation of the Scriptures is wholly controlled by the Pauline theme of their fulfilment, which is found 'in Christ', of whom Paul, in his Letter to the Ephesians, says that he is fulfilled completely in us. In this respect, as Hans Urs von Balthasar has well seen, if Origen differs from St Paul, it is above all in concentrating upon this ultimate fulfilment of 'Christ in us, the hope of glory' in *Colossians*, culminating in Christ and the Church seen as a single body and in the end a single spirit in *Ephesians*.

The fourth and last book of his *Περὶ Ἀρχῶν*, the first systematic treatise on the principles of theology, had to be consecrated to the study and meditation of the Scriptures seen in this light. The regrettable way in which modern writers have attended only to the importance of the use of allegory in this work, as in all the later preaching of Origen after his becoming a priest, has concealed what is deepest and most traditional in his thought, what is in the end the essence of it, on a subject which is, for him, as for the oldest Christian tradition, completely fundamental.

The Spiritual Exegesis of Inspired Scripture

For Origen, in the first place, according to the first words of this last book of his great treatise, inspired Scripture cannot be seriously studied and interpreted except through the same Spirit

from whom it derives.¹ That implies for him the recognition of a triple meaning in the whole Bible, the document of a history which develops from its preparation to its fulfilment in ourselves through what Christ has been and has done among us. The Old Testament leads to the New, dominated by the figure of Christ. But the work of Christ unfolds into the gift of the Spirit to the faithful, which is achieved fundamentally by the Head, Jesus, who must expand through the Spirit into the Church, his body, of which we are the members.²

This pattern, in many passages of Origen, will appear a movement from shadow (σκία) to the truth (ἀλήθεια). But what is 'truth' in Christ is still only 'figure' (τύπος) in relation to the eschatological reality of the Church and of what we must all become in her.³

Naturally, with the predominance, in the intellectuality of the time, especially at Alexandria,⁴ of Platonizing exemplarism, seeing in material things mere images of intelligible ones, this will be most spontaneously expressed with the contrast between image and reality. So we have the allegory which Saint Paul was the first to apply to the texts about the terrestrial Jerusalem, transposing their teaching to the heavenly Jerusalem which is the Church, in chapter 5 of *Galatians*. So too there are the 'types' mentioned in chapter 10 of *First Corinthians*, what happened to 'our fathers' having to be reproduced, although on another level, for us with, or rather in, Christ. Origen will invoke, of course, both these Pauline texts.⁵

Far too much has been made of an opposition claimed to exist between the school of Antioch, supposedly interested only in

¹ Walther VÖLKER, *Das Vollkommenheitsideal des Origenes*, Münster (Westphalia), 1931, has opened up a new way in the interpretation of Origen as above all a spiritual leader. In this way, we are specially indebted, for the whole of this chapter, to Cardinal de LUBAC, *Histoire et Esprit*, Paris, 1950, to which must be added the four volumes of *Exégèse Médiévale*, Paris, 1959-1964, but also to the patient and precise analyses of Père Henri CROUZEL (p. 25ff. of his *Origène et la 'Connaissance Mystique'*, Paris, 1960).

² *De Principiis*, Book IV, chapters 1 and 2 (ed. Koetschau, p. 292ff.).

³ H. de LUBAC, *Histoire et Esprit*, p. 219.

⁴ For a full grasp of the spiritual atmosphere of Clement and Origen and their intellectual context, the fascinating work of Ch. BIGG, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria*, Oxford, 1913, is of permanent value.

⁵ *De Principiis*, Book IV, chapter 2 (ed. Koetschau, p. 316-317).

historical types, and the disciples of Origen, supposedly sunk in an allegorization pure and simple of the texts and brushing history aside. Here it will be remarked only that Origen is the first to maintain that all serious exegesis must start with a careful critical establishment of the facts, the 'history', while the Antiochenes, on their side, are not always better guarded, in their enquiries about 'types', from their imaginations, even from the worst sort of fantasy, than the Alexandrian master and his disciples in their allegorization.⁶

But the heart of the matter is not there. What Origen proposes, in his theory of the three meanings, exceeds and goes beyond the unequally successful applications made of them in one or other of these procedures. What he has in view above all is a process of preparation and fulfilment, this latter itself, to repeat, comprising two principal phases, the one interlocking with the other, that of the individual Christ and what Augustine was to call, in a formula which Origen would presumably have accepted with joy, that of the total Christ, Head and members.

If one wants to find Origen's exact approach in this respect, it would be better to speak of three levels of meaning rather than of three distinct meanings. For the unity of the process, of the redemptive economy, is no less important than the continually creative aspect of its unfolding or development.

The literal sense, which he generally calls *history*⁷ – that is, the brute fact – is the first, immediate, datum of the text. It will have to be explained by its whole relationship to its literary context spreading out into its historical context, its position in the life of the time of the biblical authors.

So there must be no misunderstanding about this. However devoted Origen, like his whole period, may have been to allegory

⁶ It is even from Antioch and not from the West, as the late lamented Père Alexandre Schmemmann supposed (in his posthumous work, *L'Eucharistie, Sacrement du Royaume*, Paris, 1985), that the Byzantine commentators on the liturgy acquired a taste, certainly deplorable, for explanations of rites as symbolizing episodes in the earthly life of Christ: one has only to read Narsai (*The Liturgical Homilies*), tr. R.H. Connolly, vol. VIII of *Cambridge Texts and Studies*) to convince oneself of this. It was only on the return from the Crusades that the poor Latins, having discovered these treasures in the East, were infatuated by them, so that our own late-medieval commentaries were overrun by them.

⁷ H. de LUBAC, *Histoire et Esprit*, p. 183ff.

and more generally to a symbolic interpretation of tangible realities, he does not give way to this attraction until, with the philological and critical historical means at his disposal, he has established the literal sense. Only on the basis of this will he propose to us as the second sense what he calls the moral or tropological sense (from *τρόπος*, meaning a form of behaviour or manner of acting). This is an instruction for conduct, applicable to the present phase of the history of salvation, which could be drawn from the behaviour of our fathers in the faith as they advanced towards the Kingdom of God.

But the third sense, or rather the full emergence of the 'spiritual' sense, will not be reached until one has drawn out all that can and should find its final application in Christ, for, Origen considers, the whole of the Old Testament was directed towards his coming. Everything prepares for this, and nothing can reach to the depths of its meaning until he is present.

So we see that, if allegory, or equally the discovery of types in past history or present and final history, have their place in this exegesis, following the apostle's example, its root principle is something much greater and at the same time more precise. To repeat, the various possible uses of exemplarism have here only an instrumental role adapted to the mentality of the time. The real problem is not there, but in the movement from preparation, in the widest sense, to fulfilment. And about that Origen is quite definite.⁸

From Principles to Application

The first remark needing to be made after this summary introduction is that, whatever the influence of contemporary Hellenism on Origen may have been, especially in regard to Platonist exemplarism, the primary source of the method proposed to us by him in the last book of his *De Principiis* is not to be found in that direction. It lies plainly in what the most traditional Rabbinic exegesis could transmit to early Christianity, and there is every

⁸ On the definition of the three senses, see *De Principiis*, Book IV, ch.2 (ed. Koetschau, p.312-313). Cf. H. de LUBAC, *op.cit.*, p.141.

reason to think that Origen was concerned to recapture it at its source. For the two developments of the literal sense which he proposes seem clearly modelled on the *halakah* and the *haggadah* of the Rabbis: the *halakah*, a special legal form of exegesis, trying to extract from the whole Bible a code of conduct, while the *haggadah* seeks to show how the descendants of the fathers can enter into their experience and share it. Nothing is more illustrative of this than the paschal *haggadah*, in which the father of the family has to explain to the child taking part in the celebration for the first time: 'Today, we are delivered from the Egyptians, today we pass through the Red Sea, today we leave for the promised land . . .'⁹

In this programme for his period of teaching at Alexandria, which one might call relatively academic, however strong may be the sense of transcending the Old Testament in the New to which it was leading, it was natural that he should take up this ready-made scheme and apply it to Christian exegesis, which undoubtedly derived from it, as could be shown in all the New Testament authors. But, as Cardinal de Lubac has very rightly concluded, Origen, once a priest, in his homilies and commentaries composed later at Caesarea, modifies in a notable and characteristic way his academic theory.

The centrality, one might even say the finality, of what has happened in Christ, obviously the fruit of meditation on the Pauline Mystery, will produce in practice, for a start, a radical change in the order of the spiritual senses. What the Christian ought to do is incumbent on him because it follows from what Christ has done. So there is a movement to the first place of the sense which relates to Christ and another to the second place of the specifically Christian tropological sense, since this can only follow from what Christ has done and revealed.¹⁰

So it is to this sense, which we may qualify as Christian, that Origen will give above all, along with πνευματικός, 'spiritual' in the sense of given by the Holy Spirit, the qualification of 'mystical'. He takes it over, apparently, from Clement, who

⁹ It is only just becoming recognized that Origen did not address himself to the Jews simply for an initiation into biblical Hebrew. Cf. N. de LANGE, *Origen and the Jews*, Cambridge, 1976. But we are still, it seems, nowhere near measuring the extent of his debt to the Rabbinic tradition.

¹⁰ Cf. H. de LUBAC, *Histoire et Esprit*, p. 142ff.

used it regularly, but for him the term refers to the high point of initiation leading, as we have seen, to the vision of God in Jesus Christ.¹¹

It is a characteristic of what can be called Origen's Paulinism that, for him, the application of *μυστικός* envisages precisely the Mystery of Christ and of his saving Cross as giving us both the key to the Scriptures and the unveiling of the whole history of men and of the universe. This is the perspective in which the Christic sense becomes the source of the sense relating to ourselves, more exactly to 'Christ in us, the hope of glory', as Paul defines the mystery in *Colossians*, and relating finally to the mystery as having its ultimate fulfilment in the perfect union and conformation of the eschatological Church to the Christ-Spouse, as in *Ephesians*.¹² That is what has been so splendidly set forth in Hans Urs von Balthasar's fine study, *Le Mystèrion d'Origène*.¹³

That is also why the qualification 'mystical' will stretch to the Christian tropological sense, since that is only an extension of what we have called the Christic sense. That, let us insist, will prepare the way for the application of the same word, by the Fathers of the following century, to the sacraments, especially baptism and the eucharist, as bringing Christ to us for us to participate in his mystery.¹⁴

Another development of Origen's theoretical views in his pastoral practice will be a tendency to distinguish, but without ever separating, two stages, if we may so put it, in the elaboration of the tropological sense thus related to the fulfilment of the mystery in ourselves. The moral sense, now deriving from our union, by faith and the sacraments, with Christ in his mystery, still comes first. But, as it is now understood, it prepares for what Origen describes as 'anagogy' (*ἀναγωγή*) the journey to eternal life, at the coming of the Saviour to consummate his union with the Church and all her members.

There is also here, in the line of Paul's thinking about pledges and first-fruits, or that of John, for whom the unction of the Spirit

¹¹ CLEMENT, *Protrepticus*, I, 10; *Paidagogus*, I, 7 (Stählin, vol. 1, p. 125).

¹² ORIGEN, *De Principiis*, IV, 2 (ed. Koetschau, p. 322) and *Com. in Jo.*, I, 15 (ed. Preuschen, p. 19) and 13, 40 (*ibid.*, p. 266).

¹³ After appearing in *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, 1936, this synthesis, as profound as it is brilliant, was published in ed. du Cerf, Paris, as *Parole et Mystère chez Origène*.

¹⁴ Cf. H. de LUBAC, *Histoire et Esprit*, p. 179ff.

goes along with the seed in us of the very sonship of Christ, not just a preparation but an inauguration. And that is to say, in Origen's accounts of his 'anagogy', he is only developing all its virtualities rather than adding a supplementary meaning to the Christian tropological sense.¹⁵

Exegesis and Spiritual Experience

What has been already said shows clearly that Origen's exegesis, despite its starting with a concern for philological and historical rigour which makes him the father of all exegesis hoping to be recognized as scientific, is in fact something more than that. It is not only also a meditation but, as he declares in the first words of the last book of his *De Principiis*, and as emerges from all the applications which he has made of it, it implies a religious experience, or more precisely the experience of the Spirit. And it is not just an accompaniment of his exegetical work, according to his understanding of it, but the condition *sine qua non* of its validity.

For, in his view understanding the Scriptures is possible only in so far as one already understands Christ. And this understanding, to be precise, is not first and foremost an intellectual business; one can synthesize his thoughts by saying that one cannot comprehend Christ except by being first comprehended in him.

Here we can see the importance of the remark made by Hans Urs von Balthasar, that Origen's stroke of genius, in his interpretation of Saint Paul, was to see in the text of *Ephesians* 5, taking the 'mystery' of marriage, in the general apocalyptic sense of that word, as expressing the meaning of the union of Christ with the Church, and as the final word for all that is implied by the mystery of Christ, his life-giving Cross as the principle of our adoption in him by the Father.

But at that point Origen's own words must be quoted:

Just as the visible and tangible body of Jesus was crucified and buried, then raised from the dead, so today the body of Christ's

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 219ff.

saints is nailed to the Cross and lifeless – ‘all my bones are broken’¹⁶. . . . But when the resurrection of the true and more perfect Body of Christ takes place (τοῦ ἀληθινοῦ καὶ τελειοτέρου χριστοῦ σώματος), then all the members, however numerous, will make up but a single body.¹⁷

For Origen, that is, certainly faithful to the Pauline perspective in this, ‘the body of Christ is not something apart from his body which is the Church.’¹⁸ For, he said, a few lines earlier, Christ

joins his fallen bride-to-be, and there they have become united in one flesh, since it is for this bride-to-be that he too has become flesh. . . . And now they are no longer two beings but one flesh, since he has said to the spouse: ‘You are the members of Christ.’¹⁹

So there are many passages in Origen where *μυστικὸς* certainly still refers to an interpretation of Scripture, but seems already at the same time to refer to the most strictly Christian spiritual experience that there is. This is a sort of anticipation, of considerable import, of what will soon be, in the language of the Fathers, the ultimate semantic evolution of the word ‘mystical’, essentially Christian beneath its ‘Greek’ appearance. Undeniably introduced by Clement, its evolution, one may say, begins to show its lineaments in Origen.

Paul and John According to Origen

A final remark about Origen is perhaps of not less importance. We have seen how, as his career goes on, he comes more and more to present *anagoria*, the Christian’s climb in following Christ towards the heavenly glory by way of the Cross, as the last word in the mystical interpretation of the Scriptures. This theme of the re-ascent of the Son of Man to his heavenly home which begins with the Cross we have seen to be the

¹⁶ *Com. in Jo.*, 6, 10, 20 (ed. Preuschen, p. 202–211).

¹⁷ *Com. in Rom.*, 4, 7 (PG 14, col. 985 BC).

¹⁸ In *Matth.*, 14, 17, (PG 13, col. 1231).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, col. 1230.

Johannine equivalent and complement of the Pauline theme of the mystery.

It is perhaps the most notable indication of the depth of Origen's exegesis and meditation that he should have been thus able to use Paulinism and Johannism so as to make the one throw light upon the other. This is so much the case that, after starting from a fundamentally Pauline basis, he has succeeded in remaining without a doubt the most penetrating and at the same time the most faithful commentator on Saint John of all the Fathers. It is in this perhaps that he introduces in the most definite way, and in many respects anticipates, the final developments of Christian mysticism which we shall now approach by way of a last preparatory stage, that of the great mystagogical catechisms of the fourth century, and more generally of the sacramental spirituality which takes shape in all the preaching of the time.

The Representative Character of the Alexandrians

But we cannot conclude this chapter without showing, at least briefly, that, if Clement and Origen are exceptional in the third century by the richness and power of their thought, they are representative, both in their convictions and in their language, of all orthodox Christianity in their time.

Clement had been undoubtedly the first to speak of a 'mystical interpretation' (μυστικὴν ἐρμηνείαν) of the Scriptures,²⁰ and Origen of an 'exposition of a "mystical sense" (μυστικοῦ νοῦ) drawn from the treasury of the words.'²¹ But Didymus will speak also of a 'spiritual and mystical understanding of the Scriptures'.²² Later Cyril of Alexandria will use the same language in the same sense,²³ and so will Procopius of Gaza.²⁴

There are even Antiochenes, despite their opposing 'types' to Alexandrian allegory, who express themselves in this way, speaking of the study of the Mystery of Christ in all the Scriptures, according to their own methods, as mystical. Theodoret

²⁰ *Stromata*, V, VI (Stählin, vol. II, p.35, line 8).

²¹ *Com. in Jo.*, 1, 15 (ed. Preuschen, p.19, line 34). Cf. 13, 40 (*ibid.*, p.265, line 21) and *De Principiis*, IV, 2, 9 (ed. Koetschau, p.322).

²² In *Psalm* 1, 3 (PG 39, col. 1160A).

²³ *Com. in Isaiam*, 1, 2 (PG 70, col. 96C).

²⁴ *Com. in Isaiam*, 7, 10-17 (PG 87, col. 1960D).

himself will say that the Song of Songs is the mystical book in regard to Christ and the Church.²⁵ So here there is a universal practice in the Church from the third to the fifth century, which the great Alexandrians have only developed and justified in their own way.

²⁵ *De Providentia* (ed. Schultz, vol. IV, p.550).

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE CATECHESIS OF THE FOURTH-CENTURY AND THE MYSTICAL CONTENT OF THE CHRISTIAN LITURGY

In the fourth century, notably in the great catecheses which then multiplied for the crowds of converts, we find the word *μυστικὸς*, and, more generally, expressions and images taken from the pagan mysteries, applied for the first time not only to Christian doctrines but also to Christian rites. It continues to apply to the interpretation of the Scriptures according to the Pauline mystery, but it comes to refer also to participation in this mystery, considered as the content of the sacraments for the faithful.

Catechesis and Mystery

In that part of the *Procatechesis* attributed to Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, we find the plural *τὰ μυστήρια*, which meant what we call the mystery religions, and more precisely their rites, now applied to the ritual of what comes to be called, in consequence, 'Christian initiation'. The writer ends this preparatory exhortation with the words:

Prepare your own heart to receive instruction for communion in the sacred mysteries. Pray more earnestly that God will make you worthy of these heavenly and immortal mysteries.¹

Cyril uses this expression, in the same general sense, in his nineteenth catechesis.² So does Theodoret in his commentary on Zechariah,³ and later Saint John Damascene.⁴

¹ Par. 16.

² Par. 1.

³ 14, 8 (ed. Schultz, vol. II, p.1663).

⁴ PG 94, 1264B.

book of his *Contra Arianos*.⁵ But so does Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Demonstration of the Gospel*⁶ and his *De Ecclesiastica Theologia*.⁷

We find this again in Saint Basil of Caesarea, in his *De Spiritu Sancto*,⁸ in Saint Gregory of Nyssa in his *Oratio Catechetica*⁹, in Saint John Chrysostom in his *Adhortationes ad Theodorum Lapsum*,¹⁰ in Theodoret's *Church History*¹¹ and finally again in Cyril, speaking of the various stages of baptism.¹²

In the same place Cyril applied the word also to the eucharist.¹³ So did Eusebius in his *Demonstration*,¹⁴ Pope Julius quoted by Athanasius in his second *Apology*,¹⁵ Basil in a letter,¹⁶ Epiphanius in his book against the heresies,¹⁷ and Chrysostom in his homilies on Matthew¹⁸ and on *First Corinthians*.¹⁹

Along with this application of τὰ μυστήρια to what we call the Christian sacraments goes the introduction of μυσταγωγία to mean a commentary on the baptismal rites given in the week following their celebration.

This word has been already applied by Basil to baptism and its explanations,²⁰ by Gregory of Nazianzus,²¹ Gregory of Nyssa²² and Chrysostom.²³ Gregory of Nazianzus²⁴ and Chrysostom²⁵ use it also of the eucharist.

The word τελετή, which could be applied to all the pagan rituals, but especially to initiation into the mysteries, is now taken over for Christian rites in general by Eusebius in his *De Laudibus Constantini*.²⁶ But Origen had already applied it to baptism in his

⁵ Par. 42 (PG 26, col. 236C).

⁶ 9, 6 (PG 2, col. 673C).

⁷ 1, 8 (PG 24, col. 837A).

⁸ Par. 66 (PG 32, col. 188B).

⁹ Par. 33 (PG 45, col. 45B).

¹⁰ PG 47.

¹¹ 111, 37.

¹² *Catechesis* 12, 18, 32.

¹³ Also in *Catechesis* 23, 23, 22.

¹⁴ 1, 10 (PG 22, col. 92B).

¹⁵ Par. 31 (PG 25, col. 300D).

¹⁶ Ep., 188 (PG 32, col. 669C).

¹⁷ *Haereses* 68, 7 (PG 42, col. 196C).

¹⁸ 23, 3.

¹⁹ 23, 2.

²⁰ *De Spiritu Sancto*, 75 (PG 32, col. 209A).

²¹ *Orat.* 40, 11 (PG 38, col. 372C).

²² *De Bapt. Christi* (PG 46, col. 584C).

²³ *Hom.* 28 in *Joan.*, 1 (PG 59).

²⁴ *Orat.* 36, 2 (PG 36, col. 268A).

²⁵ *Hom.* 27 in *1 Cor.*, 4 (PG 61).

²⁶ *Proem.* (PG 20, col. 1317C).

Against Celsus,²⁷ and Chrysostom, who does the same,²⁸ applies it also to the eucharist.²⁹

This is the general context in which the word *μυστικὸς* makes its appearance in connection with the sacraments. Eusebius and Theodoret describe the eucharist, the first as a 'mystical liturgy',³⁰ the second as a 'mystical hierurgy'.³¹

Gregory of Nyssa calls it a 'mystical action' (*πρόξενος μυστικῆς*),³² and Gregory of Nazianzus calls the altar a 'mystical table' (*τράπεζα μυστικῆ*).³³ There is similar language about baptism: Eusebius describes it as a 'mystical regeneration',³⁴ while Gregory of Nyssa will say that it effects 'regeneration by a mystical act',³⁵ a 'mystical water'.³⁶ The holy oils are also called 'mystical' by Eusebius,³⁷ Epiphanius³⁸ and Theodoret.³⁹

Lastly it is noteworthy that the collection of *Apostolic Constitutions*⁴⁰ describes the eucharist as the 'mystical sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ', contrasted with the bloody sacrifices of paganism. And Saint Nilus, in his third letter,⁴¹ calls the eucharistic bread a 'mystical bread' and, a rare usage of the expression in Greek, says that we eat the 'mystical Body' of Christ.⁴²

The great historian Hans Lietzmann thought to find in these turns of speech a deliberate application to the Christian liturgy of the scheme of things in the mystery religions. We have seen how it spread from the mysteries of Eleusis to a whole series of other cults, more or less analogous through their common origin in archaic agrarian rites and the myths which were connected with them.

²⁷ 3, 59 (PG 11, col. 109A).

²⁸ *Ad Theodorum Lapsam*, 1, 17 (PG 47, col. 303).

²⁹ *De Sacerdotio*, 3, 4 (PG 48, col. 1383A).

³⁰ *Vita Constantini*, IV, 71 and 75 (PG 20, col. 1191B and 1225C).

³¹ *Epist.* 146 and *Hist. rel.* XIII (ed. Schultz, vol. IV, p.1260 and vol. III, p.1208).

³² *De Bapt. Christi*, (PG 46 col. 281A).

³³ *Orat.* 40 (PG 36, col. 404A).

³⁴ *Contra Marcellum*, I, 1 (PG 24, col. 728C).

³⁵ *Orat. Catech.*, 34 (PG 45, col. 85C).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 35 (col. 92C).

³⁷ *Demonstr. Evang.*, I, 10 (PG 22, col. 89D).

³⁸ *Haer.*, 30, 6 (PG 41, col. 413D).

³⁹ *Com. in Is.*, 61, 2.

⁴⁰ Book VI, 23, 4.

⁴¹ Par. 39.

⁴² Cardinal de LUBAC, in his *Corpus Mysticum*, has shown that in Latin writers also the meaning of the expression is at first eucharistic.

Lietzmann's arguments are worth close examination, for they are the best justification ever attempted of the views of Reitzenstein or of the theologians of Maria Laach, taking up with his theory of the origins of the Christian mysteries in those of Hellenistic paganism.

In connection with this thesis, Lietzmann emphasizes the secrecy which begins to surround the Christian celebration of the eucharist: veils and, later, rood-screens in the West like the iconostasis in the East, gradually hiding the performance of the rites from the faithful themselves. At the same time, he insists, we find increasingly the uttering in a subdued tone of essential formulas like the Roman Canon and the consecratory anaphoras – the new forms of the eucharistic prayer then reaching their full development. Along with that would go an enrichment of ceremonial: sacred vestments, the lavish use of lights and incense, rites of lustration or benediction

These suggested influences are not without interest, but they do not prove what Lietzmann thought to be deducible from them.

In the first place, these developments are either clearly later than the period in question, like the iconostasis, which did not acquire its present structure and fittings until well into the Middle Ages, or else, on the contrary, they consist simply of a richer, more elaborate, setting, adopted at a time when Christianity was now in favour, of usages of much earlier date or even primitive ones, previously restricted by the persecutions. The use of curtains veiling the sanctuary, and that of lights and incense (even, strange as it may seem, that of a more or less esoteric liturgical iconography) – all that, as we now know, was not only in existence long before the Constantinian era but also came from a direct borrowing, or rather a survival in the primitive Church, of usages which had always been customary in the synagogue.⁴³

Moreover, the interpretation given to these various characteristics of ancient, and especially patristic, liturgy by Lietzmann and many others is disputable on many counts and sometimes absurd. The iconostasis, for instance, far from being intended to conceal the celebration, aimed rather (like the catecheses) at expressing its deepest meaning, the presence of Christ and of his Mystery, *in* his Mystery, with us, indeed in us. As for the famous 'secret

⁴³ Cf. my *Architecture et Liturgie*, Paris, 1967, p. 27ff. with H. LIETZMANN, *A History of the Early Church*, vol. IV, Eng. trans., London, 1951, p. 98ff.

of the Canon', it seems really to have been the bastard product of the excessive zeal of singers conjoined with the impatience of priests!⁴⁴

All that remains true of these remarks, grouped together artificially into an apparently coherent whole, is that the influx of recent converts with more or less sufficient (or insufficient) formation led the clergy, naturally enough, to emphasize, tangibly, as it were, the respect due to the sacred rites, indicating their distinction from merely practical usages, from eating to hydrotherapy. The recent abandonment among us of such precautions has shown all too quickly what an evaporation of faith results from it, through a failure to recognize, in the actions of the Constantinian clergy, a simple proof of pastoral good sense, to which only armchair liturgists could remain blind.

From Scriptures to the Sacraments

To return to this development of mystical, or, more generally, 'mystery' language, its meaning is to be found, above all, in its earlier application – which, moreover, continues during the same period and in the writings of those who also adopt the new one – the application, namely, to the discovery by faith of the mystery of Christ as the key to the scriptures as well as to the solution of the ultimate human problem. The catecheses of the fourth century all start from the Pauline idea that the mystery of Christ must have its final fulfilment in ourselves, and that it is by way of the sacraments that it is extended to us. If their authors regard the Christian rites as 'mysteries', it is because they are 'mystical' in the sense in which the interpretation of the Scriptures founded on the Pauline Mystery is 'mystical'. And so it is that they present these rites as doing away with illusions, the diabolical deceits of the pagan mysteries, putting in their place the reality, the divine truth, of Christ.

For it is in returning to the development of the Pauline Mystery that the earliest Fathers, the Alexandrians in particular, explain

⁴⁴ Cf. my *Eucharistie*, Paris, ed.2, 1968, p.353ff.

the meaning of baptism, the anointing with oil, the eucharist, showing how, in this way, light is shed on the very meaning given to them by Paul and John.

Cyril of Jerusalem, for instance, says:

So that we might learn that all Christ's sufferings were endured for us and for our salvation, in reality and not in appearance, and that we have become partakers of his sufferings, Paul exclaims with great exactness: 'If we have become a single shoot with him in an assimilation to his death, we shall also be such in respect of his resurrection.' He says well 'a single shoot', for thus it is that the true vine has been planted.⁴⁵

In the same way he says about the anointing:

Having been baptized in Christ and having put on Christ, you have been made like to the Son of God. For God, having predestined us to become sons, has made us like to the glorious body of Christ. Having become, then, partakers of Christ, you yourselves can be called Christs, anointed ones, and it is of you that God has said: 'Touch not my Christs.' So you have become Christs in receiving the antitype of the Holy Spirit, and everything in you has become in the image of this Christ of whom you are the image.⁴⁶

Finally on the eucharist:

Thus we share with full assurance in the body and blood of Christ. For, under the form (*τύπος* of bread, the body is given to you, and, under the form of wine, the Blood is given for you, so that in sharing in the Body and Blood of Christ you become a single Body and a single Blood with him. So we become Christophers, Christ-bearers, his Body and his Blood mingling with our members, so that, as Blessed Peter says, we enter into communion with the divine nature.⁴⁷

It will be enough to give a single parallel to this teaching, choosing it from a Westerner, Saint Ambrose of Milan, for all the texts echo one another.

There is this for baptism:

⁴⁵ Par. 7 of *Second Mystagogical Catechesis*.

⁴⁶ Par. 1 of *Third Mystagogical Catechesis*.

⁴⁷ Par. 3 of *Fourth of Mystagogical Catechesis*. Cf. 2 Peter 1, 4.

So the apostle exclaims, as you have just heard, 'whoever is baptized, it is in the death of Jesus that he is baptized.'⁴⁸ What does 'in his death' mean? That, just as Christ has died, so you too must taste the death: just as Christ has died to sin and is live to God, you too must be dead to the old snares of sin, by the sacrament of baptism, and be brought back to life by the grace of Christ.⁴⁹

And for the anointing:

So, having been cleansed in the water, you came to the bishop. What did he say to you? 'God the Father almighty,' he said, 'who has caused you to be reborn of water and the Holy Spirit and who has pardoned your sins, has himself anointed you for life eternal.' See for what you have been anointed: for life eternal, he says . . .⁵⁰

Lastly, for the eucharist:

Before the consecration, the bread was not the Body of Christ. But after the consecration, I say to you that it is henceforth the Body of Christ. He spoke, and it was made; he ordained and it was created. You yourself were there, but you were a creature consumed by age; now that you have been consecrated, you are a new creature. Would you know how you are this new creature? 'Whoever is in Christ,' it is said, 'is a new creature.'⁵¹

Ambrose's *De Mysteriis* will give us a summing-up:

What we have to eat and what we have to drink, the Holy Spirit has told us in the words of the prophet: 'Taste and see that the Lord is good: happy is the man who trusts in him.'⁵² Christ is in this sacrament because it is the Body of Christ. So it is not bodily nourishment but spiritual. And so the apostle says of his type: 'Our fathers ate a spiritual food and drank a spiritual drink.'⁵³ For the Body of Christ is a spiritual Body, the body of Christ is the Body of the divine Spirit, because Christ is Spirit, as we read: 'the Lord Christ is Spirit before us.'⁵⁴ And in St Peter's Letter we have: 'It is

⁴⁸ *Romans*, 6, 3.

⁴⁹ *De Sacramentis*, 11, 23.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 11, 24.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* Cf. 2 *Corinthians*, 5, 17.

⁵² *Psalms* 33, 9.

⁵³ 1 *Corinthians*, 10, 3.

⁵⁴ *Lamentations*, 4, 20 (according to the Septuagint).

for you that Christ died.⁵⁵ Finally, this food strengthens our heart, and this drink makes glad the heart of man, as the prophet has said.⁵⁶ So, after receiving so much, we have been regenerated.⁵⁷

Preaching and Catechesis

This special teaching of the catecheses is in harmony with that of the most influential bishops of the time in their preaching. The most explicit in this respect is that of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, delivered at Constantinople on the feast of the Theophany, that is, the feast of the Saviour's Nativity, further developed in the sermon for 'the Holy Lights', devoted to the baptism of Christ, and finally in that for the baptism of the neophytes, which followed that last celebration, on the sixth of January. Their main theme is that Christ, in accepting baptism, brought to it what we have to receive from it, just as, in making himself man, he offered us divine sonship.⁵⁸

The sermon for the Holy Lights opens as follows:

Again it is my Jesus and again a mystery that we celebrate, but a mystery which is not misleading or indecent, for it does not derive from the folly of the Hellenes and their intoxication (for that is what I call what they consider holy things, as does anyone in his right mind), but from a supreme and divine mystery, akin to the splendours of heaven. For the holy Day of Lights which we celebrate has its principle in the baptism of my Christ, the true light who enlightens every man coming into this world, and it is my purification that he effects, and he rekindles that flame which we received from him in the beginning from above but which we had obscured and lost by our own fault.⁵⁹

In what follows he contrasts this mystery with the chief pagan ones, in particular those of Eleusis, of Bacchus and of Mithras, also with the Thracian orgies (that is, those of Zagreus) and the Orphic initiations, mentioning even the Curetes and the Corybantes.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ 1 Peter, 2, 21.

⁵⁶ Cf. Psalm 23, 15.

⁵⁷ *De Mysteriis*, 58-59.

⁵⁸ *Orat.* 38, 39 and 40 (PG 36, col. 312ff.).

⁵⁹ *Orat.* 39, 1 (col. 336A).

⁶⁰ *Par.* 4ff. (col. 337ff.).

It was the demons, he says, who were at work there, as everything shows, claiming for themselves what belongs only to God.⁶¹ But here it is the living and true God who raises us above every creature.⁶²

For, he tells us:

Jesus, coming up from the waters, has brought back with him the fallen world, and he sees the skies open which Adam had closed, for himself and for his descendants, as the flaming sword had closed paradise.⁶³

So we are again discovering the recapitulation in the second Adam of the human history which the first Adam had led into a path of death, the ultimate meaning, according to *Ephesians*, of the mystery which finds its fulfilment in ourselves through the sacrament of baptism. The third of these sermons will explore it further.⁶⁴

But to see the scope of its implications we must realize we are touching here on what is, for Gregory, the heart and, in a sense, the whole of Christianity. Perhaps he has never expressed it better than in his discourse in praise of his brother Caesarius:

I must be buried with Christ, rise again with him and inherit heaven with him, become God's son, become God! . . . That is for us the great mystery. That is what it means to us that God became incarnate, a poor man, for us. He came to raise up the flesh, to save his own image, to put men together again. He came to make us perfectly one in Christ who came to be perfectly one of us, to bestow on us all that he is.⁶⁵

Thus we find this exhortation in the Christmas sermon:

Be crucified with Christ, be put to death with him, be buried with him, so as to rise with him and reign with him.⁶⁶

Finally, 'this new Mystery which concerns myself,' as he puts it, is that

⁶¹ Par. 7 (col. 341B).

⁶² Par. 8 (col. 341D).

⁶³ Par. 16 (col. 353B).

⁶⁴ Orat. 40 (col. 360ff.).

⁶⁵ Orat. 7 (*In Laudem Caesarii*), 23 (PG 35, col. 785).

⁶⁶ Orat. 38 (PG 36, col. 332C and 333A).

he takes all of me along in himself, with all my wretchedness, so as to consume in himself what is evil, as fire consumes wax, as the sun absorbs the vapour of the earth, and to give me a share in all his own good by uniting himself with me . . . In the end, we shall be no longer many as we are now, divided by our passions, we who do not have God in our souls, or hardly have him. For then we shall be deiform (θεοειδής), because we shall possess God in ourselves completely and God alone. Such is the perfection to which we are moving.⁶⁸

He had said in his first sermon:

He took the form of a slave so as to give us liberty, he came down to raise us up, he was tempted so that we might conquer; he was scorned so as to glorify us, he died to save us, he has ascended into heaven to free us from sin.⁶⁹

And he concluded:

Let us then give everything, offer everything, to him who has given himself as redeemer from our sins. One can give nothing better than oneself, if one really understands the Mystery.⁷⁰

In the West, again, at the end as at the beginning of the great patristic period of the fourth and fifth centuries, we hear the same Pauline note from Saint Leo the Great, who was to leave his mark on the finest prayers of the Roman liturgy:

Let us, then, dearly beloved, give thanks to God the Father, by the Son, in the Spirit: to him who, in the abundance of mercy with which he has loved us, has had pity on us and, 'while we were dead in our sins has brought us back to life together in Christ, so that in him we might be a new creature,'⁷¹ a new piece of his workmanship. So let us put off the old man with his works, and, becoming participators with the generations of Christ, let us renounce the works of the flesh. O Christian! recognize the dignity that is yours: made like to the divine nature, do not go back to your former low degree by a degenerate manner of living; remember of what Head and of what Body you are a member. Remember that you, snatched from the powers of darkness, have been brought into

⁶⁸ *Orat.* 30, *Fourth Theological Discourse*, 6 (PG 36, col. 109C and 112B).

⁶⁹ *Orat.*, I, 5 (PG 35, col. 400).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ephesians*, 2, 5.

the light and the Kingdom of God. By the sacrament of baptism you have been made the temple of the Holy Spirit. Do not drive such a guest from you by evil deeds and do not subject yourself afresh to the tyranny of the devil, for you have been ransomed by the blood of Christ, and he will judge you in truth, he who has ransomed you in his pity, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen.⁷²

One more text will be quoted as illustrating very clearly the natural sliding of the reference of *μυστικός* from the interpretation of Scripture in terms of the Mystery of Christ to the fulfilment in us of the same Mystery in the sacraments. In his commentary on Isaiah, Cyril of Alexandria declares (in regard to the prophet's statement, 'the stay of bread and water shall be taken from them'):

This is a mystical statement, for it is to us, who have been called to sanctification, that belongs the bread of heaven, the Christ, that is, his Body.⁷³

Word and Spirit

Let us add that, whereas the Hellenic mysteries, like all pagan rituals, were supposed to develop that natural power which reveals, in the elements of the world, a presence thought to be divine, it is the common doctrine of all the mystagogic catecheses that the efficacy of the sacraments comes from the meeting of the Word, creative and redemptive, of the Son of God with the prayer in which the faith of the Church invokes him in its thanksgiving. Those of Cyril of Jerusalem insist on the 'epiclesis', the Church's invocation, but it is clear that he means by this the whole eucharistic prayer which developed around the words of institution. Ambrose of Milan starts with these words, but it is clear that they are effective in response to the prayer (the central formulas of which he mentions) which invokes them. It hardly needs pointing out that this shows the absurdity of the medieval quarrel between West and East, opposing to one another

⁷² Conclusion of *Sermon 20*.

⁷³ *Com. in Is.*, 1, 2 (PG 70, col. 966). This text could be compared with the *Chronicon Paschale*, in which the last supper is called a 'mystical supper' (PG 92, col. 548C), and Hesychius of Jerusalem calls it a 'mystical Pasch' (*Quaest. Evang.*, 34, PG 93, col. 1421D). There is also the very Pauline formula of Eutychius, referring to the Pasch as 'mystical first-fruits and earnest of the Body and Blood of Christ' (PG 86, col. 2397A).

two elements which Christian antiquity held unanimously to be inseparable.

But this vision of the efficacy of the sacraments, the eucharist above all, which was, for the Fathers, the heart of all Christian initiation, calls for a further remark. We have noted the impression that we saw emerging from more than one passage in Origen: contemplation of the mystery of Christ was there called 'mystical', but the word qualified not just an explanation, but also a spiritual experience inseparable from it. This impression is made upon us even more strongly as we read most of the passages quoted in the present chapter.

In other words, what is 'mystical', for the Fathers, in the performance of the Christian sacraments, closely bound up as it is with the specifically Christian meditation of the Scriptures, which leads to it, is this transformation of one's whole being and with it the experience which it involves. We are thus at the fringe, and often even in the midst, of the third and final stage in the meaning of *μυστικός*, that in which we shall see the word applied directly to the most intimate experience of the Christian who is faithful to the revelations which have been made to him and the gifts which have been granted to him.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MYSTICAL CONTEMPLATION ACCORDING TO THE FATHERS

The fourth century is a decisive time in the evolution of Christian spirituality, as well as in that of theology, by reason of the sudden influx of pagans into the Church in enormous numbers. To assimilate them, it was necessary for her to undertake a considerable development of her catechesis and her whole preaching. But this century is no less important by reason of the appearance and very rapid development of monasticism. The two things, moreover, are obviously linked together. If, before that time, asceticism was thought of as a preparation for an always possible martyrdom, it became, after the conversion of Constantine, in its development, its new organization, a substitute for martyrdom.

The conclusion of Origen's *Exhortation to Martyrdom* was already a move in this direction. And it had been anticipated up to a point by Clement's declaration that his 'gnostic', if he were truly such, would have to make his whole existence, like his death, a 'gnostic martyrdom'.¹

The Theology of Monasticism

It is through theological reflection promoted by the integration of the monastic movement into the life of the Church, together with the renewed understanding of the whole Christian life which it was to produce, that the word 'mystical' (μυστικός) came to receive definitively a third application, for it will now stand for Christian experience its fully developed form, in particular that of a prayer which saturates with faith the whole Christian life.

¹ *Stromata*, IV, IV, 15 (ed. Stählin, t. II, p.255).

So 'mystical' in this sense will be the word for the experience of a life enlightened by Christian meditation of the Scriptures and nourished by the Christian sacraments in the Church.

It can be said that the first theological work about monasticism is the *Life of St Anthony* by Athanasius.² And it is very significant to find the champion of Nicene orthodoxy becoming also the theorist of the monastic ideal. As Christoph von Schönborn in his study of Sophronius of Jerusalem³ has stressed, from the beginning of the patristic era to the end, monastic spirituality faithful to its original inspiration, the New Testament,⁴ and doctrine faithful to the authentic tradition will go together. As Clement of Alexandria has been the first to insist, in spite of his intellectualist leanings, the true Christian 'gnosis' can develop only with and through the development of charity, God's supreme gift because the gift of his own life made to us through the Spirit 'in Christ'.⁵

But the first and fundamental systematization of monasticism was to be made by the same three Cappadocians who also completed the theological work of Athanasius: Basil of Caesarea, his friend Gregory of Nazianzus, his younger brother Gregory of Nyssa. Basil systematized the practice and Gregory of Nyssa the theory, taking that word here in its full sense as contemplation of the Christian ideal in Christ, assimilating us to him in our whole being. But, between the two, Gregory of Nazianzus, who had been the first to remark that the *Life of Saint Anthony* gave us not only a biography of one of the first great monks but also the pattern ([*ἡ ἀρετή*]) of what a monk ought to be, plays a decisive part in establishing that the monastic vision is nothing but a clear-eyed vision, in a life which is entirely controlled by a man's beliefs, of that final meaning of the Scriptures which Origen had tried to define.⁶

² See my book *La Vie de Saint Antoine, Essai sur la Spiritualité du Monachisme Primitif*, 2nd ed., Bégrolle-en-Mauges, 1970.

³ Christoph von SCHÖNBORN, *Sophrone de Jerusalem*, Paris, 1972.

⁴ On this see the admirable synthesis of Antoine GUILLAUMONT, *Aux Origines du Monachisme Chrétien*, Bégrolle-en-Mauges, 1979.

⁵ Cf. above, p. 187ff.

⁶ Cf. the section on Gregory of Nazianzus in my *Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*, London, 1963. His remark on the *Vita Antonii* is in his *Oratio in Laudem Athanasii* (PG 35, col. 1088A).

Gregory of Nazianzus and the Monastic Exodus

In Origen's steps, first in his poems *On Virginity*⁷ and *On Ἀρετή*, which one might translate as 'the life which is worth living',⁸ and not without some direct inspiration from Clement also, Gregory defines the monastic life (which Basil had already called 'our philosophy'⁹) as the only true acquisition of that ideal life which all the παιδεία, the education, the culture of Greece had aimed at,¹⁰ without ever really reaching it. On the contrary, he says, this is what monks can and ought to achieve, following Christ and through his grace. Thus they make their own, in the full light of the Gospel, that exodus from the earthly city to the Kingdom of which only God can be the architect and the king, which Abraham had inaugurated, which the whole people of the Old Covenant, in the departure from Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea and the journeying through the desert, had foreshadowed. But it was to be accomplished only in the Pasch, the *Transitus* of the Saviour, bringing us through his redemptive death into the life of the resurrection, the life of the children of God.¹¹

As the second of Gregory's great *Theological Discourses* shows, all the meaning and purpose of the 'Exodus' is to lead to that knowledge of the God of the prophets, of which Moses on Mount Sinai is, in the Old Testament, the living symbol, a knowledge, to repeat, in which is resolved into a unity the duality of the knowledge of the divine Name, the divine reality, as it is revealed in the Burning Bush, and the knowledge of the divine plan for us, beginning to disclose itself in the Ten Commandments. It is, as we have seen, the filial knowledge of God which makes us his children, in a reciprocity of love for

⁷ Poems 1 and 2 of section 2, PG 37, coll. 521ff.

⁸ Poem 10 of section 2, PG 37, coll. 608ff. See on Ἀρετή Werner JAEGER, *Paideia*, vol. 1, Oxford, 1947, p. 3ff.

⁹ See the article by Gustave BARDY, 'Philosophie' et 'Philosophe' dans la *vocabulaire chrétien des premiers siècles*, in vol. 25 of the *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique*, Toulouse, 1949, p. 106ff.

¹⁰ See, with the poem on Ἀρετή quoted in note 8, his *Orat.* 6, (PG 35, col. 721), also *Orat.* 25, (*ibid.*, coll. 1198f.) and the development of *Orat.* 7, (*In laudem Caesaris*: *ibid.*, col. 765B).

¹¹ See all the first part of the poem on Ἀρετή (coll. 680ff.).

the sake of which he comes down to us sinful creatures in our weakness.

Thus, on our part, there must be faith as the response of self-abandonment to the divine gift, freeing us for this love and so surpassing hope.

In this important text, Gregory, following up Origen's *Homilies on Exodus*, emphasizes that this knowledge, according to the account of chapter 33 of *Exodus*, is not a knowledge of God face to face but a knowledge from behind, that is, a knowledge which cannot be had save by letting oneself be drawn after him in his *transitus* across the world.

This is, still according to *Exodus* and Origen's interpretation of it, an entrance into the cloud, the cloud of faith, which, however, becomes luminous when it is penetrated, even transforming us into the very image, the living image of the Creator.

All this is plainly not only Origenist but Pauline; it is only the unfolding of what was contained in or implied by the great text of 2 *Corinthians*, 3: 'reflecting as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, we are transformed, from glory to glory, by the Lord [become] Spirit.'¹²

Gregory of Nyssa and Epectasis

Of all these themes, put together by Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa was to be the expounder and the developer. In his *Life of Moses* he again traces their origins and brings out all their meaning, unfolded only by the Gospel of Jesus. In his *Homilies on the Canticle* (following up the *Homilies* of Origen applying it to the Church, and his *Commentary* transposing it to each soul), he works out the progressive realization of our union, here below, with God in Christ, made possible by the union with us which God had consecrated in the Incarnation of his Son in our sinful flesh. Delivering him thus to the Cross, he was to give us a share of the divine life in his resurrection and the pouring out of the Spirit, of which the Cross is for us the principle: all that being set out in the sermons of Gregory of

¹² See the end of the chapter.

Nazianzus on the Theophany and the Lights, that is, the nativity and the baptism of the Saviour, who brings to it what we must receive from our own, and finally on the Pasch, Gregory of Nyssa draws the full consequences of this in his sermon on the Ascension (the first which we have about this solemnity). His *Homilies on the Canticle* bring out, we might say, the axial line in what Daniélou has called *epectasis*.

It seems that Gregory of Nyssa used the noun ἐπέκτασις only once, in the sixth of his homilies, in the sense of a tension towards what is ahead of us.¹³ But the verb ἐπεκτείνω is common enough: it is found with this meaning in the ninth homily¹⁴ about the Spouse who stretches to what is beyond her and in his comments on the titles of the Psalms,¹⁵ his *Life of Gregory the Wonderworker*¹⁶ and his *Commentary on the Hexameron*.¹⁷ And the importance of the idea for him is in no doubt: as the vision in Christ of the infinite God is infinitely beyond us, it is, in the present life and even in eternal life, only by continuous progress, in which any light at which one stopped could only bring us darkness, that we shall ever know him. What he calls the θεογνωσία can be found only in this ceaseless movement in the wake of God.¹⁸

But, to give herself to it, the soul must recover the virginal integrity essential to her condition as God's image. It is in this reciprocal handing-over, always deepening, of Christ to the soul and the soul to Christ, that she will regain this integrity, according to Gregory's *De Virginitate*.¹⁹

All this is clearly only a development of Origen's anagogy, which was itself only a renewal of the following of Christ, by the Cross to glory, so typically Johannine. And, again, this is only the Christian view of things in the style of the fundamental biblical themes of the *Schekinah*: the divine Presence with us here below, but 'beneath the tent' of the perpetual pilgrims and travelers of which the Letter to the Hebrews²⁰ speaks, which snatches

¹³ PG 44, col. 888A.

¹⁴ PG 44, col. 997A.

¹⁵ PG 44, col. 453A.

¹⁶ PG 46, col. 901C.

¹⁷ PG 44, col. 121A.

¹⁸ *Hom. I in Cant.* (PG 44, col. 773A). Cf. *Vie de Moïse* (PG 44, col. 329B).

¹⁹ *De Virginitate*, II (PG 46, col. 324).

²⁰ *Hebrews*, 11, 13.

up from the earth and raises beyond the skies the fiery chariot of the *Merkabah*, in which God himself shuns all installation in this world to which he came to seek 'what was lost'. So too we have the seemingly paradoxical theme of the luminous cloud in which the Transfiguration is consummated,²¹ the obscure cloud of faith which leads towards clear vision, but at the same time a luminous cloud for those who move towards it, whereas it becomes obscure again as they, like Peter, come to a stop, so as to draw us on always further . . .

Mystical Contemplation

We must keep in mind all that context if we are to appreciate the expression of capital importance used by Gregory at the beginning of his *Homilies on the Canticle*:

Hear now the mystery of the Canticle of Canticles . . . which is mystical contemplation.²²

This use of *μυστική θεωρία* is the first in which, undeniably, 'mystical contemplation' appears in the modern sense of a spiritual experience. What has been already said makes sufficiently clear how essentially biblical is its context and how fully in accordance with the New Testament line of interpreting all the themes which we have been recalling.

As we have already noted in passing, but it is now useful to return to it, certain passages in Origen brought us close to this point, which Gregory had undoubtedly read and pondered. This is notably the case for a text in the *Commentary on John* which speaks of 'ineffable mystical contemplations' (*ἀπόρρητα καὶ μυστικά θεωρήματα*) giving joy and enthusiasm,²³ but also probably of the presentation, in the same work, of Christ as the high priest according to the order of Melchizedech who guides us (*ὁδηγόν*) to 'ineffable and mystical contemplations'.²⁴

²¹ Cf. *Matthew*, 9, 1 to 8 and parallels, with 2 *Peter* 1, 17-18.

²² PG 44, col. 765A.

²³ 1, 30 (ed. Preuschen, p. 37).

²⁴ 13, 24 (*ibid.*, p. 248).

Let us also recall that Gregory of Nyssa himself spoke of the baptized as 'regenerated by this mystical economy',²⁵ and that in the *Homilies on the Canticle* he described baptism as a 'mystical bath'.²⁶ This indicates that the context of this new usage is sacramental as well as scriptural. Also Clement of Alexandria had said that obtaining *gnosis* presupposed the reception of baptism. Only this, he pointed out, will give us that cleansing of the soul's eyes which will enable us to know God.²⁷

After Gregory of Nyssa, and very probably in immediate dependence on his work, the so-called Macarian writings use the word *μυστικός* relatively often in the same sense. We read in the second homily:

The soul wounded with *agape* for Christ ardently desires (ἐπιποθεῖ) mystical union (μυστικὴν συνουσίαν) with him.²⁸

Again the forty-seventh homily says:

The perfect Spouse (that is, Christ) receives the perfect soul as perfect Bride in the holy and mystical communion of Marriage.²⁹

Again in the fifteenth homily:

So it is for whoever Christ, the heavenly Spouse, has summoned to be his Bride in a mystical and divine association (κοινωνία).³⁰

In general, one can find in these writings attributed to Macarius, called 'the Egyptian', who seems to have publicized all the positive, luminous, aspects of the teaching of Gregory of Nyssa, almost all the vocabulary of what in our age is called 'mysticism', except for the expression, so familiar today, 'mystical experience'. But it is very likely that this gap is only accidental and that the pseudo-Macarius would not have hesitated to use the phrase on occasion. For, to explain further the expressions which have just

²⁵ Par. 34 (PG 45 col. 85C).

²⁶ *Hom. II in Cant.* (PG 44, col. 1001B).

²⁷ *Paidagogus*, I, 28 (ed. Stählin, t. 1, p. 106).

²⁸ PG 34, col. 416D.

²⁹ Par. 17 (PG 34, col. 808C).

³⁰ Par. 2 (PG 4, col. 576C).

been quoted, and in which the word 'mystical' is firmly set, he writes:

If your inner man has been established in the experience and the certitude (ἐν πείρᾳ καὶ πληροφορίᾳ) of all these things, see that you are indeed alive.³¹

On the other hand, Evagrius of Pontus, whose developments of the Gregorian heritage, also highly personal, underline the aspect of obscurity and ineffability in the contemplative life (which he prefers to call 'gnostic'), does not use the word 'mystical'.³²

Dionysian Mysticism

But, apparently in the fourth century, the great Unknown who presented himself as 'Denis the Areopagite' (Saint Paul's Athenian convert),³³ bringing together the contrasted aspects of light and darkness already connected by Origen and made inseparable by Gregory, will put definitely into circulation what we may call the vocabulary of mysticism. First, in the Greek world, the *Mystagogy* of Saint Maximus the Confessor (which is a commentary on Denis) was to establish it once for all. Then, in the Latin world, perhaps even more widely, the translations of Hilduin and, especially, of Scotus Erigena, and finally the use which Saint Thomas Aquinas made of it, won for it an authority which remained unchallenged until the Renaissance and our own epoch.

Today it is this Dionysian synthesis that arouses more than anything else the accusation of Hellenism, of a Platonism which corrupts Christian spirituality. In Ritschl, Heiler, Nygren and their successors it became a settled conviction that mysticism, in Catholic Christianity, is only the substitution of a spirituality fundamentally alien to the Bible, and without anything in common with authentic Christian spirituality.

³¹ *Homily I*, 12 (PG 34, col. 61D).

³² See my *Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*, p.380ff.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.395ff. But see above all Walther VÖLKER, *Kontemplation und Ekstase bei Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita*, Wiesbaden, 1968.

Yet one has only to make a critical study of Denis's work, which is certainly highly original, to discover there the wholly biblical and Christian character of his mysticism, despite a vocabulary closely allied to that of Platonism, while showing his astonishing independence in regard to this kind of thinking, that of his contemporaries, of course, whom he wished to gain for the faith.

The fact is that, in him as in Gregory of Nyssa (certainly his most immediate and abundant source of inspiration), his familiarity with neo-Platonism, far from handing him over defenceless to it, is what enables him to utilize it while making a complete recasting of it. Most especially, it is clear, for anyone not reading him with an invincible prejudice, that it is not from Proclus (no doubt the philosopher of whom he has the fullest knowledge), nor Plotinus, nor Plato himself that he takes what he refers to as 'mystical'. On the contrary, it is just on those occasions when he explains the meaning which he gives to this term (which, to say it once more, despite all that is said and repeated without the slightest justification, Plotinus never uses), it is just then that he makes clear how completely he depends on the tradition of biblical exegesis and liturgical catechesis as found in Gregory.

That is what the work of Endre von Ivanka,³⁴ Vladimir Lossky,³⁵ and most particularly Walter Völker³⁶ have demonstrated. But this is also what the majority of French specialists persist in ignoring, although, to repeat, it is enough to read Denis without blinkers in order to recognize it.

But for that it is necessary not decide on principle to regard him as a philosopher pure and simple who would touch on theology only in an incidental way. This absurdity can be avoided only if one is content not to read him upside down. As opposed to modern French popularizations, which begin with the treatise on *The Divine Names* and go from there to *The Mystical Theology*, it is clearly no accident that all the Greek manuscripts put first *The Celestial Hierarchy* and *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, to which *The Divine Names* constitutes only a theologico-philosophical appendix, whereas *The Mystical Theology* is the spiritual development

³⁴ *La Signification du Corpus Areopagiticum in Recherches de Science Religieuse*, vol. 36, Paris, 1949, p. 18ff.

³⁵ *Essai sur la Théologie Mystique de l'Église d'Orient*, Paris, 1942, p. 23ff.

³⁶ Cf. *op.cit.*, note 33. The recent article by Michel CORBIN, *Négation et transcendance dans l'oeuvre de Denys*, in *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, vol. 69, Paris, 1985, p. 41ff., seems to me one of the best analyses in regard to the idea of God in Denis.

of the first two treatises and, provided that one does not separate it from them, the key to the whole work.

Far from Denis's being in the first place a philosopher, or even a theologian in what has become the current sense of the word, the true meaning of the title of his final work is that, in the end, the only true 'theology' is not some philosophical development of the data of revelation – although Denis excels at it! – but indeed the highest and purest experience of Christian existence, the fundamentally biblical and liturgical sources of which are explained in the treatises on what are called 'hierarchies'.

Whatever is to be said about Denis's philosophical, or (in our post-medieval meaning of the word) theological, developments, it is most noteworthy that it is never in connection with these that he is found dealing with what he himself qualifies as mystical. It is always, on the contrary, in reference to the Origenist and Gregorian interpretation of the Scriptures or to the liturgical and sacramental tradition inherited from the Fathers of the fourth century.

In the first place, the course itself taken by *The Mystical Theology* follows the tradition received directly from the two Gregories of interpreting the life of Moses, enriched by Saint Paul and going back to Jewish sources. But what is decisive is that, whenever he produces a concrete definition of what he understands by 'mystical', it is always in the immediate context either of biblical interpretation or of liturgical exposition, and often both at the same time.

Speaking of his imaginary master (whom he calls 'the divine Hierotheus'), in a certain passage (which happens often to be mistranslated by our contemporaries³⁷), he explains to us that the latter did not interpret the Scriptures just in an academic way, but according to the spiritual understanding which corresponds to their own inspiration, and which cannot be acquired simply by study but only by experience and then makes us capable of attaining to 'a union and a mystical faith which cannot be the object of an instruction.'³⁸

³⁷ e.g. by Maurice de GANDILLAC, *Oeuvres Complètes de Denys*, Paris, 1943, p.80.

³⁸ *Divine Names*, II, 9 (PG 3, col. 648B).

A little later, returning to these biblical interpretations of Hierotheus, he tells us that in making them he was

quite taken out of himself into God and thus participating, interiorly and completely, in the very object which he was celebrating.

After which he refers to what he has been discussing, Hierotheus's interpretations and the spiritual experience inseparable from them, as τὰ ἐκείνα μυστικά.³⁹

For in the first of these two passages he remarked that 'we have received mystically' the teachings of the Christian dogmas and in particular what concerns union with the divinity in Christ. And he added:

These things we have sufficiently explained elsewhere, and by our famous instructor (Hierotheus) they have been supernaturally celebrated in his *Theological Elements*, whether he received them from the holy theologians or whether he conceived them in plumbing the depths of the [divine] words, or whether he was given understanding of them by some more divine inspiration, not only learning about the things of God but experiencing, and, by this sympathy with them, if one may so speak, being consummated in an initiation to mystical union and faith in them, something which cannot be taught.⁴⁰

The allusion will be noted to what Aristotle said of the pagan mysteries, that they were a matter rather of experiencing than of knowing something, which is here applied to Christian experience.

All this, to repeat, follows upon the double treatise on *The Celestial Hierarchy*, the worship of the Angels, and on *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, the liturgy of the Church on earth.

In the second of those works we find Denis explaining the terms κοινωνία and σύναξις, which he likes to use for the eucharistic celebration, saying that

it brings together our divided lives in the unifying divinization (εἰς ἐνοειδῇ θέωσιν) and, by this deiform (θεοειδεῖ) bringing

³⁹ III, 2, 3 (*ibid.*, col. 681A to 684D).

⁴⁰ III, 9 (*ibid.*, col. 648D).

together of those who were separated it makes us the gift of the communion and the union with the One (ἔνωσις πρὸς τὸν Ἐνν).⁴¹

Let us note, even here where he uses of God the term dearer to Plotinus than any other, τὸν Ἐνν, the radically Christian transformation of his language. Plotinus spoke of a becoming, or more precisely of a being, divine through an unqualified *enosis*, that is, a sheer unification of our being, thus merging into the primordial oneness as well as unity to which it returns.⁴² For Denis, on the other hand, *enosis* always means not a sheer unification of subjects but union with the transcendent object which is the one God: ἔνωσις πρὸς τὸν θεόν, a union which is not fusion but communion (κοινωνία). And it is very characteristic that where Plotinus spoke of τὸ ἔνν (in the neuter) Denis uses only the masculine, τὸν Ἐνν.

In the same context he tells us that the *synaxis* culminates in the communion, the 'mystical distribution' by the Pontiff, who has himself first 'participated in the mysteries'.⁴³ Finally, parallel to the passage about Hierotheus commenting on the Scriptures, we have another on the ideal bishop, according to Denis one whose comportment, when he is celebrating, shows that he experiences the reality hidden beneath the symbol which he handles.⁴⁴ It would be hard to find a more striking confirmation of the fact that, for Denis and for all the Fathers of the fourth century, the mystical is the experience of what the Scriptures reveal to us in the Spirit who has given them to us and of what this Spirit communicates to us in the sacraments, in the eucharist first and foremost.

It should also be emphasized in this connection that the 'hierarchies' of which Denis constantly speaks, and which are for him the very principles of all life, far from being just a copy of the neo-Platonist *σειραὶ*, take the precisely opposite line to theirs, no doubt of set purpose. These 'series' constitute a universe of

⁴¹ *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, III, 14 (*ibid.*, col. 424C).

⁴² *Enneads*, VI, 9, 9. Cf. the judgement of R. ARNOU, *Le Désir de Dieu dans la philosophie de Plotin*, Paris, 1921, p.245, all the more convincing because the author brings Plotinus as close to Christian views as possible.

⁴³ *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, III, 14 (PG 3, col. 445A).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 2 (PG 3, col. 428A).

sealed compartments in a descending gradation from the One. Any communion between them would mean their abolition as distinct and their reabsorption pure and simple into the Nous as the prelude to its own disappearance into the One with no distinctions left. The One itself, moreover, cannot subsist unless it remains ignorant of them.⁴⁵

But for Denis, what he calls 'the celestial hierarchy' of the angels and 'the ecclesiastical hierarchy' of men saved by Christ are only a springing-forth from the 'divine thearchy', which means the eternal intercourse of the Christian Trinity.⁴⁶ And, as is the way with divine persons, they live only one for one another, one in another, in an eternal exchange. And of these two hierarchies, making their link with the divine Thearchy, Jesus is the source and the goal.⁴⁷

So, in the face of the neo-Platonist universe in which there are no distinct beings except as emerging from the One and becoming divided among themselves in detaching themselves from it in its persistent ignoring of them, Denis sets up the Christian universe as that of a love, in God first and then in all that he loves, which exists only in giving all that one has, all that one is. It is the universe of Christian *Agape* opposed at every point to that of the Greek *Eros*.

The Cloud and the Mystical Darkness

So the 'cloud of unknowing', the 'mystical darkness', is not, for Denis, the sheer identification of the divine transcendence with a complete ineffability and incommunicability of the One, as understood, if not perhaps by Plotinus himself, certainly by his successors, the last neo-Platonists.⁴⁸ Nor is it, as it often seems to be in Evagrius, making his theology, if not his spirituality, very equivocal, the pure negativity of a super-knowledge which rejects all knowledge of particulars. Instead, it is the

⁴⁵ Cf. the excellent synthesis of A.H. ARMSTRONG, *Plotinus*, New York, 1962, p.28ff.

⁴⁶ *Celestial Hierarchy*, III, 1 (PG 3, col. 164D to 165A).

⁴⁷ *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, I, 1 and 2 (*ibid.*, col. 373 AB). Cf. *Celestial Hierarchy*, VII, 2 (*ibid.*, col. 208C).

⁴⁸ Cf. H.D. SAFFREY, *Quelques aspects de la spiritualité des philosophes néoplatoniciens de Jamblique à Proclus et Damascius* in *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, vol. 68 (1984), p.169ff.

ultimate ineffability of all personal being, which expresses itself only in the interpersonal communication of love, summed up by Montaigne's wonderful words which say everything about friendship, 'because it was he, because it was I', raised to infinity.

This corresponds exactly to what Hermann Lotze said at the end of the last century, that the divine Absolute, conceived after the manner of the Christian revelation, far from being made impersonal by its freedom from limitations, is, on the contrary, super-personal, personality itself.

Mysticism, Scripture and Liturgy

There is no way, short of making it contradict its whole context, of reading otherwise the passage of *The Mystical Theology* which conjures up its ineffable content:

The good principle of all things is both overflowing and concise, even mute (ἄλογος), as if it had no words or thoughts, by reason of the fact that it surpasses them all superessentially and shows itself without a veil only to those who have passed beyond all that is accursed and indeed all that is pure and who go beyond all the ascents and all the holy summits, leaving behind all the divine lights, sounds and heavenly words so as to enter into the cloud where is in truth, as the [divine] words say, He who is beyond all things. For it was not only to purify himself that the divine Moses was first summoned and then to separate himself from those who were not pure, and, after all purification, to hear the resounding trumpets, to see many lights bursting into pure and manifold rays, after which he separated himself again from the crowd and with chosen priests reached the summit of the divine ascents. But after all that he did not draw near near to God and did not see him, for he is invisible, but did see the place where he was. I believe that the divinest and highest visions and thoughts are the hypothetical reasons of attributes which truly belong to Him who surpasses all thought, moving upon the intelligible summits of his most holy places; then [Moses] was detached from visible things and from those that see and entered into the truly mystical cloud of unknowing, in which he closed his eyes to all gnostic apprehensions and came to that which is altogether intangible and invisible, being all that belongs to Him who is beyond everything, and in the cessation of knowing anything whatever of himself or of another, was united

in a better way to Him who is unknowable, knowing beyond the power of intelligence by reason of knowing nothing at all.⁴⁹

That is confirmed by this shorter but completely decisive passage in the *Fifth Letter*:

The divine cloud is the inaccessible light in which, it is said, God lives.⁵⁰ Being invisible by the excess of his splendours, and inaccessible through the unboundedness of the super-essential expansion of his light, whoever is judged worthy of seeing God reaches him by the very fact of neither seeing nor knowing, having truly reached the goal in Him who is above all vision and *gnosis*, in knowing that he is above everything that is sensible or intelligible.⁵¹

This passage gives the key to the inevitable interplay in all biblical and Christian theology between cataphasis, a positive statement giving God all the highest qualities of his creation while suppressing all their limitations, and apophasis, a negative statement that he does not have these qualities as his creatures have them but infinitely surpasses them, while the meaning which they have for us is not destroyed, although God gives himself to us in the end only in the communication of his love, beyond both negation and affirmation.⁵² For, if the God of Plotinus and the neo-Platonists is the One beyond all multiplicity, as Vladimir Lossky has justly remarked, the God of Denis is as much beyond the One as beyond the multiple,⁵³ as Gregory of Nazianzus had already pointed out.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ *Mystical Theology*, I, 3 (PG 3, col. 1000C to 1001A).

⁵⁰ Quotation from 1 Timothy, 6, 16.

⁵¹ *Fifth Letter*, 5 (*ibid.*, col. 1073A).

⁵² Cf. M. CORBIN, *op.cit.*, especially p. 73ff.

⁵³ V. LOSSKY, *op.cit.*, note 35, p. 28ff.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Oratio theologica*, V, 14 (PG 36, col. 149A).

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

PHILOSOPHY AND MYSTICISM

The preceding chapters have shown the fundamentally biblical and Christian character of mysticism, attested by the semantic evolution of its vocabulary. But that is not to say that the Fathers, particularly those most familiar with the Greek philosophical tradition, refrained from drawing upon it for whatever could help them in expressing their thoughts about what is called to-day 'mystical experience' and what they themselves usually call 'mystical contemplation' or, like Denis, 'mystical theology'.

Christian Contemplation and Philosophy

The word 'contemplation' (θεωρία) is itself an indication of this use of philosophy. But, as the most recent studies of Gregory of Nyssa have established especially well in his regard,¹ the fact that an author fully grasps a philosophical system is no proof that it has taken him over to the extent of emptying his own religious affirmations of their own proper content.

It is rather the contrary, as the case of Gregory shows most of all, that is likely to get near the truth. A vague sort of knowledge about a system, a sort of atmosphere in which one lives without being able to master it, may indeed produce an insidious perversion, but a complete initiation into it will better lend itself to an amended use of this or that element to the advantage of a quite different way of looking at things. It may even be said that such a rectification and re-use of elements

¹ See in particular Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Présence et Pensée, Essai sur la Philosophie Religieuse de Grégoire de Nysse*, Paris, 1942; Jean DANIELOU, *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique, Essai sur la Doctrine Spirituelle de Saint Grégoire de Nysse*, Paris, 2nd ed., 1954; Walther VÖLKER, *Gregor von Nyssa als Mystiker*, Wiesbaden, 1955.

in an earlier system are proofs of the victorious vitality of a quite different *Weltanschauung*.

In the study which we shall now undertake, in this perspective, of the way in which the Fathers of the early Church could make use of Hellenistic philosophy to expound and explain their own conclusions, there are two aspects of the question which we must examine. The first comprises the semantic evolution of terms such as 'contemplation', or of others more or less closely connected like 'ecstasy', and finally the pair 'cataphasis' and 'apophasis'. The second, inseparable from the former, will produce, on the basis of this evolution, a first instance of a comparative study which we shall have to generalize before coming to the end of this work. What we have to decide is in what measure the borrowing or adaptation of Greek philosophy for their own use by Christians, especially in regard to its special vocabulary, implies the presence, or at least the desire, among the philosophers in question, of an experience in any way analogous to what we have been led to describe as the typically Christian experience to which the term 'mystical' was originally applied.

Before beginning this study, it is necessary to repeat, now in connection with philosophy, what had to be said about the mystery religions. The very natural tendency, up to a point an inevitable one, of explaining the unknown by the known, has led more than one historian, or merely translator, to use a specifically Christian vocabulary to describe experiences or expound speculations of a different kind. And, after such a start, it is almost inevitable that one comes to suppose that the true origins of the most specifically Christian realities have been discovered in pre-Christian thinkers or ideas. It has to be recognized, however, that one has done no more than fall into the snare which one had laid oneself. This is an illogicality of which the best writers are sometimes guilty, when they speak, for example, of 'the mysticism of Plotinus', when there is not in all the *Enneads* a single example of the use of this term in any sense whatever.

More subtle but not less dangerous is a readiness to make Plotinus speak of union with God. It is true that he uses (although much less often than his modern commentators and translators imply) the word ἕνωσις, also found in Christian writings, in particular in Denis, in the sense of 'union'. But in Plotinus this

word always means 'unification' and so has no complement, especially not 'God'. For, as he says, it is a matter of unifying oneself to 'become God, or rather to be God'.²

In his system, the One being God in as far as he is one, it is precisely in oneself becoming one that one becomes God or rather becomes him again, distinct beings existing distinctly only in so far as they have left this perfect unity which is what is most divine in God.

Contemplation in the Philosophers of The Ancient World

In beginning our examination of vocabulary with the word θεωρία, the meaning of which passed to the Latin *contemplatio* and its derivatives in modern languages, we must note that it occurs only once in the New Testament Greek, in *Luke*, 23, 48, where it has only the banal sense of physical vision. But the verb θεωρεῖν is found fairly often, especially in the Fourth Gospel, where it has frequently the meaning which we give to 'contemplate'. When the noun occurs, it has only the same simple meaning as in *Luke*.³

In ordinary Greek, there was originally the same general usage which does not distinguish θεωρία from simple vision except by an emphasis on attention (which seems to correspond with the etymology, if, as is probable, θέα stands for simple vision and ὄρω for the act of seeing).⁴

There is, however, an old religious usage which applies θεωρία to a procession or religious embassy,⁵ or to the performance of a tragedy (Aeschylus entitled one of his works Θεωροί).

² *Enneads* VI, IX, 9. [The text used is that of BRÉHIER's edition. The latest translation in English is that of A.H. Armstrong (Loeb Classical Library, London and Cambridge, Mass., 1966-1988, 7 vols.) *Tr.*]

³ See above, p.120, what is said about seeing, believing and contemplating in Saint John.

⁴ The etymology often given by ancient writers deriving θεωρία from θέος seems to be unfounded.

⁵ Cf. *Phaedrus*, 58b and *Critias*, 52b. The θεωροί are especially ambassadors sent to Delphi.

It seems that we get near to the philosophical sense with the Pythagoreans, *théôria* becoming the investigation of rhythms and the numbers which measure them, on the basis of the scale of sounds. It is the combination of this sense with the Socratic enquiry into the Good in itself which will result, in Plato, on the one hand, in the conception of the eternal, immutable, divine Ideas, considered as the source of all reality, and, on the other hand, in a specialization, and at the same time an elevation, of *théôria* as the consideration of these Ideas as themselves the supreme reality.

But we must note that modern commentators are not agreed about what we should understand that to mean. According to Émile Bréhier, it would be, for Plato, only the object of a rational consideration, the conclusion of a syllogism. Yet it is undeniable that this is bound up, for Plato himself, with a search which may be called religious and an exaltation, an enthusiasm, in the etymological sense of a divine presence which takes possession of us. Bréhier, however, maintains that this is just an inconsistency on Plato's part! On the contrary, according to Père Festugière, it is essential to Plato's very notion of λόγος, of the reason, that it goes beyond dialectic. It is difficult, after an unbiased reading of his great book, *Contemplation et Vie Contemplative selon Platon*,⁶ not to be convinced of this, despite Bréhier's refusal to admit it.⁷

That amounts to saying that, on this point, the reading of Plato which the neo-Platonists of early Christian times were the first to make quite explicitly, even though it was a development of his thought, remained basically faithful to it.

We must accept Léon Robin's interpretation of the *Symposium* from the same point of view, emphasizing that love does not only lead to contemplation but is essential to it.⁸ This is, of course, a matter of ἔρως, as opposed to the ἀγάπη of the New Testament, a love compounded wholly of desire. But it is the desire of Beauty, of the ultimate Truth, of the Good in all the fullness of meaning, truly religious, which Socrates gave to it.

⁶ Paris, 1936.

⁷ *Platonisme et néo-Platonisme. A propos du livre récent du P. Festugière in Revue des Études Grecques*, t. 51, (1938), p.489ff.

⁸ *La Théorie Platonicienne de l'Amour*, Paris, 1908, p.213.

It remains true that this contemplation, being that of the Ideas, is wholly intellectual. But we must remember that for Plato, as A. Diès has shown, the Ideas (as much as and more than the Demiurge who produces our world by forming it out of matter) are divine, the Idea of the Good being supremely so.⁹

In Aristotle, on the other hand, contemplation does seem to be nothing but the thinker's last look at the rational demonstration which has brought him to truth. But, as Chroust has recently made clearer than anyone else, Aristotle's religious orientation cannot be denied.¹⁰ For, divine activity consisting in his eyes essentially in thought, contemplation remains, if not directly religious, at least akin to religion. It is true, nevertheless, still according to Aristotle, that man has nothing divine in him save by his thought alone. So it will be necessary for him to combine contemplation with action.¹¹

But it is not the least remarkable achievement of Père Festugière's book to have established that, on this earth at least, far from contemplation's turning people away from activity at all, it is the only possible source of truly good activity.¹² So we have the typically Platonic idea that the ideal sovereign would be one who had lived as a philosopher.¹³

This should be enough to show the absurdity of the modern Protestant prejudice that mysticism has corrupted Christianity by an infiltration of Hellenistic philosophy, making it prefer a purely passive contemplation to charitable activity. Not only does that not make sense because Christian contemplation is only faith's vision of the mystery of the divine *agape* taking complete hold of us (to which alone, as has been shown, the word 'mystical' properly applies), but also, even if it were true that Christian contemplation was contaminated by Platonist contemplation, it could have drawn from it only further reason for striving to do good!

⁹ *Autour de Platon*, Paris, 1927, vol. 2, p. 555ff.

¹⁰ Anton Hermann CHROUST, *Aristotle, New Light on his Life and some of his Works*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1973, p. 221ff.

¹¹ Cf. W.K.C. GUTHRIE, *Aristotle, an Encounter*, (vol. VI of his *A History of Greek Philosophy*), Cambridge, 1981.

¹² *Republic* VI, 500b to 501c. See the commentary of Festugière on pp. 400ff. of *Contemplation et Vie Contemplative selon Platon*, Paris, 1936.

¹³ *Ibid.*, V, 473 cd.

It will be objected perhaps that this might be said about Plato's contemplation but not about that of his successors, especially Plotinus. One might adduce in this interest the anecdote of a Roman magistrate won over to Plotinus's ideas who could no longer bring himself to follow the lictor who had come to conduct him to his tribunal.¹⁴ This story, although handed down by one of Plotinus's admirers, verges on caricature. But Plotinus, it must be recognized, has not avoided seeming to expose himself to this criticism by remarks such as these in an important passage of the *Enneads*:

After drawing near [to the One], and, as far as one can, entering into a relationship with him, one may announce to another what such intercourse is like . . . or, if one considers political affairs beneath one, one may remain, if one wishes, in this higher region which befits one well-versed in contemplation.¹⁵

In fact, what this passage expresses seems to be not so much a disgust for politics (in the sense of the business of a well-conducted city) as a disgust for politicians, which Plato himself, taught by experience, came to feel at the end of his life.

In any case there can be no doubt that, for Plotinus, contemplation was not only much more supra-rational but also much more religious, in the modern sense of the word, than it had been for Plato.

Ammonius Sakkas

The first question which now arises is: where did this change of attitude come from? One need not hesitate to say that, so long as only philosophical intermediaries between Plato and Plotinus are sought for, this metamorphosis is inexplicable.

Now, in fact, we know from Porphyry that Plotinus had been a pupil (and a particularly enthusiastic one) of Ammonius Sakkas.

¹⁴ Cf. what Porphyry says in *The Life of Plotinus*, chap. 7, about the senator Rogatianus. See *Plotinus I*, translation by A.H. Armstrong, London and Cambridge, Mass., 1966, p.27.

¹⁵ *Enneads*, VI, IX, 7.

But who was Ammonius Sakkas? Porphyry also tells us: he was a Christian of Alexandria who had come to teach a very special sort of philosophy, but in the Platonist tradition. Certainly Porphyry tells us that Ammonius Sakkas had rejected the Christianity in which he had been brought up.¹⁶ However, as M. Cadiou has shown in his book *La Jeunesse d'Origène*,¹⁷ there is every reason to believe that this is only an arbitrary conclusion on the part of Porphyry, for whom it was plain that no one could be both a Christian and a philosopher.

However, even if we suppose that the abjuration of Ammonius Sakkas was not fictitious, from the little that we know definitely about his teaching it seems clear that it contained a doctrine of divine transcendence, including the creation of the world *ex nihilo*, of its matter as well as of spiritual beings – a doctrine obviously drawn from the Bible and the whole Jewish and Christian tradition.¹⁸

Philo the Jew

Moreover, even if these things were not so, it is impossible to suppose that Plotinus could have known nothing of Philo (one of the sources, in fact, of Ammonius Sakkas). And Philo, despite all that he could take from Platonism, but also from Stoicism, even from Aristotelianism, that is, from all the sources of neo-Platonism, remains, on all points connected with divine transcendence and creation, strictly faithful to the Bible and to Judaism. Now it is in close connection with these beliefs that he proves to have developed Platonist contemplation in a way which led directly to that in which Plotinus was to make it his own.

Like Plato, and quite obviously drawing upon the *Symposium*, Philo makes much use of the terminology of the pagan mysteries to show what contemplation has to offer. Goodenough's hypothesis, that he had in mind Jewish Alexandrian mysteries, is quite

¹⁶ Cf. the quotations given by Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, Book VI, chap. XIX, 7.

¹⁷ René CADIOU, *La Jeunesse d'Origène*, Paris, 1936, pp. 213ff.

¹⁸ CADIOU, *Op.cit.*, pp. 184ff.

baseless.¹⁹ His source is the divine Logos (which, of course, he thinks of as the biblical Word considered as creative). As Son, first-born of the Father, model and mediator of creation, he not only includes all Plato's eternal ideas but is himself, as it were, the Idea of the ideas.²⁰ This Logos himself enjoys the creative power and the royal power through which God makes himself known, both in the creation of all things and in their providential guidance. He will reveal himself as such with these powers to contemplative souls whose model is Abraham.²¹

For it is not reasoning but ἐπιγνωσις, a recognition of a higher sort, that leads to this, following the example of Israel (the name means ὁ ὁρῶν θεόν, 'he who sees God'), the soul being then brought to God (θεοφορία), undergoing what seems madness (παθοῦσα ὡς ἄφρων). Such, according to Philo, is the contemplation which was at the source of all inspiration for Moses, the prophets and biblical writers in general.²²

This contemplation is essentially a pure gift of God in which he communicates himself, because he is not knowable except through himself (δι' αὐτοῦ μονοῦ θεωρεῖται).²³ Also the very intelligence which he has brought to the greatest purity (ὁ νοῦς καθαρώτατος) cannot see him except thanks to a 'seed' of himself (οὐρανίου τε καὶ θείας μοίρας ἐπιλαχών . . . σπέρμα τὸ νοητόν).²⁴ Even this cannot, however, disclose to us the essence of God as he is in himself, for that surpasses all knowledge.²⁵ But what has been revealed to us implies no less a blinding of our own sight.²⁶ What Philo comes back to with the greatest insistence is, however, the gratuitous character of this contemplation: one sees God only in being the object of his own vision, one comes

¹⁹ E.R. GOODENOUGH, *By Light Light*, New Haven 1935, pp.235ff. and also the 11 volumes of his *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman world* (1953-1964), criticized decisively by A.D. NOCK in *Gnomon*, vols XIII, XXVII, XXIX and XXXII.

²⁰ *Migr.* 103 and *Quaest. Ex.* 11, 124.

²¹ *Quaest. Gen.*, 1, 57; 11, 16, 51, 75; 111, 39, 42; IV, 2, 4, 87 and many other texts, references to which are given in *Cambridge History of Late Greek Philosophy*, ed. A.H. Armstrong, Cambridge, 1970, p.145.

²² *Quis rerum div. heres.*, 14 and 53.

²³ *De praem. et pen.*, 7.

²⁴ *Quis rerum div. heres.*, 13.

²⁵ *De post Cain*, 4ff.

²⁶ *Abr.*, 74-76; *Opit.*, 71; *Immut.*, 78.

near to him only through his own attraction.²⁷ It is a pure gift.²⁸ So no ratiocination can obtain such an intuition.²⁹

All the treatise *On the Contemplative Life* praises the example of the 'therapeutists' (the equivalent, it seems, among the Jews of Alexandria of Palestinian communities like that of Qumran), emphasizing that contemplation requires not only an irreproachable moral life, but a life stripped of everything, given over to constant prayer.

Plotinian Contemplation

All this is certainly not to be found as it stands in Plotinus, but there can be discerned throughout a touch of the notion of the divinity and of the relation which we can have with it which, without breaking completely with the Greek notion of a 'divine' somewhat, diffused through all that is, brings it as near to the biblical God as it is possible to be without actually getting there.

It is even tempting to say that Plotinus's religious aspiration takes him further in the end than his systematic thought can allow, so close is it to the notion of an infinite God, creator of all the finite, and even postulating on the part of this God a personal intervention which is remarkably like the grace of Jews and Christians.

Significant here is the fact that contemplation happens 'suddenly' (ἐξαίφνης): whatever preparation on our part may be required, we could never bring it about.³⁰

Plato had already used the expression, certainly indicating a first transcending of reflective thought, which seems to be called for by the 'ecstasies' of Socrates. In fact, these are mentioned in the *Symposium* by Alcibiades shortly after the topic had been introduced.³¹

But Plotinus, who insists on it on several occasions,³² goes further. Not only does he tell us expressly that he who contemplates

²⁷ *Somm.* II, 226; *Plant.*, 64.

²⁸ *Abr.*, 80.

²⁹ *De post. Cain*, 167; *Leg.*, all, III, 97-99; *De praem. et pen.*, 40-46; *Leg. ad Caium*, V, 6.

³⁰ *Enneads*, VI, vii, 36.

³¹ Cf. *Symposium*, 210c and 220c. Also *Seventh Letter*, 341 cd. It is emphasized below that the word *ecstasy* is not found in Plato.

³² *Enneads*, V, iii, 17; V, v, 7; VI, vii, 34 and 36.

is passive to a divine action,³³ not only that it is through him alone that we see him alone³⁴ – which is exactly what Philo said – but also that

we must believe that one sees him when the soul suddenly receives a light, light which comes from him and which is himself, so that we must think that he is present when he enlightens us, like the God who comes to his temple when he has been entreated.³⁵

Ecstasy in Greek Philosophy

This leads us to consider the role played by ecstasy in Greek philosophy and, in relation with that, the first developments of what may be called a negative theology.

In Greek, as in French and English, an expression which amounts to 'being beside oneself' has on the face of it a merely pejorative sense, applying to states such as madness and drunkenness. We have already seen that such states have a large place in the Dionysiac religion. And we have noted that the same thing, although in less disturbing guises, is found in the cult of the Delphic Apollo.

Plato, however, apparently the first of the philosophers to mention the matter, speaks of a *mania*, an apparent madness which in fact shows a contact with higher realities.³⁶ This is to be compared with poetic inspiration in the dialogue of the *Ion*.³⁷ But it is to be noted that Plato himself does not use ἔκστασις in this sense any more than Plutarch does when he speaks of the Pythian Sybil's inspiration.³⁸

It is again in Philo that the word makes its first appearance in the sense which will be given to it thereafter. He too speaks of an ἔκστασις φρενῶν, which is only a mental disorder; but distinguishes it from a torpor of the senses which allows a free

³³ *Enneads*, VI, ix, 7 and 9.

³⁴ *Enneads*, I, vi, 7.

³⁵ *Enneads*, V, iii, 17.

³⁶ *Phaedrus*, 244a.

³⁷ *Ion*, 534 bd.

³⁸ PLUTARCH, *De Pythiae Oraculis*, 397.

development to the pure intelligence: this, for him, was the case when Adam slept, according to *Genesis*, 2, 21, and Eve was born.³⁹ But he also tells us that it is 'a divine and inspired transport that makes a prophet'.⁴⁰

Yet, in Philo, it seems that ecstasy of this sort is limited to the revelation of some divine secret, not applied to the vision of God in himself. On the contrary, when Plotinus speaks of 'ecstasy', it means undoubtedly losing oneself in the One.⁴¹

This final passage of the *Enneads* has been often quoted, but it is too important not to be given here in its entirety:

Since one must speak of it, he [that is, the contemplative at the peak of his contemplation] found himself caught away, filled with the divine: and, in no way turning from being itself [the One], and not turning to this side or that, but utterly at rest and become rest itself, leaving behind beautiful things and even beauty itself, now passing beyond even the choir of virtues, as one who reaches an inaccessible sanctuary has left behind him the statues of the temple . . . There again there was no vision [in a strict sense] but something different from that: an ecstasy, a simplification, an abandonment (*ἐπίδοσις*) of oneself, the approach to contact, the halt, the impression of adjustment, so far as there is anything to see in the inaccessible sanctuary. As for seeing in any other way, nothing lends itself to that. There are only images, the ways in which the wisest of the prophets have translated in enigmas the vision of God himself. It is a wise priest, understanding the enigma, who can give an account of what is to be seen there, when one reaches the sanctuary. But, even without getting there, judging that this sanctuary is something that cannot be seen, he will know that it is the source and the principle, that it is only like that accords with like, neglecting nothing of the divine realities that can belong to the soul. He asks what remains after contemplation, and that is what surpasses everything and is before everything . . .⁴²

But what, exactly, is it all about? Access to a transcendent God, recognized as such, and to whom one would be united, or rather

³⁹ *Leg. All.*, 2, 9.

⁴⁰ *Quis rerum div. heres.*, 51, 249; cf. *Quaest. in Gen.*, 3, 9.

⁴¹ *Enneads*, VI, ix, 11. Armstrong (*loc. cit.*, vol. 7, p. 342-343) contends that 'there is no good reason for describing the mystical union according to Plotinus as "ecstasy"'. Otherwise there are no significant differences between his text and Bréhier's in the passages quoted.

⁴² *Ibid.*

who would unite himself to us? What follows seems to declare just the opposite:

[The soul] will not go to a being different from itself, but it returns to itself and thus is not other than itself, once it is in itself alone and not in some being but in him [the one], for it becomes that which is not some essence but beyond essence for the soul with which he enters into relationship. If one sees oneself becoming him, one is like him, and, leaving oneself behind, one makes progress as an image towards its archetype, where the journey ends. Fallen back again, but, wakening the virtue within and knowing it all in order, we are made light once more and move by virtue to the Intelligence (the *voûç*) and by wisdom to the One. This is the life of gods and of those blessed among men, freedom from the otherness of things here below and the life which takes no pleasure in them, the flight of the alone to the Alone.⁴³

No doubt Père Arnou was right to say, in his book *Le Désir de Dieu dans la Philosophie de Plotin*, that we are here beyond pantheism,⁴⁴ if that means the belief that everything is God since God is everything. It remains true that we are faced at least with a virtual pantheism, every distinct entity being an emanation from the unique and single God and returning to be this God in returning to the One. This is so true to the mind of Plotinus that in another passage, too little noticed, in which he speaks of ecstasy, he is not afraid of contradicting himself and declaring that in the end there can be no question of anything of the kind. Speaking of the same experience in the *Fifth Ennead*, he said:

But, one might say, it is God that [the soul] then sees. But, if one allows that it knows God, one will have to admit that it is itself

⁴³ Conclusion of all the *Enneads*.

⁴⁴ R. ARNOU, *Le Désir de Dieu dans la Philosophie de Plotin*, Paris, 1922, p.245. Cf. Jean TROUILLARD, *La Purification Plotinienne et la Procession Plotinienne*, Paris, 1955. The only really critical edition of Plotinus is that of Père Paul Henry, used up to date only for the revised English translation by S. Mackenna (London, 1958) and for that of A.H. Armstrong (London and Cambridge, Mass., 1966-1984).

that it knows . . . But this rest, for the *noûs*, is no ecstasy: on the contrary, this rest of the *noûs* is an act freed from all that is alien to the *noûs*.⁴⁵

And yet it is the same Plotinus who declares: one can, one should, prepare oneself, dispose oneself, for receiving this emanation (ἀπορροή),⁴⁶ this illumination (ἐλλαμψις),⁴⁷ but one cannot induce it, set it in motion:

We must not pursue it, but wait quietly for it to appear, as the eye waits for the sunrise.⁴⁸

Moreover, the soul experiences itself as purely passive under the divine action.⁴⁹ How can that be reconciled with Plotinus's general conception, in which the One can indeed be known by the *Noûs*, just as the Soul which gives life to everything does so only by reflecting the gushing out of transcendent life which characterizes the *Noûs* itself. Yet the *Noûs*, conversely, by reason of its own superabundance, can know nothing exterior to itself, and the One is itself above all knowledge, even of itself, and even above existence!⁵⁰

This contradiction seems too plain for Plotinus not to have been the first to notice it. The only reply which seems possible in answer to this is that in his experience he goes beyond his own thinking. It does indeed appear that we have here in the raw the witness of an experience exceeding the means of formulating it which even the great thinker who enjoyed it had at his disposal. No doubt it is no accident that Porphyry put this witness on the last page of the *Enneads*, and still less that neither he nor any of Plotinus's disciples makes the slightest allusion to it, although he mentions Plotinus's ecstasies,⁵¹ but without comment, and himself, like Iamblichus and Proclus, does not breathe a word about such experiences.

⁴⁵ *Enneads*, V, iii, 7.

⁴⁶ *Enneads*, VI, vii, 22.

⁴⁷ *Enneads*, VI, ix, 7.

⁴⁸ *Enneads*, V, v, 8.

⁴⁹ *Enneads*, VI, ix, 7 and 9.

⁵⁰ Cf. A. H. ARMSTRONG, *Plotinus*, pp. 28ff.

⁵¹ *The Life of Plotinus*, chapter 23 (see note 14 above).

The Posterity of Plotinus

In fact the last neo-Platonists, if they carry on and develop in their own way the religious aspirations of this whole evening of Greek thought, seem to renounce any hope of satisfying them in a purely inward experience, but look for it from an artificial galvanization of the Hellenic religions, then in their last agonies. This is, of course, a desperate reaction to the victorious attraction of Christianity, for, whether consciously or not, they found the only escape in giving their paganism a false Christian appearance, transferring it to something that would certainly never have emerged from philosophical thought without the prompting of the Jewish and Christian tradition which came to them by way of Philo, Ammonius Sakkas and, in short, more than one master of Middle Platonism. Modern historians of ancient philosophy are in general not disposed to admit it. This is what Numenius frankly announced, saying quite simply that he was indebted to the Bible and even to Jesus.⁵² And the religious writings of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, which show throughout traces of the Septuagint's vocabulary, are surely a much overlooked ingredient of the synthesis which we call neo-Platonist.⁵³

In any case, Iamblichus, the tutor of Julian the Apostate, who, as we shall see, tried vainly to turn a dream into reality, reveals some dependence (direct or not, it matters little) on Saint Paul. It is certainly he who is behind this final shift of direction among those disciples of Plotinus who could not bring themselves to accept Christianity, as one of their leaders, Marius Victorinus, was to do.

These last neo-Platonists were to bring to the furthest point of precision the paradoxical language of unknowing invented by Plotinus, to describe a knowledge of God which could have no meaning or content apart from an experience more or less similar to that which he himself had described. It is not surprising that thinkers concerned with Christian mysticism promptly seized upon this language, not without immediately altering its application and so its significance and range.

⁵² Cf. Fragm. 102 and 192.

⁵³ Cf. Dom Jacques DUPONT, *Gnosis*, Louvain - Paris, 1960, p.5, note 1 and p.366.

The Development of Apophatic Language

It is to this elaboration in neo-Platonism after Plotinus, preparing for its transposition and reinterpretation by Christians, that we must devote the last part of our excursion into the field of non-Christian philosophies contemporary with the theological developments in the work of the early Fathers.

Jean Trouillard has not hesitated to write that 'neo-Platonism takes the place of Middle Platonism when Platonists start looking for the secret of Plato's philosophy in his *Parmenides*',⁵⁴ for, whereas for Aristotle negative discourse is only a sign of our inability to speak of God, in Plotinus a reinterpretation of the *Parmenides* moves to the going beyond of ἀποφάσις, negative language itself, preparing for the experience which we have touched on, which thinks to reach the very reality of the One which goes beyond all knowledge in that it is above any particular faculty.⁵⁵

Porphry, however, writing next after Plotinus, cannot accept this overthrow of Greek rationalism and maintains that knowledge does belong to the One himself, but one which, unlike any other, does not involve a duality between the knower and the known. Proclus will return to this, saying, in the first place, that, if the One surpasses everything of which we can affirm something determinate, it is more correctly expressed by a negation which, even if it does not make him known,⁵⁶ can alone convey his lack of determination.⁵⁷

But he will go further, himself envisaging an experience analogous to that which Plotinus, as reported by Porphyry, had enjoyed, but one surpassing all reasoning, which is why the latter could make nothing of it. Proclus, however, following Iamblichus, now looks for it in what both call 'theurgy', that is, a return to the traditional rituals.

How does he justify this? His explanation must be given in its entirety:

⁵⁴ *Le Parménide de Platon et son Interprétation néo-Platonicienne* in *Études néo-platoniciennes*, Langages, Neuchâtel, 1973, p. 9.

⁵⁵ Cf. Christian GUÉRARD, *La Théologie négative dans l'apophatisme grec* in *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, t. 68 (1984), pp. 183ff.

⁵⁶ *In Parmenidem*, col. 1192.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, col. 1074, 1-7.

As Plato himself has said in his *Letters*,⁵⁸ what is the cause of all the soul's evils is trying to discover the true character of the One and relying on reasoning for one's knowledge, whereas it is necessary to awaken the One in ourselves in order to know, in some sort, if one may so speak, the like by the like conformably to our particular rank. For just as by opinion we know opinable things, dianoetic things by *διανοία* (dialectical reflection), the intelligible by the intellective faculty which is in us, so we know the One by the One, which amounts to knowing the One by non-being, or again to know the One by negation.⁵⁹

In Proclus as in Iamblichus, this involves a fresh recourse to traditional rites, the meaning of which philosophy should indicate but for which it cannot be a substitute; this is what they call *theurgy*. It is what the *De Mysteriis* of Iamblichus is all about.⁶⁰ And in his writings it goes hand in hand with a firm rejection of the absolute monism in which Porphyry had tried to enclose himself. Iamblichus avoids it in principle by emphasizing that every participation in the emanater by the emanated implies in the former something unparticipable.⁶¹ Proclus follows him, working out a scale of beings thus diversified by successive emanations down to matter (which is only a limit).⁶² It is deployed at each stage on the model of the triad by which each particular being comes to life in a *πρόοδος*, which is only completed in the intelligence, this having its fulfilment in an *ἐπιστροφή*, a 'conversion', returning to the Principle.⁶³ But how can this be regained without abolishing all distinction between the emanated and the emanating?

In Iamblichus, the fundamental triad shows a Christian influence impossible to disguise, the *ἐπιστροφή* working according to the formula faith-hope-love.⁶⁴ Love there is certainly *eros* and not *agape*, but this substitution cannot hide the original source.

⁵⁸ Allusion to Plato's *Second Letter*, 313a.

⁵⁹ In *Parmenidem*, col. 1081, lines 10 and 11.

⁶⁰ Cf. the introduction by Père Édouard des Places to his edition and translation of Iamblichus, *Les Mystères d'Égypte*, Paris, 1966.

⁶¹ Cf. A. C. LLOYD, *The Later Neoplatonists*, in *Cambridge History of Later Greek Philosophy*, pp. 295ff.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 302ff. Cf. H. D. SAFFREY, *op. cit.* in note 48 of chap. 14 above.

⁶³ Cf. LLOYD, *op. cit.*, pp. 308ff.

⁶⁴ *De Mysteriis*, 239. Cf. F. COPLESTON, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. 1, Part 2, Westminster (Maryland), 1962, p. 220.

Proclus, to confine ourselves to matters of vocabulary, may seem to have been more successful in stitching a new patch on an old garment. He puts back *eros* at the start of things: it is *eros*, the desire for beauty, he makes clear, that reaches the truth, which engenders faith in us.⁶⁵

But the surprising similarity of this process to what we have found in Clement, describing the development of his *gnosis*, suggests an assimilation perhaps deeper, not of the mere vocabulary but of something at least of the substance of biblical and Christian faith.⁶⁶

Nothing of this, however, can dissipate the equivocation of an emanating which in no way lessens the source but nevertheless communicates something essential to it or, which amounts to the same thing, of an identification of the definite with the indefinable (or, if anyone prefers, of the finite with the infinite) which neither abolishes the first by the second nor amounts to confusing the second with the first.

It is unquestionably the dissatisfaction caused by this unresolved equivocation, insoluble in the framework of Hellenism, which led the translator and popularizer of the neo-Platonists among the Romans of the end of the fourth century, Marius Victorinus,⁶⁷ to go over to Christianity, and to orthodox Christianity as defined at Nicea. This move imposed itself, it seemed to him, as that from a God, a One who might be the object of the loftiest *eros*, but who, having everything, being everything, had nothing to love, that is, to desire, to an Infinite who is not such only because escaping from all definition, but for that reason incapable in the end of not seeming in our eyes to have vanished into nothing. The positive Infinite which this situation demands can be only the Christian God, the God of the Mystery, who is *agape*, and who, far from being unable to love because he is God and nothing is lacking in him, is God only because he loves beyond measure and with a love that gives,

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

⁶⁶ Cf. the last three sections of chapter eleven, above.

⁶⁷ See the introduction by Pierre Hadot to his translation of the edition of *Theological Treatises on the Trinity* produced by Paul Henry (*Sources Chrétiennes*, no. 68, Paris, 1960).

gives all that he has and all that he is, *because his very being is gift*.

So it is a radical transformation of Proclus's fundamental triad, from being to life and through life to the intelligence, that Marius Victorinus brings about. For him there is to be no descent of a superior to an inferior, of the transcendent unity of the divine to a multiplicity, thus become completely immanent in this world, emanating from God, yet not God and unable to return to him without disappearing into his total lack of distinction. The reasoning of Athanasius against Arius will be for Marius a shaft of light: if God is God, there can be no question of his giving the Son, the Logos, a divinity of the second class: for the Son of such a Father, unless the one is more a Father than the other is a Son, only the *ὁμοουσία* is fitting, the common possession of the same nature.⁶⁸

Coming from philosophy, Marius Victorinus was the first to put his finger on the radical distinction of the living God of the Bible and the Gospel, which contrasts him with the God or gods of the philosophers who are such only as remaining in the solitude of their motionless unity. On the contrary, Marius will say, he is in himself, he is himself, the eternal movement by which the Father, the plenitude of being, lives by casting himself completely into his Son, who knows himself, recognizing his Father as such, only in returning to him, not to be absorbed by him but to exult in the Spirit in their community of life, a life, Life itself, which is nothing but gift.⁶⁹

In the same perspective Denis, beginning with an apophysis more radical than that of Proclus, since for him God is as much beyond the One as he is from the many, formulates finally in his *Mystical Theology* the only super-apophysis which is not pure nonsense, one which does not simply deny the affirmations of the divine Word. For the God who is Trinity reveals himself to his creature precisely so as to take him into what the Greek Fathers call the 'perichoresis',⁷⁰ the ceaseless circulation of his love, or

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 20ff.

⁶⁹ Marius VICTORINUS, *Adversus Arium*, III, 7 (*ibid.*, pp. 456ff.).

⁷⁰ *Celestial Hierarchy*, III, 1 (PG 3, col. 164D to 165B).

rather of that love which is himself. Then truly, but then only, in the mystical experience to which the adjective properly belongs, it will be revealed that the 'darkness of unknowing' is one with the inaccessible light in which God lives, according to the First Letter to Timothy.⁷¹

⁷¹ *Fifth Letter of pseudo-Denis* (PG 3, col. 1073A).

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MYSTICISM IN THE CHURCH OF THE FATHERS

After dealing with the semantic problem of the use of the word *μυστικός* to describe a spiritual experience, we have tried to see how far Plotinus approached a more or less analogous experience and what his disciples could produce by way of an apophatic theology the meaning of which would be transfigured by its application to a specifically biblical and Christian experience. At this point it is desirable to go back a little in time so as to discover more fully how, in the spiritual theology of the Fathers, they developed an analysis of what they were the first to call mystical experience or contemplation, the content of which, as we have seen, was drawn from meditation on Scripture and the Church's sacramental practice.¹

But before starting on this enquiry, it would seem most illuminating to show that the Father who appears to have accepted the most completely, the most simply, the neo-Platonist conception of contemplation, in fact gives an entirely fresh sense to the terminology which he takes over, once there is no longer question of returning to a God who is the One, moving all things towards him, while remaining quite unaware of them, only by a love of desire which he cannot help inspiring in them. This is, of course, Augustine. For it is evident to anyone who reads him without invincible prejudice that what he is concerned with is the completely positive Infinite, the God of love who has

¹ It is impossible to give more than a sketch in this chapter of what I discussed at greater length in *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*, London, 1965, p.228ff., and in *Le Consolateur*, Paris, 1980, p.193ff. But the reader will find here some other aspects of the problems in question.

created us, freely and voluntarily, and has saved us and adopted us by pure grace so as to associate us, in all that we are, with the fullness of his own generosity.²

Augustinian Contemplation

Anders Nygren, in his *Agape and Eros*, had opposed in every respect *agape*, the divine love of the New Testament, to the Greek *eros* as being, even when most highly spiritualized, only a love of desire. Thus he had denounced Augustine as the chief Hellenizer and therefore corrupter of Christian spirituality, his *caritas* being, according to this view, an unnatural synthesis of *agape* and Platonist *eros*. But he himself had in the end the lucidity (and mere honesty) to recognize, in his later work *Reconciliation as an Act of God*, that *agape*, in God himself, is indeed desire in a sense, desire for communion.³ That is enough to refute the accusation. As Burnaby had already shown,⁴ what Augustine's *caritas* stands for is much rather that opening to the infinite which the friendship of the ancient Greeks and Romans (φιλία) suggested room for in the closed circle of *eros*. But only the God of the Bible, the Father of Jesus Christ, could lead it to the complete gift, involving, through its very completeness, the only true and perfect reciprocity.

And that is just what Augustine was to come back to in *The City of God* with his fundamental opposition between love of self even to contempt of God and love of God even to the contempt of self. The working out of the latter, the exposition of it which he was to give, would show that it is indeed a question of entering into a participation of that love of which God himself remains the

² On Augustine, neo-Platonist or Christian, see the opposed accounts of Prosper ALFARIC, *L'Évolution intellectuelle de Saint Augustin*, Paris, 1918, and Charles BOYER, *Christianisme et néo-Platonisme dans la formation de Saint Augustin*, Paris, 1920, also Georges LEBLOND, *Les Conversions de Saint Augustin*, Paris, 1950.

³ Cf. the clear-cut views of his *Agape and Eros*, London, 1957, particularly unacceptable in the abstract logic of their application both to the Johannine writings and to the Fathers, whether it is a question of Gregory of Nyssa or of Augustine, with the much more discriminating views to which he came later in his *Reconciliation as an act of God*.

⁴ J. BURNABY, *Amor Dei*, 2nd ed., London, 1947.

only possible subject, unless he communicates to us that grace of all graces, the love which is essentially gift, even the gift of oneself.

But even in Augustine's earliest writings, where he seems still wedded to a Plotinian view of a return to God which is confused with a return to the depths of the self, it emerges that the simplemindedness referred to above – there was that remark of his that the Platonists would have said everything about God if they had known about the Incarnation – was much less simple than it seemed. For, when we consider the consequences of the Incarnation, it would become clear that Augustine's God who is closer to us than we are to ourselves, and therefore apparently so Plotinian, is perhaps just what the best Plotinian spirituality was moving towards but what the logic of Plotinus's own thinking (and of all Greek thinking) made precisely unthinkable for him. For the germ of all Augustine's development is already in his *Soliloquies*, however neo-Platonist all his expressions may still be. It is not just the allusion to faith, hope and charity which ends the first prayer of the *Soliloquies* that allows one to say this – Iamblichus a little earlier, as we have seen, had done the same without abandoning the idea of a God who is the supreme object of *eros*, but could not be its subject – but rather the very personal tone (not only in reference to himself but also in his conception of him whom he invokes) which becomes more and more striking as the prayer draws near to its end:

... If it is true that I desire nothing but you, grant, Father, I pray you, that I may find you. And if there is still in me some superfluous desire, deign yourself to take it from me and make me capable of seeing you.⁵

Plotinus, even when he hoped only from the divine initiative (how unexpected from such a thinker!) the final revelation of the One in himself, could never have invoked him like this. The fact is that even in Augustine's earliest and most philosophical expressions of contemplation the themes both of the creative God and of the God who draws the soul to him so as to speak

⁵ *Soliloquies*, Book 1, ch. VI.

directly to him underlie even the vocabulary which is most alien to them.

Conversely, a biblical meditation like that of the psalm *Quemadmodum* (41 in Latin versions), so profoundly analysed by Père Maréchal,⁶ can easily start and develop almost to the end in terms of the desire for God formed by the soul (the notion that this theme is alien to biblical inspiration is contradicted by the entire psalm!), and Augustine, here as in the discussion at Ostia, can pass from perceptible beauties to spiritual ones, described as altogether interior – but the soul, not content with insisting on the fact that the meeting with God cannot take place in it but only beyond it, knows well that, from the very beginning, it was God who was not only drawing it but guiding it:

. . . For it is there, it is above my soul, that God has his dwelling. There he lives, from there he sees me; from there he has created me, from there he controls me, from there he provides for my needs, from there he stirs me, from there he directs me, from there he leads me, from there he brings me to harbour.⁷

And how could it be otherwise for him who was to become supremely the theologian of grace and most specially of prevenient grace?

Yet there can be no doubt that the last word of Augustinian mysticism, if there is one (although he never uses the term), is the end of Book X of *The City of God*, which directed the whole construction of this city. That is the vision of an offering in which each soul, in the Church, with the whole Church, in offering the eucharistic sacrifice, is itself offered in what it offers – and that, of course, is the only offering that Christ, *as God made man*, could offer: for, as Augustine says a little earlier, although it is made or offered by man, ‘the sacrifice is a divine reality.’

So it proves that, even for a Christian who declares that the one thing lacking to the ‘Platonist’ is the Incarnation, this Incarnation, taken in all seriousness, could suffice to turn such Platonism, like a glove, inside out.

⁶ J. MARÉCHAL, *Études sur la psychologie des mystiques*, Paris, 1927, p. 189ff.

⁷ *Enarratio in Psalmum XLI*: see the whole text in *Corpus Christianorum (series Latina)*, Vol. XXXVIII, p. 459ff.

Origen and Gregory of Nyssa

This would be all the more the case for the Greek Fathers who had first-hand knowledge of neo-Platonism and were thus able to draw more from it than Augustine could ever do, but only through a transfiguring even of those notions which seem most special to it.

It can be said that almost all the great themes of Christian mysticism down the ages were announced, and often developed, by Origen and that they are basically biblical. In his *Homilies on the Canticle* he applies what is said of the Bride, taking up the oldest Rabbinical tradition, to the people of God (now the Church), and his *Commentary* shows how what is proper to the whole Church is actually accomplished in every faithful soul, the basic theme of the mystical marriage. The theme, so characteristic of Origen, of the spiritual senses (where we find the fundamental biblicism which interprets his borrowing from Plato) can be seen developing out of this. The other themes, that of the climb up the holy mountain after Moses, and above all that of the wound of love made in our hearts by the divine dart thrown by Christ which is nothing but our sharing of his Cross, are not so much adding to the basic theme of the divine espousals with humanity as disclosing its method and approach. Finally the no less important theme of the birth of the Word in the soul represents here, undoubtedly, in its Christian flowering and fruiting, the theme of the divine adoption which, from Ezekiel onwards, has been allied with that of marriage. In other words, it is by this union of the Son-Logos with us and of ourselves with him that we come to share his sonship. Let us just add that, if Origen was the first to point out and justify the supremacy of this last theme (the Gospel theme above all others), earlier or contemporary Fathers, as Père Crouzel has rightly pointed out,⁸ however different from Origen, the anonymous author of the Epistle to Diognetus as well as Clement and Hippolytus, had drawn attention to it.

But it is in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa that we first find a complete recasting of the meaning given to neo-Platonist themes by their adaptation to profoundly biblical and Christian themes.

⁸ Cf. H. CROUZEL, *Origène et la connaissance mystique*, Paris, 1951, p.529.

That has been established by the latest studies of Gregory's work, and this is equally true, although this has not been much noticed in France, of that of the most brilliant successor both of the Alexandrians and the Cappadocians, the great Unknown hidden from us under the name of Denis the Areopagite – St Paul's only Athenian convert (a highly significant choice of name on his part, whereas so many commentators persist in seeing in him only a Hellenizer of the Gospel).

The altogether biblical character of the central theme of Gregory's 'mystical' spirituality, 'epectasis', as Daniélou called it, has been already sufficiently established. But what may now be remarked is that his work is enough to destroy at the source the supposed opposition which some have thought to find between a 'mysticism of essence' and a 'nuptial mysticism'. The latter, according to them, was an affective mysticism, nourished on more or less imaginary visions, the former was a fundamentally intellectual mysticism, assimilating one to the contemplated object, on the lines of the Aristotelian idea of knowledge as *adequatio rei et intellectus*, the identification of the knower with what is known.⁹

In Gregory's *Catechetical Discourse* and his treatise *On the Creation of Man*¹⁰ he has given us the foundations of his whole spiritual theology. On the one hand, it is bound up indissolubly with the divine revelation, meditated and assimilated, which the Scriptures bring us, and the sacraments: baptism assimilating us to the Christ of the Gospels in his death and resurrection, the anointing consecrating us a living dwelling-place of the Spirit which he has thus given us, the eucharist nourishing our life with his own, which is the source of our knowledge of God in Jesus Christ. On the other hand, it is only by a living faith taking possession of a whole disciplined existence that this union and conformation to Christ can be developed, or rather develop itself, into that *θεογνωσία*, that awareness, of what God is in himself.

⁹ Hence the absurd notion of a nuptial mysticism which was only a 'nunnery-mysticism'!

¹⁰ *The Catechetical Discourse* has been edited by L. Meridier, with French translation, Paris, 1908, and the treatise on *The Creation of Man* (PG 45, coll. 10ff.) by J. DANIELLOU and J. LAPLACE (*Sources Chrétiennes* 6, Paris, 1946).

So the 'mystical contemplation' of which Gregory speaks is the essentially mysterious knowledge of God which is found only in a continuous and endless progress in the steps of the Christ of the Cross and of the Ascension, seen by Gregory, as by John, in a single perspective. This 'knowledge', then, can flourish only through an ever-deepening 'union'.

So Gregory says that Stephen was raised to the knowledge of God (κατανόησιν) being, as it were, dissolved in the grace of the Holy Spirit (ἀνακραθείς).¹¹ For, as his Sixth Homily on the Beatitudes explains, 'knowing' means the same as 'possessing' and, a little further on: 'he who knows God possesses thereby everything good that there is.'¹² Again in the Sixth Homily on the Canticle, he says that there will be 'a mutual compenetration, God coming into the soul and the soul being transported into God' and speaks of 'the soul having become susceptible of the divine indwelling'.¹³

It is an essential theme of these last homilies that this union and this knowledge, which are indivisible, are the fruit of God's love, *agape*, finding us in Christ, associating us with the very mystery of his Cross:

The Spouse praises the skilful archer who has so well known how to aim his arrow at her. For she says: 'I am wounded with love.' Here she shows what sort of arrow it is, fixed in the centre of her heart. The archer is *agape*. We have learned from holy Scripture that God is *agape*, he who sends his chosen arrow, his only Son, to those who shall be saved, bringing with the arrow, into him whom it pierces, the archer himself, as the Lord says: 'I and my Father are one, and we shall come and dwell with him'. . . O blessed stroke and lovely wound, by which life pours within, making for itself a door and a path by the tearing of the arrow! For hardly has the soul felt the blow from love's arrow when its wound turns to nuptial joy.¹⁴

And the ultimate object of this mysticism, as of Augustine's, is not just the union with God through Christ of the individual soul in its sharing with the Cross, but the final gathering together of the whole Church in its shared union with God in Christ:

¹¹ PG 46, col. 717AB.

¹² PG 44, col. 1265AB.

¹³ PG 44, col. 839D and 893C.

¹⁴ *Fourth Homily on the Canticle*, PG 44, col. 852.

When perfect *agape* has driven out fear . . . or when fear has been changed into love, then all that is saved will be a unity, growing together with the only Good, and all shall be, the one in the other, one in the perfect love . . . And so, encircled by the unity of the Holy Spirit as by the bond of peace . . . all shall be one body and one spirit.¹⁵

It is in relation to this conviction about the necessary abandonment of ourselves, so as to become one with Christ in his death and resurrection, that Gregory speaks of ecstasy. In the *De Virginitate* he shows the necessity of going beyond oneself (*ἐκβὰς αὐτὸς ἑαυτὸν*), of surpassing one's nature.¹⁶ And in his *Life of Macrina* (his sister) he says that she had gone beyond human nature.¹⁷ Similarly the *Life of Moses* shows him leaving everything around him, not only what comes by way of the senses but what the reasoning intelligence (*διανοία*) seems to discover.¹⁸ And the Sixth Homily on the Canticale says of the Bride that she leaves the senses behind,¹⁹ the Eleventh that she leaves the things of this world.²⁰

This theme must be compared with that of 'sober drunkenness', taken from Philo, in the Fifth and Sixth Homilies on the Canticale,²¹ and that of the sleep of the senses as the condition of the soul's awakening to the sudden appearance (*ἐμφανεία*) of God in the Twelfth.²²

This is the time when the soul receives a 'sense of the divine presence' or rather 'coming' (*παρουσία*), the Bridegroom coming in the night without showing himself gives it to the soul but refuses her clear knowledge (*κατανόησιν*).²³ Daniélou rightly remarks that this is the equivalent of Origen's teaching about the spiritual senses.²⁴

The *De Virginitate*,²⁵ however, maintains that the eyes of the soul are bidden to see 'a light that is intelligible' (*νοητόν*). Yet this

¹⁵ *Fifteenth Homily on the Canticale*, *ibid.*, col. 1116D.

¹⁶ *cd.* Jaeger, p.290.

¹⁷ *cd.* Jaeger, p.390.

¹⁸ II; PG 44, col. 376D-377A.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, col. 892D.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, col. 1000D.

²¹ *Ibid.*, col. 873D and 990B.

²² *Ibid.*, col. 993AC.

²³ *Ibid.*, col. 1001B.

²⁴ *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, Paris, 1944, p.238ff.

²⁵ *cd.* Jaeger, p.277.

is the light which the *Life of Moses* calls a 'resplendent darkness' (λαμπρὸς γνόφος).²⁶ The commentary on this is too important to be omitted:

What are we to make of this entry of Moses into the darkness and the vision of God which he had in it? What we are now told seems to be in some contradiction with the theophany at the beginning.²⁷ Then it was in the light that God appeared, now it is in the darkness. But let us not think that this is in disagreement with the normal course of spiritual realities which we are considering. What the text is teaching us is that *gnosis* of piety is light when it first appears, for it is opposed to the impiety which is darkness and the shadows are driven away by enjoyment of the light. But the more the mind (νοῦς) advances by an ever-increasing and more perfect endeavour to understand what knowledge (κατανόησις) of realities truly is and draws nearer to contemplation, the more it sees that the divine nature is invisible . . . For true knowledge (ἐιδήσις) and the true vision of him whom it seeks consists in seeing that he is invisible . . .²⁸

But to understand exactly what these expressions mean for Gregory we must turn to the decisive text of the Sixth Homily on the Canticle:

The intelligible and immaterial being free of all circumscription escapes limitation, being bounded by nothing. But we have to distinguish, on the one hand, the uncreated reality, creative of all things, which is always what it is, always equal to itself, beyond all increase or diminution, unable to receive any good – and, on the other hand, the reality brought into existence by creation, always turned towards the first cause and conserved in good by participating in that which holds it fast, growing by its increase in good, so that it no longer sees any limit there, nor that this increase can be circumscribed by any bound; but it does see that the present good, although it may seem the greatest and most perfect possible, is only the basis of a still higher good. So there too is verified the apostle's statement that, in tending towards that which is to come [this is the famous 'epectasis'] we find that what appeared before falls into oblivion, for the reality which is always greater and shows itself as a higher good draws to itself the dispositions of those who participate in it and forbids them to look back at the past, driving

²⁶ II; PG 44, col. 377A.

²⁷ The reference is to the Burning Bush.

²⁸ *Vie de Moïse*; PG 44, col. 776C-777B.

away the memory of lesser goods by the enjoyment of the higher ones.²⁹

So the 'luminous darkness' is not, for Gregory, a mere phase in spiritual progress, but a paradoxical discovery which is always deepening by the very fact of its never seeming exhaustive.

This does not prevent us from finding in him a first outline of the three ways, or better (to use the formula of Garrigou-Lagrange) the three 'ages' of the spiritual life which become classical in the later tradition. But they are not so much definite stages as an indication of the curve, the direction, of the onward drive. This was already the case with the succession, in Origen, of *πρακτική θεωρία* (taught, according to him, in *Proverbs*) and the *φυσική θεωρία* (in *Ecclesiastes*), issuing finally in *θεολογία* (in the *Canticle*).³⁰

It is perhaps still clearer in Gregory's Eleventh Homily on the *Canticle*:

The manifestation of God was made first to Moses in light; then he spoke with him in the cloud; lastly, become more perfect, Moses contemplates God in darkness. The passing from darkness to light is the first separation (*ἀναχώρησις*) from false and erroneous ideas about God. The more attentive understanding of hidden things, leading the soul by visible things to the invisible reality, is like a cloud which obscures all that is perceptible and accustoms the soul to the contemplation of what is hidden. Lastly, the soul which has travelled by these ways towards things above, after leaving behind terrestrial things so far as is possible for human nature, reaches the sanctuaries of divine knowledge (*θεογνωσία*) surrounded on all sides by the divine darkness.³¹

The fluidity of mystical experience in Gregory must always be borne in mind. This allows him, according to the point of view adopted, to call the same experience ecstasy, drunkenness or, paradoxically, *ἡσυχία*, 'pacification', or even, as it will come to be called later, 'quietude', necessary for being 'attentive to the contemplation of invisible things'.³² This theme had appeared in

²⁹ *Ibid.*, col. 885A to 888A.

³⁰ See the prologue to his *Commentary on the Canticle*.

³¹ PG 44, col. 1000CD.

³² *Com. in Psalm.* 1, 7; PG 44, col. 456C.

Basil,³³ and Gregory of Nazianzus was also aware of it.³⁴ It was to have its heyday in the Byzantine Middle Age and the modern West.

Evagrius of Pontus

Evagrius, it might be said, puts back Gregory's thought into its Alexandrian sources, Origen, but perhaps equally Clement, in forming for the first time a rigorous systematization, one with a more than ambiguous metaphysical aspect (leading to condemnations of what was called 'Origenism' but is much rather 'Evagrianism'). His psychological insight is no doubt what enables him to survive, although passing under names other than his own.³⁵ Thus he systematizes the soul's progress with the three successive phases which pseudo-Denis was to formulate and impose, at least in the West, as the purgative, illuminative and unitive ways.³⁶ For Evagrius, one starts with what he calls *πρακτική* (that is, a period in which ascetic efforts are dominant and which his psychological gifts clarify definitively), and should then reach *θεωρία* or *γνώσις φυσική* and finally attain to what he calls the *γνώσις* of the Trinity. This physical knowledge or contemplation for which asceticism should dispose us is simply the eye of faith directed upon the world and finding the key to it in the mystery of Christ, which renews our view of things to the extent that asceticism and nothing else frees the whole of us for faith. The way in which he conceives of the development of this 'physical *gnosis*' is significant. It is, he tells us, a contemplation of all created things in the *λόγοι*, the 'reasons', according to which God, in his divine Logos, thinks them from all eternity. These *logoi* cannot be known by us without throwing us open, in a living faith, to the inspired Word.

³³ *Epist.*, 9, 3; PG 32, col. 272C. Cf. *Epist.*, 2, 2; col. 225C and 228A and *Epist.* 14, col. 277B.

³⁴ *Orat.* XXVI, 7; PG 35, col. 1237A.

³⁵ See Irénée HAUSHERR, *Le Traité de l'oraison d'Évagre le Pontique*, Paris, 1960.

³⁶ These expressions are obviously taken from Plotinus's vocabulary, but for him illumination coincides with unification, whereas it is to be noticed that, for Denis, the three ways correspond respectively to the three stages of sacramental initiation: baptism – confirmation – eucharist. Cf. *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, VI (PG 3, col. 504A).

Evagrius distinguishes four levels. This is explained in a passage of *Selecta in Psalmos*, for long attributed to Origen but which Hans Urs von Balthasar has shown to be by him. Commenting on verse 16 of Psalm 138 (according to the Septuagint) 'And in your book they will all be written', he says:

The contemplation of corporeal and incorporeal beings is God's book in which pure mind (νοῦς) is shown thanks to the *gnosis*. In this book are shown also the *logoi* about providence and the judgement, the book by which God is known as creator, wise, provident and judge, creator by what has come into being from nothing, wise by the hidden reasons of these things, provident by the helps [arranged] to lead us to virtue and the *gnosis*, judge, lastly, by the different bodies of reasonable beings, the various worlds which the ages cover.³⁷

If one extracts the basic idea which underlies a phraseology presenting a sort of crude and fossilized Origenism on the metaphysical level, in fact a specifically Evagrian product, it proves to be an idea common to all early spiritual writers, namely that from observing the differences between beings one must gain the outlook of faith which discovers what God wants to make of them, discovering the providential guidance which will bring them to their goal if they do not refuse it, and lastly the judgement which will be the final consequence of their acceptance or rejection of God's plan for them. These αἰῶνες, which are translated here as 'ages', in the biblical sense of the successive phases of creation, fall and redemption, have therefore nothing in common with the aeons of heretical gnostics, and Evagrius, who mentions this again elsewhere, must not be blamed for putting forward what is fundamentally a wholly biblical point of view.

What is true, from the perspective of Gregory of Nyssa and, more or less explicitly, of all the Fathers, is that spiritual discernment must see in the whole reality of the world and its history a spiritual drama, that of the rebellion of the Angels who control the 'physical' cosmos, involving also that of men, whom only the mystery of the saving Incarnation of the eternal Word himself can free and restore to their destiny, that of a 'knowledge' of God

³⁷ PG 12, col. 1661C.

in the sense most true to the Gospels and to Saint Paul, which amounts to recognizing that his love is behind everything and in the end to giving ourselves up to him.

It is only thus that we can grasp how the physical *gnosis* can prepare and lead us to the *gnosis* of the Trinity,³⁸ for it is clear that the *gnosis* of providence is ultimately the recognition of the way of salvation which is that of the Pauline Mystery and the *gnosis* of judgment or of the *αἰώνες* that of the successive periods of history which should bring us, at last, from demonic subjection to what Paul calls 'the liberty of the glory of the sons of God',³⁹ that is, the final and definitive realization of the 'mystery'.

Thus recognized in its true reality as supernatural, this outlook of faith, bearing on everything, tends to concentrate the mind on an awareness of God in himself who has made everything contribute to the manifestation of that love which is what he is and to which he would lead us, the *gnosis* of the Trinity.

Before trying to show exactly what Evagrius means by that, it will be useful to examine how both it and the 'physical *gnosis*' develop.

It has been thought possible to find in Evagrius the source of a distinction frequently made in modern studies of mysticism between 'acquired' and 'infused' contemplation. In fact, it does seem that for him physical knowledge or contemplation is the natural product of asceticism and prayer, whereas knowledge of the Trinity is presented as a pure gift of God. We find the formal statement:

It is within the power of the mind (*νοῦς*) to have physical *gnosis*, but knowing the Holy Trinity is not only not in its power but requires God's superabundant grace.⁴⁰

Still more precisely, the setting aside, required by him, of all representation or conception of God in order to reach this height is itself presented as 'a charism of the sight of God'.⁴¹

³⁸ *Practicos*, 1, 71; PG 40, col. 1244AB.

³⁹ *Romans*, 8, 21.

⁴⁰ *Fifth Century*, 79 (ed. Guillaumont, p. 111).

⁴¹ *Supplementary Chapters*, 2 (ed. Frankenberg, *Evagrius Ponticus*, Berlin, 1912, p. 425).

We shall see, however, that things are not as simple as these formulas would lead us to suppose. But to settle that we must first consider what he says about this supreme *gnosis*.

It presupposes the possession of ἀπαθεία, which, for him as for Clement, is no sort of 'insensibility', but the domination of the 'passions' by charity. That is promoted by ascesis, which characterizes πρακτική. However, it is only when *gnosis* has developed out of πρακτική that ἀπαθεία is gained through the expansion of charity, *gnosis* and charity developing together. Evagrius tells us:

Charity is the higher condition of the *noûs* in which it is impossible to love anything corruptible more than the knowledge of God.⁴²

And *praktiké* cannot take us there unless *gnosis* crowns it:

praktiké is a spiritual method (πνευματική) which purifies the sensible part of the soul. But the force of commandments does not suffice to cure perfectly the powers of the soul unless, on their side, contemplations then take possession of the soul.⁴³

Still more categorically, he says:

It is *gnosis* that heals the *noûs*.⁴⁴

How, then, can one reach this summit of *gnosis* which is that of the Trinity?

When the *noûs* has put off the old man and put on the man who comes from grace, then he will see his own state, at the moment of prayer, like the colour of sapphire or of the sky, as what Scripture calls the place of God which was seen by the elders on Mount Sinai.⁴⁵

The allusion is to *Exodus*, 24, 9 and 10, when the elders of the people were admitted, with Moses, to see the 'place of God'. It

⁴² *First Century*, 86 (ed. Guillaumont, p.57).

⁴³ *Practicos*, 50 and 51; PG 40, col. 1233B.

⁴⁴ *Third Century*, 35 (ed. Guillaumont, p.111).

⁴⁵ *Practicos*, 1, 7; PG 40, col. 1244A.

is clear that, for Evagrius, this place is the *noûs* itself. Does it follow that for him, as for the neo-Platonists, the *noûs*, returning to and seeing itself, sees for that reason God from whom it is not really distinct? What has been said previously about the necessary substitution of 'the man who comes from grace' for the 'old man' shows that this cannot be the case. Let us remember that the setting aside by the *noûs* of all that is not God, far from being the cause of the knowledge of God, proves in the end to be its consequence. And that this vision is itself a pure grace is made perfectly clear by what follows:

The *noûs* will never see the place of God in itself unless it is raised above everything which belongs to things of earth, but it will not be so raised unless it rises above the passions which bind it to temporal things by thoughts, and it rises above the passions by the virtues and above the mere thoughts by spiritual contemplation and above that too when the light appears which, at the time of prayer, carves out (*ἐκτυπώντος*) the place of God.⁴⁶

This makes clear that in Evagrius, as in all the Fathers, formulas which appear to distinguish between an acquired contemplation, supposed to be an achievement of our own, and an infused contemplation, which would not be so, do not have the meaning which our contemporaries are too much inclined to give them. Faithful to Gregory of Nyssa's idea of 'synergy' which sees at work together, from the beginning to the end of our sanctification, the Holy Spirit and our free will, he distinguishes in reality only a moment when the consciousness of our efforts predominates from another when it is the activity of God in us which holds the field.

With still more precision he tells us that it is only by the light of God that we, here below, can come to see him:

Jus. as the light which shows us everything around has no need of another light for being seen, so God, who makes us see everything,

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, col. 1244B.

has no need of another light for us to see him by, for he is essentially light.⁴⁷

But it is true that Evagrius feels no need to explain what makes the final vision that of the Christian God, or, as he puts it, 'of the Holy Trinity'. On the other hand, he has vigorously insisted on passing beyond all forms or ideas as of all sensations, going so far as to say:

Blessed is he who has come to the infinite ἀγνοία!⁴⁸

Hence the severe judgments passed upon his conception of the higher sort of contemplation both by Père Hausherr and Hans Urs von Balthasar.⁴⁹ The passages quoted do not seem to justify these judgments. It is, however, the case that, if he presents this contemplation as luminous (Père Hausherr speaks of his 'mysticism of light'), he seems to have retained habitually from Gregory's constant juxtaposition of light and darkness only the insistence on the rejection of everything definable so as to reach what he nevertheless calls θεογνωσία or θεολογία. We have to wait for pseudo-Denis both to re-establish the equilibrium between the two approaches and to declare the final triumph of divine light over all darkness as well as over all lights which are only of this world. And Denis will also explicitly link up his 'hierarchies', by which God communicates himself to us, to what he calls the 'divine thearchy' of the Trinity. Yet we have to wait again for the Rhineland mystics to give us a more thorough account of our introduction, by mystical contemplation, to the very life of the Trinity.

⁴⁷ *First Century*, 35 (ed. Guillaumont, p.33).

⁴⁸ *Third Century*, 86 (Cf. Hausherr, *op.cit.*, p.149).

⁴⁹ Hausherr says: '... Evagrius has not integrated Trinitarian theology into his mysticism' (*op.cit.*, p.117) and Balthasar: '... Evagrius's mysticism ... is more akin, essentially, to Buddhism than to Christianity' (*Metaphysik und Mystik des Evagrius Ponticus*, in *Zeitschrift für Askese und Mystik*, 1939, p.47). The best introduction to Evagrius remains the book of Antoine Guillaumont, *Les 'Kephalaia gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique et l'histoire de l'Origénisme chez les Grecs et les Syriens*, Paris, 1962.

From Pseudo-Denis to Maximus the Confessor

We were led in a previous chapter to go into so much detail about Denis, especially about certain aspects of his 'mystical theology', so often overlooked although essential to it, that there is no need to add much here. In addition, however, to what has been said already about the firmness with which he connects and relates the angelic and ecclesiastical 'hierarchies' to the Trinity, it is necessary to emphasize that, although this is mentioned only in passing, Christ, for him, is, by his Incarnation, at the heart of all mysticism as well as of revelation, the communication of the biblical Word and the sacramental experience in which this Word finds its permanent actuality in ourselves.

And here it is suitable to insist on the very special character of his 'apophaticism'. This is constantly appearing in his work, and it is not enough to say that it takes us beyond cataphasis. It is necessary to make clear, for this is, for him, something vitally important, that apophasis is not cut off from cataphasis. In fact, far from cataphasis, and, in particular, biblical and dogmatic statements being simply left behind, they receive a mysterious but unquestionable upgrading. God and his actions are beyond all that can be said about them, not in the sense that they are simply negated, which would rule out the application of anything to them in an eminent mode, but in the sense of a supereminence which would verify it beyond everything that we can think or imagine. That is why the 'darkness of unknowing', as Denis so strongly insists, is nothing other than the 'inaccessible light' where, as Saint Paul says, God dwells.⁵⁰ And we can add that this inseparable conjunction, or rather this mysterious identification, of the one with the other, is precisely what the Pauline Mystery presupposes, as is made finally clear to us in the letters written in captivity. For, to repeat, God's ineffability is simply that of *agape*, the love of him whose life is simply one of giving himself without reserve, so different, then, from the static unity so rightly discerned and denounced by Marius Victorinus, the converted neo-Platonist, in the most refined notions of divinity to which Hellenism could attain. And so God's uniqueness does not

⁵⁰ Cf. above, chapter 15, final section.

mean solitude but inexhaustible fecundity, in himself and outside himself.

It must be admitted, nevertheless, that Denis, in his obvious desire to present in Christianity what Plotinus's most loyal disciples were helplessly groping for, can give, and has in fact given, the impression, and doubtless not only to men of our time, of volatilizing humanity, and all creation, in its return to the God from whom it proceeds. This might perhaps justify the supposition that Denis was a follower of the Monophysitism of Severus,⁵¹ which is generally recognized to-day as having been only a verbal one. And this, no doubt, is hard to avoid when one wants to give its full sense to the Johannine statement that we are not only *called* children of God but, in Jesus Christ, actually *are*.

In other words, it is perfectly true, as the Greek Fathers so often declare, that God became man only to divinize us, but we must take care that our salvation is not conceived of as a sort of de-creation. And so, to persuade the orthodox East of the truth of Denis's mysticism, the last and final champion of the total and final truth of the Incarnation, Saint Maximus the Confessor, had to undertake a *retractatio*, in the Augustinian sense of the word (which has nothing to do with a mere retractation), of Denis's cosmic and supercosmic vision. That the West should have taken Denis to its heart (as he deserved, indeed) without knowledge of Maximus's *Mystagogy* explains the ambiguities into which the Rhineland mystics could fall, but without thereby deserving the suspicion of heresy which attached itself to them for so long. All the more does this explain, even though it does not justify, the mistaken interpretations, which have never ceased and no doubt will not cease in a hurry, not only of their mysticism but of all Christian mysticism.

Maximus of Chrysopolis,⁵² faced by a Monothelitism and a Monoergism which tended to make the will, the human activity,

⁵¹ Cf. my *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*, *op.cit.*, chapter 16.

⁵² See what is said of this in my *Le Consolateur*, Paris, 1980, p.285. Add to the basic biography there given: Pierre PIRET, *Le Christ et la Trinité selon Maxime le Confesseur*, Paris, 1983, also F.M. LETHÉL, *Théologie de l'Agonie du Christ*, Paris, 1979 (some of his views seem minimizing on the matter in hand), and the article of J.L. MARION, *Les deux volontés du Christ selon saint Maxime le Confesseur*, in *Résurrection*, no. 41 (1973), p.42ff.

of Christ, disappear into his divinity, became the exponent, the 'confessor', of the diametrically opposite view and, in the end, was martyred for it. In consenting to his redemptive Incarnation, in taking to himself our humanity in the suffering and deadly condition in which sin had firmly fixed it, the Son of God willed and brought about not the extinction but the restoration of the liberty in which man had been created but which sin had so much damaged. This restoration of created liberty is to be seen as the supreme manifestation of divine liberty, already apparent in creation but fully revealed in our salvation as that of infinite love, the *agape* which is the very life of the holy Trinity. So, at the moment when Christ consummates the free offering of the humanity received from us to the Father's loving will, the divine Spirit, who had first given us liberty in the image of the Son conferred on us in our creation, restores it to us for ever in the resurrection as the actual power to love even as we have been loved.⁵³

This theology of the redemption might be called the perfect and complete account of the Mystery according to Paul and the Evangelists. In this perspective, Maximus repeats most of the Evagrius formulas about the soul's transcending everything created as it gives itself to divine contemplation, that is, to divine love or rather the God of love who asks her to become like him by making this love her own. Yet he parts company with Evagrius, paradoxically in the very footsteps of Denis, by pushing Evagrius detachment to the total gift of self, the loss of self in the other, which is proper to *agape*. Thus *theologia*, the summit of contemplation, will be, for Maximus, not a knowledge of God by the rational soul, knowing him in itself and recognizing itself as his image, but a going out from itself, an ecstasy:

When, in the transport of *agape*, the spirit (νοῦς) goes out towards God, it no longer has any awareness of itself or of any existing reality. Filled with God's infinite light, it becomes insensible to all that exists only through that light. Thus the eye no longer sees the stars when the sun rises.⁵⁴

⁵³ See *Le Consolateur*, p.212ff. and 285ff.

⁵⁴ *First Century on Charity*, 10, PG 90, col. 964 and *Sources Chrétiennes*, 9, Paris, 1943, p.71.

And again:

The spirit is rapt, in the energy of its prayer, by the infinite light of God: it loses all feeling of itself and other beings in that of him who, through *agape*, brings about this illumination.⁵⁵

It must be emphasized that this is seen by Maximus precisely as the fruit of the taking up into the Son made man of our human will in all its weakness so as to bring it, in free consent, even to a death accepted on behalf of those who inflict it, and so for it to make its own 'the love of God poured into our hearts by the Spirit'.⁵⁶ What took place in Christ must also take place in us, the *Mystagogy* concludes, if receiving in faith the Gospel of Christ who died and rose again, we are united with his death and resurrection as we take part in the Eucharist. Thus there is imposed upon us our whole life, the *τρόπος*, the manner, of the Son's own filial existence, the same in his earthly life as in the bosom of the Father.

That this does not dehumanize us any more than the humanity of Jesus is abolished by his assumption into the divinity is made clear by Maximus throughout his *Centuries on Charity*, perhaps the most Pauline of all patristic writings:

God, good and passionless by nature, loves equally all men, the work of his hands; but he glorifies the just, united intimately with him in his will, and, in his loving kindness, he has pity on the sinner whom he seeks to convert in this life by his instructions. So the man whose will has become good and free loves all men equally, the just for their nature and their good will, sinners for their nature and with the compassionate pity which is felt for a madman who escapes into the night.

Perfect charity does not allow, between men who have the same nature, any distinction based upon differences in their characters. It never regards anything but this unique nature; it is attached with equal strength to all men, to the good as to friends, to the wicked as to enemies – but to do good to them, to help them, to endure patiently whatever they may do to one, obstinately refusing to see

⁵⁵ *Second Century on Charity*, 6 (*ibid.*, p. 95); PG 90, col. 685.

⁵⁶ *Romans*, 5, 5. Cf. *Ambigua*, 42 and *Opuscula theologica et polemica*, 16 (PG 91, col. 1345D to 1348C and 196C to 197A).

malice in it, even suffering on their behalf if opportunity arises. In this way perhaps we shall make friends of them; at least we must never be unfaithful to ourselves but must show to all men, equally, and unceasingly, the fruits of charity. Our God and Lord Jesus Christ has indeed shown his love by suffering for all humanity and giving to all the world, as a free gift, the possibility of rising again one day, each remaining master of his deserts whether for glory or for punishment.⁵⁷

This must be kept in mind if we are to understand the central passage of the *Mystagogy*, in which we find again, along with the most specific formulas of the Christian Mystery, the transfigured meaning of formulas taken both from the pagan mysteries and from those of neo-Platonism:

The declaration by all the people, at the end of the mystical theurgy, 'One only is holy!' together with what follows signifies this conjunction (συναγωγή) and this union and unification (ένωσις) of those who have mystically and with full understanding (σσιφώς) initiated and accepted according to God into what is most hidden (κρυπτον) of the divine unity and simplicity – what will be accomplished in the incorruptible age of the intelligences: then, beholding (ένορτεύοντες) the light of the invisible and ineffable glory, they will be capable of the blessed purity, together with the powers on high. After that, as the crown of everything, comes the sharing in the mystery, which, assimilating them to itself, makes like to the essential Good, by a sharing in grace, those who receive it worthily. To them nothing is now lacking for them to be said and to be called gods by a disposition (θέσει) granted to men gratuitously. In that way, these can be adopted by grace, because God will make them wholly filled with all that he is, leaving nothing in them empty of his presence.⁵⁸

This suggests that we should make quite clear what the Fathers in general mean by 'divinization' (θέωσις and θεοποίησις).

⁵⁷ *First Century on Charity*, 25 and 71, PG 90, cols. 965 and 976 (*Sources Chrétiennes*). 9, p.74 and 84).

⁵⁸ *Mystagogy*, XXI; PG 91, col. 696D to 697A.

Divinization

So far no complete and satisfactory study has appeared of the precise meaning of this notion in the Greek Fathers.⁵⁹

Here, as with the use of the word 'mystical' about a religious experience, despite what is still repeated without a shadow of proof, it must be recognized that the idea of a 'divinization' of religious people is purely Christian and has no real antecedent in early Greek writing. According to pagan Greek thinking, in general, divinity has many degrees. For Platonism, the human soul possesses it of its nature. And, as Plotinus says, by *ἔνωσις*, that is, the simplification or reunification of its being when it regains its original condition, rather than again becoming God, it simply recovers the consciousness of being so.⁶⁰

Thus *θεοποίησις* means just the making of idols, or, later on, the apotheosis (a purely legal and ceremonial affair) of the last Roman Emperors. It is the same with the verbs *θεοποιεῖν* and (a rarer usage) *θεοῦν*. And the noun *θέωσις* is found only in Christian writings.

But what do the words mean in these writings when they are applied to a faithful Christian? Certainly nothing but the reality of our sharing in the divine sonship recognized as proper to Jesus, the Son of God made man precisely to offer us this possibility.

This is, quite explicitly, the sense in which Athanasius uses these expressions, which had been used already by Clement and Origen.

⁵⁹ A summary has been given in my *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*, *op. cit.*, p. 416-20. Jules GROSS, *La Divinization du chrétien d'après les Pères grecs*, Paris, 1938, is not really critical, nor are the articles of Mme Lot-Borodine, *La Doctrine de la déification de l'homme des Pères grecs* in *Revue d'histoire des religions*, p. 5ff. of vol. 106 (1932) and p. 525ff. of vol. 107 (1933), republished in one volume, Paris, 1970. My confrère Norman Russell is preparing a thesis on the subject under the direction of the Orthodox Greek bishop Kallistos Ware at Oxford. It has not been possible to consult a volume published in Greek at Athens in 1951: *L'enseignement sur la déification de l'homme des Pères grecs jusqu'à saint Jean Damascène*. But there is a good introduction to the subject in the article *Divinization* (II) by I.H. DALMAIS in vol. III of *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, Paris, 1957.

⁶⁰ *Enneads*, IX, 9. *θεωθῆναι* or *ἀποθεωθῆναι* are found only in two passages of the *Corpus hermeticum*; it is very characteristic that they are found only in connection with this *γνώσις* of plainly biblical origin.

The former has told us that 'Christ deifies man by heavenly doctrine' (οὐρανίῳ διδασκαλίᾳ θεοποιῶν),⁶¹ the second that 'the *noûs* is deified (ἐν οἷς θεωρεῖ θεοποιεῖς).⁶² Athanasius says, already in his *De Incarnatione*, that 'the Word was made man so that we might be made God.'⁶³ This was the nub of his argument throughout the Arian controversy: how could the Son make us sons of God by grace, but a truly real grace, unless he were Son by nature?⁶⁴ In the same way, in the later controversy about the Holy Spirit, he uses the same argument: if it is in fact by receiving the Spirit of Christ that we are made sons in him, how could the Spirit himself not be also divine?⁶⁵

The continuation of that last passage makes it clear that it is a question, not of making us gods by God's side, but of insisting on the reality of our participation, in consequence of the redemptive incarnation, in the very Sonship proper to Jesus.

Basil of Caesarea says the same, calling the Spirit 'him who deifies all others' and man 'him who is deified by grace'.⁶⁶

Gregory of Nazianzus is the first to use θεοῦν and θέωσις in the same sense. In his *Fifth Theological Discourse* he asks: 'If the Spirit ought not to be adored, how is it that he divinizes me in baptism?'⁶⁷

But it is Denis who uses the expression most regularly and who defines its import most exactly when he says: '*theosis* is assimilation and union with God so far as it is allowed, and a continual love (ἀγαπήσις) of God and of divine things is the common goal of all the hierarchies.'⁶⁸

None of the Fathers, however, has been so formal as Maximus in making clear that it is the entry into a sharing of *agape*, so exclusively proper to divinity, that is the content of divinization.

⁶¹ *Protrepticus*, XI (PG 8, col. 233A).

⁶² *Com. in Jo.*, XXII, 17 (PG 14, col. 817C).

⁶³ *De Incarnatione*, 54 (PG 25, col. 192B).

⁶⁴ Cf., for instance, 1 *Contra Arianos*, 70 (PG 26, col. 296AB).

⁶⁵ Cf. *First Epistle to Serapion*, 24 (PG 26, col. 588A).

⁶⁶ *Against Eunomius*, 111, 5 (PG 29, col. 665BC).

⁶⁷ *Fifth Theological Discourse*, 28 (PG 35, col. 1221B).

⁶⁸ *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, 1, 47 (PG 3, col. 376A).

Learned Mysticism and Experience of the Simple

We must end this chapter with stressing that the Fathers who were the first to systematize mystical experience, whatever use of Greek philosophy they may have made for the purpose, have never sought to do anything but elucidate the general experience of the most fervent of the faithful, especially the simplest monks who had as a rule no other basis for their experience than the Word of God and the liturgy, and often, as in the case of Saint Antony,⁶⁹ chiefly, even exclusively, the Word of God in the liturgy.

This has been shown recently in a most convincing way by Don Garcia Colombas in his book *El Monacato Primitivo*⁷⁰ and particularly in his detailed study of what the Desert Fathers meant by 'the remembrance of God' or *διόρρασις*. And this is only a very extensive verification of what has been established by M. Antoine Guillaumont in his seminal work, *Aux sources chrétiennes du monachisme*.⁷¹

And it is this popular mysticism, nourished on the New Testament and especially on meditating the *Acts of the Apostles*, that was to find its most unsophisticated expression in the Homilies and other works attributed to Macarius the Egyptian.⁷²

Here we find no speculations about the contrasted aspects of light and darkness in mystical experience developed in the tradition of Origen and the two Gregorys and systematized by Evagrius and then by Denis. The only contrast is that between the light of this world, which asceticism makes us regard as darkness, and the light of Christ of which Saint Paul and Saint John speak, into which we must plunge while we are still on earth.

We shall return later to this tradition of a non-speculative mysticism, which will run through the Middle Ages in the West as well as in the East, side by side with a mysticism which can be

⁶⁹ Cf. Athanasius, *Vita Antonii*, 1 and 2 (PG 26, col. 841BC).

⁷⁰ Garcia COLOMBAS, *El Monacato primitivo*, Madrid, 1983, p.363ff. Cf. R. DRAGUES, *Les Pères du désert*, Paris, 1949, p.LII and the article *Contemplation*, signed Lemaître but considered to be the work of Père Hausherr, in vol. 2 of *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, col. 1856-1857.

⁷¹ Paris, 1938.

⁷² See below, p.283.

called a theological one, in the later sense of that adjective. There can be no doubt that this popular mysticism, which, to repeat, that of the learned does no more than extend, has degenerated into sheer illuminism as in the charismatic experiences of the Corinthians in the apostolic age and, in the patristic one, in the form of what has been called 'Messalianism'. But we shall have to make clear that for neither of these two forms of Christian mysticism, always inseparable, have these deviations ever been essential or inevitable.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MYSTICISM IN THE MEDIEVAL WEST

It is too readily accepted that the influence of Augustine on Western spirituality in the Middle Ages, and on mysticism in particular, has been, if not the only one, at least the most important. In fact, although pseudo-Denis was unknown until the translations of Hilduin and then of Scotus Erigena appeared, and also the essentials of the Greek tradition (especially Origen and Gregory of Nyssa) until the twelfth century, two major writers had already publicized, in monastic circles especially, the basic principles of Eastern patristic mysticism, Cassian in the first place and then Gregory the Great.

Cassian

Cassian was just as able a popularizer of the mysticism of the Greek Fathers as he was of the asceticism of the Egyptian monks. It is noteworthy in this connection that he had been a particularly close friend of Pope Saint Leo the Great, whose preaching on the redemptive Incarnation, like his influence on the formularies of the Roman liturgy, was to give, in Latin, magisterial expression to the theology of the Mystery, in the direct line of Saint Paul and Greek Patristics.

In Cassian we have a very discriminating and, so much the more therefore, an effective popularizer of the Evagrian tradition, combined, most adroitly, with the soundest and purest elements in that non-speculative monastic tradition, which, as we have said, the Macarian homilies had undoubtedly set forth, and this with a vigour and a power of suggestion all his own.¹

¹ See my *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers* (London, 1965), p.500ff. Cf. Owen CHADWICK, *John Cassian*, Cambridge, 1968, and the introduction by Dom E. PICHERY to *Sources Chrétiennes*, 42, 54 and 64.

First and foremost Cassian presents contemplation as arising from meditation on the Scriptures, altogether in the spirit of Origen's systematizing, that is, as seeing in the Mystery of Christ the key of this interpretation. His Fourteenth Conference is completely categorical on the point.²

It is through the constant practice of this meditation, along with an ascetic life governed by it, that the heights of contemplation are attained. He, like Evagrius, calls this 'pure prayer', and, for him, it unites with transcending all particular thoughts or imaginings the illuminated fervour of Macarian prayer:

In this way the soul will come to the purity of prayer which was the topic of the previous discussion, according to the grace which the Lord has deigned to give us. This prayer is not concerned with thinking about any image, nor is it expressed by speech or in any words, but it bursts out like a blazing fire, an ineffable transport (*cordis excessus*), the impetuosity of an insatiable spirit. Torn away from the senses and all that the eye can see, it is with unspeaking groanings and sighs that the soul lays itself open to God.³

This theme returns constantly in Cassian. He tells us again:

[This prayer] goes beyond all human feeling. There is no sound made, no movement of the tongue, no word uttered. The soul, bathed in light from above, no longer uses human language, which is too feeble. But there is a sort of rising flood of all holy affections together at once: a superabundant source from which prayer bursts out and overflows, spreading out in an undescrivable way towards God. The soul says so many things in this short instant that it could hardly express them or even go over them again in memory when the experience is over.⁴

Concentrating our attention upon God alone, prayer is essentially the plunging of the soul into the divine love which is bestowing itself:

It is a gaze upon God alone, a great fire of love. The soul is dissolved and sunk into this holy tenderness and talks with him as with a Father, very familiarly, very affectionately.⁵

² Chapters VIII and X in particular.

³ *Tenth Conference*, XI.

⁴ *Ninth Conference*, XXV.

⁵ *Ninth Conference*, XVIII.

The Tenth Conference calls it the direct effect of the sacerdotal prayer of Jesus (*John*, 17), itself the basic communication to humanity of the very love which is the eternal life of God in himself:

Then we shall see the complete fulfilment of the prayer which our Saviour made to his Father for his disciples: 'That the love with which you have loved me may be in them . . . That they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, so that they also may be one in us.' The perfect love with which the Father has first loved us will come to our hearts in virtue of this prayer, of which our faith tells us that it cannot be fruitless. And these will be the signs of it: God will be all our love, all our desire, the end of all our seeking, all our thought, our life, our speech and our very breathing. The unity of the Father with the Son and of the Son with the Father will flow into the depths of our souls; and just as God loves us with a true and pure charity which will never die, so we shall be united with him by the indissoluble bond of an unfailing charity, attached to him in such sort that he will be all our breathing, all our thought and all our speech.⁶

For Cassian, explicitly, to reach this prayer is the sole purpose of the Christian life in general and of the ascetic life in particular:

The whole edifice of the virtues has only one goal – to reach the perfection of prayer; without this crowning, which puts its various parts together to form a solid whole, it will have no firmness or permanence. Without the virtues, the constant tranquillity of prayer of which we speak will not be gained or consummated; and, correlatively,, the virtues, which serve as a basis for it, will not reach perfection without it.⁷

We are brought to it in a special way by psalmody, as understood by Cassian, that, in its making us share in the psalter's own inspiration, always seen in the perspective of the fulfilment of all Scripture in the redemptive Incarnation:

Vivified by this food with which [the adept] is constantly nourished, he is so far penetrated by the sentiments expressed in the

⁶ *Tenth Conference*, VII.

⁷ *Ninth Conference*, X.

psalms that he now recites them not as composed by the prophet but as if he himself were their author, and as a personal prayer, with sentiments of the deepest compunction; at least he considers that the psalms were composed precisely for him, and he knows that what they express has not taken place only of old in the person of the prophet but that they still find their fulfilment every day in himself. . . .⁸

And again it is necessary that such a prayer should tend to fill his whole life. Thus Cassian is the first in the West (Diadochus of Photike, to whom we shall return, seems to be the first in the East) to recommend a single prayer called *monologistos*, one which consists of a single formula constantly repeated because it says everything that matters. The special example which he gives is the *Deus in adiutorium*, which became in the West the introduction to all the hours of the divine Office:

O God, come to my aid.
Lord, make haste to help me!

This is the fundamental theme of the Tenth Conference, attributed by Cassian to Abbot Isaac and quoted at length above.

Gregory the Great

A century later, Gregory the Great⁹ will also make everything begin, in the same spirit, with meditating on Scripture as the nourishment of prayer. In this meditation, he tells us, it is a matter of coming to know 'the heart of God'.¹⁰ It shows us the Son of God coming to bring us back to his Father, the Spirit being, as it were, the tongue of the Son.¹¹ All the prophets help us on to

⁸ *Tenth Conference*, XI. This leads immediately to what has been quoted above about pure prayer.

⁹ Cf. Jean LECLERCQ, *La Spiritualité du Moyen Age*, Part I, Paris, 1961, p. 11ff.

¹⁰ *Epist.*, IV, 31. See the comments of B: DE VRÉGILLE, in the article *Écriture sainte* of the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, fasc. XXV Paris, 1958, col. 169-176 and the whole account of Dom Jean LECLERCQ, *op.cit.*, p. 29ff.

¹¹ *Hom. in Ev.*, XXX, 5.

our acceptance of this mystery of Christ, and the ascetic life has no other purpose than our conformation to it.¹²

The goal, Saint Gregory constantly reminds us, is 'to see God'. To speak strictly, this vision is reserved for the life to come, but we can prepare ourselves for it, even inaugurate it in some sort, by progressing in contemplation.¹³ For there is, he says, before the vision itself, a *visio per appetitum*.¹⁴ It is a sightless vision which the *mens* (the intellective soul), reason being only one of its functions, attains in faith as just a savour, as opposed to satiety.¹⁵ So he will say that it is by love awakening in our hearts that we come to this: *per amorem agnoscamus*.¹⁶ In fact, love itself is knowledge: *amor notitia est*.¹⁷

Here below, in his view, this does not allow us to pass beyond the 'circumscribed images' which he contrasts with the uncircumscribed light of the divinity. If certain saints have managed to do so, it is because a mystical death has granted them a foretaste of this vision of the eternal light.¹⁸ But it is possible, without going so far as that, for any fervent soul to be 'rapt out of herself, raised above herself'.¹⁹

But this is never more than a fugitive transcending: *raptim, per transitum, quasi furtim*, only a brief pause in which one sees some feeble reflection, *tenuiter, exiguum valde, vix parum aliquid*.²⁰ Nevertheless the soul is so overwhelmed by it that it falls back under the weight of its own unworthiness²¹ – hence the sufferings, the humiliations, even the temptations, which follow. That is what he calls the *reverberatio*. But, thus brought back to the

¹² *Moralia in Job*, XV, 20.

¹³ Cf. the article by A. MÉNAGER, quoted and summed up by Jean LECLERCQ, *Les divers sens du mot 'contemplatio' chez saint Grégoire le Grand* in the *Supplément de la Vie Spirituelle*, LIX (1939), p. 145ff. and the thesis for the Gregorian University of G. FARKAS, *Typische Forme der Kontemplationem*, 1948.

¹⁴ *Moralia in Job*, XXII, 6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, VIII, 49.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, X, 13; cf. *Hom. in Ev.*, XXVIII, 4.

¹⁷ *Hom. in Ev.*, XXVIII, 4.

¹⁸ *Moralia in Job*, XXVIII, 89. Cf. the commentary of R. GILLET, in his introduction to the edition of *Sources Chrétiennes*, Paris, 1950, p. 27ff.

¹⁹ *Moralia in Job*, XXIV, 11.

²⁰ Cf. *In Ezech.*, I, 5; *Moralia in Job*, VIII, 50; *Dialogues*, II, 35.

²¹ *In Ezech.*, I, 5-12.

realization of its lowliness, the soul, in this very rejection, loves only the more: *tamen repulsa amat*.²²

Light from the East

Gregory the Great, who was both a monk and papal representative at Constantinople, became the link, all the more effective because he was instructively pastoral, with the simplest forms of what may be called the biblical, liturgical and monastic mysticism of the ancient East, although his work was not untouched by learned influences. The Benedictine tradition will be nourished chiefly by himself and by Cassian, until, at the time of its division into Cluniacs and Cistercians, there was indisputably a first recovery in the West of a knowledge of what is best in the Greek Fathers and the use that can be made of it.²³

The first translation of Denis's work to give some knowledge of it to the West²⁴ was made by Hilduin, Abbot of Saint Denis near Paris, who, whether in good faith or not, propagated the legend which identified 'Denis' not only with the Apostle's convert at the Areopagus but also with the first bishop of Paris. But it was that of Scotus Erigena and his enthusiastic but highly personal use of it that won it popularity. From then on its influence went on growing. The importance given to Denis by Saint Thomas Aquinas, who put him on the same level of authority as Augustine, is typical.

²² *Moralia in Job*, X, 13. On all this see Ménager and Gillet in their *op.cit.* It is surprising that Claude DAGENS, in his very detailed study, *Saint Grégoire le Grand*, Paris, 1977, is concerned only with the aspect of interiority in Gregorian contemplation.

²³ On this rediscovery in the West of the Eastern tradition, see the works of Dom DÉCHANET mentioned below. There has been much discussion about the extent of this discovery, the American Cistercians, in particular, in their (otherwise excellent) translations of their twelfth-century authors, insisting with surprising vigour that everything which William of Saint Thierry, especially, could have known of the Greeks was known to him only by way of Saint Augustine. The contents of the library at Clairvaux in Saint Bernard's time is enough to refute this absurdity, even if Dom Déchanet, in the first enthusiasm of his discoveries, may have sometimes exaggerated them a little.

²⁴ See Maieul CAPPUYNS, *Jean Scot Erigène*, Louvain-Paris, 1933.

But in fact it is through William of Saint Thierry and the use he made of Greek Patristic mysticism that it spread through the Latin Church from the twelfth century onwards, even more vigorously, perhaps, than in the Byzantine East itself.²⁵

William of Saint Thierry and his Influence

The best way of realizing how immersed William was in both the Greek tradition and the Latin (particularly the Augustinian) is to note how he rethought the three ways or stages of the spiritual life according to the Greeks by combining his Augustinianism with the teaching which is passed on through Origen and Gregory of Nyssa to Evagrius and Denis. On the basis of the tripartite anthropology of Saint Paul and of Origen,²⁶ he made this complete synthesis in his very personal conception of fundamental monastic observance: the obedience which reveals itself as the journey from the sham liberty of the fall to the liberation wrought for us by Christ made ours by the Holy Spirit.²⁷

The tripartite view of the soul distinguishes in it the animal soul, that is, the form of the body (*anima*, ψυχή), the intellectual soul (*mens*, νοῦς) and the soul which has become wholly spiritual (*spiritus*, πνεῦμα). These are not three different souls, nor even three parts of the soul, but its various situations, according as it remains, as a result of the fall, under the domination of the *pathé*, the egoistic and sensual passions, or recovers the meaning and use of its rational nature in a reanimated awareness of the self, or finally transcends itself, goes out of itself by handing itself over entirely to the Spirit of God.

Thus there is a first phase of spiritual development in which the soul has only faith to recall it to the meaning of what it is

²⁵ Cf. J.M. DÉCHANET, *Aux sources de la spiritualité de Guillaume de Saint-Thierry*, Bruges, 1940; *Guillaume de Saint-Thierry*, Bruges, 1942, and *Guillaume de Saint-Thierry; aux sources d'une pensée*, Paris, 1973.

²⁶ Cf. H. DE LUBAC, *Théologie d'occasion*, Paris, 1985.

²⁷ See my *The Cistercian Heritage*, London, 1958, p.92ff.

in itself and its spiritual destiny. This is obedience in its most elementary form (*obedientia necessitatis*); that is, submission to the will of those, our spiritual fathers, of whom faith has taken complete possession, will shift us towards an elementary recovery of a practical love of what God loves, which we are still unable to experience instinctively. And that will lead us gradually to recentre the soul in a grasp of true realities. So it will pass, by the development of what William calls *scientia*, the *gnosis physike* of the Greeks, to the *vita rationalis*, a life corresponding to God's plan for us in this world.

Here obedience is no longer limited to doing blindly the enlightened will of our spiritual fathers; going beyond their injunctions, it follows the example, now interiorly grasped, of the brethren who are further advanced in faith than ourselves. Thus love, blind until now, or not felt, if you like, becomes *dilectio*, an intelligent affection for the good. And at once the image of God in us, of which only a vestige remained in the ubiquity of the soul in regard to the body like that of God in regard to the world (an idea taken from Gregory of Nyssa), the *mens* of Augustine, that is, awakes from its torpor through *cogitatio*, personal reflection on the purpose of its existence.

Now we move towards the final phase, when the soul, indeed the whole human being, becomes 'spirit', dominated, assimilated, as it is, by the *spiritus*, the divine *pneuma*. This is in the full sense the *vita spiritualis*, in which *scientia* is transcended in the contemplation of God himself, corresponding to the Augustinian *sapientia*. Then we are, in the matter of obedience, under the direct control of the Holy Spirit. This will put us at the service not just of our brethren but of all men, the bad as well as the good. Divine love is no longer in us as a dry willing or even just as affection but as a complete unification of our wills in the unity of the Spirit with God, the fruit of the consummated union of the divine Spirit with our spirits. And then also (William is still following Gregory of Nyssa) we have gained the only true liberty, corresponding to the fullness of love according to Augustine, when it emerges from the *cogitatio*, rectified in terms of God, of the *mens*, the created spirit.

It seems that one might say that to William's first phase cenobitical monasticism corresponds, to his second eremiticism and to his third a transcending of anything institutional in the

perfection of sonship, 'the liberty of the glory of the children of God'.²⁸ In this perspective, William's eucharistic teaching shows us in the eucharistic celebration, in a way very reminiscent of Origen, the 'sign' of the sacrifice once offered by Christ in which faith, advancing towards contemplation, grasps more and more effectively the presence, beneath the sign, of the reality of his unique oblation, 'brought to us in such sort that our communion opens out into a total and permanent offering of ourselves to God'.²⁹

This, finally restated in terms of the Trinitarian vision of the New Testament and the Greek Fathers, reveals in the humanity of Christ, recognized by faith as that of the Son throughout the course of his earthly life leading to the Cross, the source for ourselves of the gift of the Spirit which, in the end, with Christ and in Christ, restores us to the Father, giving him back love for love.³⁰

Here we can see the juxtaposition and the fusion of Augustine's account in *The City of God*, especially in the conclusion of Book X, with the development of the great eucharistic prayers in which we find set forth and enriched, in the fourth century, the vision of the Christian mystery in the catechesis of the Fathers at that time and in their Christological and Trinitarian thinking as we have found it finally and completely worked out in Maximus the Confessor.³¹

William and Bernard

William had been lost in admiration for Bernard of Clairvaux and was his first biographer. Nevertheless, as regards theology, it was certainly he who influenced Bernard, not the other way round. Even in the domain of pure spirituality Bernard does not owe him less than he gave him. It is not altogether surprising that William's work, as distinguished for what is special to him as for

²⁸ Cf. *Romans*, 8, 21.

²⁹ *The Golden Epistle of Abbot William of St Thierry to the Carthusians of Mont Dieu*; trans. W. Shewring (London, 1930), p. 55 (PL 184, col. 327).

³⁰ *Aenigma Fidei*, especially col. 136B to 440D of PL 180.

³¹ Cf. above, p. 224.

the extensiveness of his sources, was almost at once confused with Bernard's:

But, although his personality was very soon forgotten, it was inevitable that his most original and most traditional writings should at once attract attention.

This was especially the case in those societies, composed of Beguines more often than of Beghards, which began to develop about the beginning of the thirteenth century, devout lay people put off by the decadence of the monastic orders, despite the revivals, as brilliant as they were ephemeral, of Cluny and still more of Cîteaux, and hardly more attracted to the so-called mendicant orders whose spiritual decadence seems to have followed closely, if it did not accompany, their very rapid development.³²

Hadewijch of Antwerp

In these circles, especially active in Flanders and the Rhineland, was to be found an extraordinary personality, unnoticed in modern times until the middle of this century, who seized avidly on what William had recovered from the old Patristic tradition and what he had added, or, better, contributed to its own proper development. Hadewijch's work, although so original, was not studied and published, apart from two manuscripts in the Royal Library of Brussels, until some fifty years ago. And then it was not until two Belgian scholars, a Jesuit and a Dominican, Fathers Van Mierlo and Axters, had completed their labours there that her importance was suddenly recognized.

Her historical personality, however, is still shrouded in almost total darkness, but her spiritual personality, fully and simply human (and notably feminine), has stamped all the little that she has left us of her writings.³³

Hadewijch was a highly cultured woman, with exceptional

³² On all this see François VANDENBROUCKE, *La Spiritualité du Moyen Âge*, Second Part, Paris, 1961, p.414ff.

³³ See above all, with the article which Dom John Baptist PORION has devoted to her in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, his two volumes touched on below, *Hadewijch d'Anvers, Poèmes des béguines traduits du moyen néerlandais*, Paris, 1954, and *Hadewijch d'Anvers, Lettres spirituelles*, Geneva, 1972. There is also *Hadewijch: The Complete Works*, translation and introduction by Mother Columba Hart OSB, New York, 1980, and London, 1981.

literary and poetic gifts, as well as a spiritual leader who can be compared only with the greatest. It is now certain that she was an essential and direct source for Ruysbroek and, if not the source, at least at the source of what is most original in Meister Eckhart in the spiritual domain, in the first place, but also in the more precisely speculative one.

We have the advantage of studying her in the admirable translation and commentaries of a French Carthusian, the Venerable Father Dom John Baptist Porion, monk of Valsainte. The little that I can say comes to me entirely from his two volumes, one of the poems, the other of the letters (not to speak of *The Visions*) which remain to us, and which Dom Porion has published, further clarified for me by the long talks on the subject which I have been able to have with him.

Apart from her astonishing spiritual physiognomy, the most striking thing about Hadewijch is the organic unity of her work, which matches its wealth of meaning. She shows superbly that nuptial mysticism and the mysticism of essence, far from being strangers to one another, still less opposing one another, are only two complementary aspects of the same experience. At the same time any opposition between the mysticism of Christ, God made man, and the mysticism of God envisaged in his utter transcendence, is shown to be meaningless. All the more must this be said about an opposition supposed to be discovered, in Philo or Origen, between a mysticism of the Logo, and a mysticism of the Father.

For Hadewijch, who shares the Pauline and Johannine outlook, Christ is always thought of in his divinity as assuming humanity, thus coming to us, espousing us and making us thereby so many sons in the Son, who is not only first-begotten but only-begotten, the Father's perfect one.

This, with her, springs from an experience just like that of the Canticle as described by Origen and, especially, Gregory of Nyssa, in other words, the discovery of the divine *agape* coming to us, awakening in us an *eros* which exceeds and transcends altogether the *eros ouranios* of the loftiest Platonism. But this vision of the nuptial mystery of the Incarnation in which, as we have seen, the development of the Pauline mystery in *Ephesians* seems to culminate and reach its conclusion, finds in her for the first time, it appears, the key to its full understanding.

First emerging, by way of Philo and Gregory of Nyssa, in the work of Evagrius, it had been fully exploited theologically by Maximus, but it does not appear to have received the spiritual exploitation of which it was capable before Hadewijch. It is the idea that the divine Word encloses in himself from all eternity, in the unbreakable unity of his subsistence in the bosom of the Father, precisely in that relation of subsistence, the particular *logoi* which correspond, not only to the essence of all possible creatures which God will one day call into being, but to the providential development which will be that of each one of them. Thus they will reach the *tropos*, the manner of being which will make them all so many images of that living image of the Father who is the Son.

So the fundamental theme (which Gregory of Nyssa would have called the *σκόπος*, the goal to aim at) of Rhineland-Flemish spirituality, is announced for the first time by Hadewijch. For each of us, everything comes back to becoming such in ourselves as we eternally are as God sees each of us in his Son, from all eternity.³⁴

To this is linked the theme of unity, that in which, in the bosom of the Word-Son himself, all these *logoi* subsist in themselves but also, following from that, the unity in which they are found taken up together in the stream of the divine life from the Father to the Son, returning eternally to the Father with the Son in the Spirit. In other words, we have here the binding-up of nuptial mysticism with the mysticism of essence. For Hadewijch, and for all those whom she influences more or less directly, it is in returning to coincide with the eternal idea, if one may so put it, that the Father has of us in his Word, by the union consummated between ourselves and the Word made flesh of our flesh, the unity of the Bride and the Bridegroom, that, all becoming together sons in the Son, we are finally recapitulated, in the sense given to this by Irenaeus and by the letter to Denis of Alexandria by Denis of Rome, in the Father by the Spirit.³⁵

³⁴ Cf. *Letters* II and IV, and, above all, Poem XVIII, with Dom Porion's note in his translation.

³⁵ See especially Letter XVII. On the theme of *logoi* in the *Logos* in Maximus, see *La Théorie des 'Logoi' des créatures chez Maxime le Confesseur* in the *Revue des*

This unity, then, beyond all thinking not only about created objects but even about the divine Persons themselves, to which this whole mysticism is explicitly directed, is far from being the static unity of a divine essence considered as superior or anterior to the distinction of the divine Persons: it is shown by Hadewijch directly and decisively that that this unity beyond the Trinity is the unity of the infinite Love that is God himself. For it is this essential love according to which the Father exists only in throwing himself into the Son and the Son in giving himself back to the Father, returning to him in the Spirit in whom is accomplished the eternal communion of *agape*.³⁶

In Hadewijch, therefore, it is constantly shown that this final accession to essential unity is identified with the return to the Father or, if you like, that the divine essence is revealed primarily and supremely in God's fundamental Paternity, from which proceed both the subsistence of the Son, in which the Father gives himself completely, and that of the Spirit, in whom the Son gives himself back to this same Love which, in giving him the Father's whole being, gives him also his own giving back of himself in return to the Source from which proceed 'every excellent grace and every perfect gift, the only Father of lights'.³⁷

And we find in Hadewijch, following this line of thought, particularly in her correspondence with those whom she directs, a sublime exaltation of spiritual 'poverty', involving, of course, material poverty, but containing and going beyond it, as the sign, or rather the very signature, of the divine love which is the gift not only of all that one has but also of all that one is, the gift ultimately of living only in the gift, since everything has been given to you, is perpetually given to you.³⁸

It must be added that this development of the theme of unity, of the divine essence, as it were, absorbing us, but without thereby abolishing us in any way, but rather fulfilling us as God himself is fulfilled, or rather *is* the fulfilment, the absolute excellence (this is only touched on by Hadewijch) – this development, to repeat, is the subject of a series of poems left in

³⁶ Cf. Père Porion's commentary on p. 24ff. of his translation of the *Letters*.

a manuscript of hers, but to all appearances the work of a disciple, called provisionally Hadewijch II.³⁹

For some time Hadewijch was thought to have lived later than Eckhart and to have been influenced by him because her vocabulary and his are astonishingly alike, but, as Dom Porion in particular has shown, these terms and the themes to which they refer, far from being the creation of the speculative mystics, particularly Dominican, of fourteenth-century Germany, were taken over by them and systematically worked out in circles of Dominican nuns and, more generally, devout persons, female especially, like the Beguines of the previous century.⁴⁰

Meister Eckhart

What remains Eckhart's originality is, in one aspect of it, his having bound up this whole vision of our relationship with God through faith in Christ, in the mystery of his redemptive Incarnation, with the theme, already found in the Fathers, from Origen to Saint Leo, of the triple birth of Christ, eternally in the bosom of the Father, in humanity to bring it back to the Father, at Christmas, and lastly to each of us, through our assimilation to him in baptism, our constant nourishment by him in the eucharist, our giving of ourselves up to him, *ad Patrem*, through the Spirit, in all our prayers and all our life in this world.⁴¹

The other aspect of Eckhart's originality is that he developed

³⁹ In Dom Porion's translation of the poems, cf. with p. 45ff. of his introduction to *Poems XVII to XXIX*.

⁴⁰ See especially on this point p. 48ff. of the volume quoted in the previous note.

⁴¹ On this theme of the birth of Christ in us, cf. the Sermons on *Omne datum optimum* and *Beati qui esuriunt et sitiunt iustitiam*, also *Le Livre de la Consolation divine*, the essential passages of which are quoted and discussed by Jeanne ANCELET-HUSTACHE, p. 14ff. of her translation of the *Treatises*, Paris, 1971. In a general way, by her introductions as by her translations and her bibliography, this volume and the three others devoted by her to the *Sermons*, Paris, 1974 to 1979, constitute the best initiation in French to Eckhart. But in the more recent work of A. de LIBERA, *Introduction à la mystique Rhénane*, although it concentrates on the philosophical aspect of the Rhinelanders, will be found the most masterly evocation known to me of Eckhart's mysticism, p. 258ff. and especially p. 287ff. From the especially detailed study devoted by this writer to the ideas of the One and the Ground (*Grund*) in Eckhart, it seems to me made clear that it is a matter here of what makes the soul undetachable, in its historical existence and in its providential destiny, from the thought which God has of it eternally in his Word-Son, in which it finds itself taken up by the living unity of the divine Persons who are identical with the Essence of God transcending all definitions or distinction.

the theme of spiritual poverty as inherent in our participation in the divine love, the life of the Father as he throws himself into the Son by the Spirit, activities called by him *Abegescheidenheit* and *Gelazeneheit*.

The former is detachment, the stripping away of all propriety (as Saint Benedict calls it), all fixation on the world or on ourselves, everything that tends to immobilize us, to interrupt the flow of love which is the outpouring of the divine life, of an essence which is to be in three persons, living only for one another, one in another.⁴²

The latter is abandonment to faith, to this love of God which constrains us; only this will allow us to be thus completely despoiled of ourselves and of everything, handing us over entirely to this unique virtue of divine *agape*, that of existing only in giving oneself, only in gift.⁴³

Ruysbroek the Admirable

After that, Ruysbroek, quoting textually what is attributed to the second Hadewijch but drawing largely on the first as well, develops what Eckhart, just like Hadewijch, clearly presupposed even when he is most insistent on the necessity of emptying oneself, on the complete renouncing and forgetting of oneself and of all particularity and distinction, but what the contemplative of Groenendale is the first to articulate so clearly. And this is that

⁴² See the little treatise which he has devoted to this notion. Its authenticity seems to have been established by Joseph QUINT in *Les Traités*, Mme Ancelet-Hustache's translation, p.160ff., together with the excellent special introduction which precedes it. See also her *Meister Eckhart*, London, 1987 and Cyprian SMITH's *The Way of Paradox*, London, 1987.

⁴³ See sermon 6 (*Videte qualem caritatem*) in the translation of the *Sermons* by Mme Ancelet-Hustache, vol. III, p.110ff. She points out the abundant (even superabundant) commentary of Reiner SCHÜRMANN in *Maître Eckhart ou la Joie errante*, Paris, 1972, p.252ff. Without denying its interest, I should be more reserved about the comparisons made here with Heidegger, Zen and Taoism, which seem to me more likely to cause confusion than to throw light on the thought or the experience of Eckhart.

the mysticism of essence here is not a mysticism of annihilation, of pure abstraction (as there is always the risk of its becoming for those who see, in all these spiritual guides and thinkers, only a return to the ambiguities of the neo-Platonist themes woven round the central theme of the *epistrophe*, apparently abolishing the *aporoè*, the original emanation).

The admirable analysis made by A. de Libera of the way in which Eckhart's mysticism, in particular, takes over all the themes of Proclus's *Theological Elements* is a demonstration of this. But Ruysbroek is the first to make the point expressly and to explain that there can be no question of forgetting what is essential to this Christian vision of the divine life, first opposed to the pagan Greek one by Marius Victorinus, that it is the vision of a God who is love, *agape*, movement itself, instead of a God who is One only in being a stranger to all multiplicity, all communication. In the eternal Trinity of the Christian God, we must see the living unity ceaselessly and inseparably passing to the Father-Son dyad, and, the second dyad, Father-Son and Spirit of the Father resting upon the Son, in the Son, with the return of the Trinity to Unity, or rather (since they are three only in being one, indeed, but the one of *agape*) the return of the substantial and infinite Gift.

So, Ruysbroek tells us, it is necessary, in all our Christian life, as in the life of the cosmos recapitulated in the divine life, to find everywhere, associating ourselves with it, this outflow of God from the Father, as the Source in which the divine essence is fundamentally revealed, towards the multiplication of the Persons of the Trinity, and beyond that in the prolongation, if one may so speak, of the Son's procession to the creation – and the flowing back to the Source of everything, beyond God as within him, through the Spirit who proceeds from the Father in the Son, returning with the Son, and with everything in him to the Source, not to be abolished there but to be fulfilled in the fulfilment of God himself.

To this outflow and reflow, ceaseless and inseparable, will correspond, then, for the faithful, and for the mystic especially, an alternation of an all-absorbing attention to God and a not less complete devotion to him with a not less total emptying of divine love, giving itself up, losing itself in favour of his creatures, in us as in God himself, and down to the humblest and the most

depraved. But this will have in the end no other meaning than the return of all, of them and of us, of them and of us in the Son, through the Spirit, to the Father from whom all paternity proceeds, in heaven and on earth.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ On Ruysbroek, see Louis COGNET, *Introduction aux Mystiques théno-flamands*, Paris, 1968, p.233ff., and J. A. BIZET, *Ruysbroek, oeuvres choisies*, Paris, 1946. Dom James WISEMAN, who has published an excellent English translation, is preparing a general study of this still too little-known mystic.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

MODERN TIMES: MYSTICISM AND PSYCHOLOGY

After the scaling of these heights in working out the meaning of traditional mysticism in the Church by the Rhinelanders, properly understood, we might suppose that the sixteenth century presented us with an unexpected turning-point. For don't we find, in the Spanish mystics, the final result of a divorce between a theology cut off from spirituality and a spirituality looking down on theology, a divorce which was more than announced by Gerson and seems complete with *The Imitation of Christ*? And don't we find in Teresian mysticism an essentially psychological one in which Christian doctrine itself, along with theology, plays no essential part, surviving, one might say, only in the margins and without any necessary connection with spiritual experience?¹

That, of course, could appear as an unexpected result, in the Church herself, of what Léon Brunschwigc has called the advance of consciousness in modern philosophy. That is to be understood as a phenomenon which develops at the end of the fourteenth century and during the fifteenth, the appearance of a subjectivism, a return of the human spirit upon itself, upon what it undergoes, which does not detach itself straightway from the objects which up to then had absorbed its best attention but interiorizes them in such a way that one may ask whether they are now anything more than symbols of its own conscious states.

¹ Isn't it rather disturbing not only to see an agnostic psychologist, such as Delacroix, studying Saint Teresa at length without any suspicion that what she, as a faithful Christian, believed might have something to do with her mystical experience and teaching, but also, in our own time, a large number of books written on the same subject by religious persons who employ, as a matter of course, the same bracketing process? The most serious works so far produced on Teresa of Avila seem to me those by Alison Peers.

This had begun with what has been called 'devotion to the humanity of Christ',² detaching itself, for the first time in Christianity, from any consideration of his divinity. It is still, in Saint Bernard, expressly an affair of a preliminary stage, only providing, in principle, access to the divinity. But it is undeniable that he is attached to the humanity and dwells on it as though with some unwillingness to go beyond it.

But it is only in the period known as 'the Enlightenment' that the separation reveals itself as complete and definitive, when Rousseau will speak of the divinity of Christ only in the sense that he was perfect man.

Yet one may wonder whether this was more than a sudden realization of something that had been preparing in many minds since the end of the Middle Ages, even something which had already happened although one did not dare admit it to oneself.

Such questions cannot fail to be asked. But although there may have been a change going on in men's minds, at least gradually becoming predominant, and present when one still seemed to belong to Christianity, until the sudden discovery that this was no longer so and that one had hardly any wish to return to it, it would be as unjust as it would be inaccurate to interpret Spanish mysticism in that way, that of Saint Teresa as much as that of Saint John of the Cross.

Let us take, for example, Aldous Huxley's *Philosophia Perennis*, an attempt to remove from doctrinal and institutional Christianity a spirituality which (he has persuaded himself) became part of it only as the result of a misunderstanding. That is just one characteristic example of his brilliant improvisations which are a desperate expedient, among so many made by liberal Protestants or Catholic Modernists, to keep what one chiefly values in Christianity without including anything specifically Christian.

That is no doubt an extreme case of 'wanting to eat your cake and have it'. But one cannot deny that Christians, even the most faithful, cannot, indeed should not, avoid a certain common approach to human problems with the tendencies, the more or less conscious orientations, of their time. They cannot, because

² Unwittingly indicating its ambiguity, E. Dumoutet's famous book with this title appeared between the two World Wars.

it is impossible to live in a society to which one has become a complete stranger. And they should not, because, if they were to effect a total separation, they would lose straightway any chance of transmitting a faith which could not itself remain alive in those who had simply given up being effective witnesses to it for their contemporaries.

It remains true that this 'advance of consciousness' is highly ambiguous and that something of this ambiguity undoubtedly appears in the work, as in the life, of Saint Teresa of Avila.

But she would not be a saint, and a very great saint, and still less deserve the title of Doctor of the Church, unless in the end she had triumphed over this ambiguity.

The Problem of Saint Teresa's Mysticism

To take the positive side first, it is indisputable that the psychological analyses of mystical states and their evolution, which are largely, or perhaps chiefly, responsible for her immediate and astonishingly durable success, represent a positive gain. But contrasts between ancient and modern mysticisms should not be exaggerated. It is undeniable that there is a psychological element inherent in what is called the mystical tradition as soon as it has become aware of itself and received a formulation in these terms in the fourth century. One can say that the immediate and no less astonishing success of Evagrius in the first place (he was at the same time considered a heretic after the condemnation of the 'Origenism' of which we have said that it was more of an 'Evagrianism') was largely due to the psychological value of his work. But even without taking so extreme a case, we can be certain that the most traditional Christian mysticism contains, from its earliest formulations, a psychological element or aspect. And, it must be added, this is true of Christianity itself from the beginning. Conversion and adhesion to it are impossible without successive states of consciousness.

Yet there is a considerable difference between the Christianity of the first thirteen centuries, taken as a whole, and that of those which followed. For, until this turning-point, not only had no one ever thought of detaching these states of soul from a transcendent object, but also no one had been tempted to suppose that they

were thus detachable, for no one had ever tried to describe them by making such an abstraction, nor would anyone have thought such a thing possible. This idea, standard in modern philosophy since Descartes and above all since Kant, that what we think is detachable, indeed detached in its origins, from an object of these thoughts, leading to the idea that they have no need to explain themselves thereby, even in illusory fashion, is something that would have seemed to the ancients in general (non-Christian as well as Christian) as simply nonsense.

Paradoxically, this development seems not to have been possible until Christianity, having won over, or thought to have won over, the generality of minds, convinced them of the primordial importance of the individual consciousness (in the sense both of psychological consciousness and of moral conscience). But, in Christianity, this importance itself is bound up organically with the discovery, or rather the revelation, that each man, throughout the whole of humanity, is the object of a love, and an eternal love, on the part of the God on whom all things depend entirely both in their essence and their existence.

The birth, however, just at this time, of what has been called bourgeois civilization, as being peculiarly one of self-made men, resting ultimately if not exclusively on an economic base, is what was going to produce the temptation and then the attempt to autonomize the consciousness, to make it its own master, its own God, even in the end its one and only universe. Its quasi-sacred character would be preserved, indeed supposedly exalted, in this way, but only by cutting it off from every source of the sacred except the human – whereas, as modern phenomenology has rediscovered, the sacred is and is only the wholly Other, recognized as such, and therefore both supremely *tremendum* and *fascinans* at the same time.

In Saint Teresa, however, the appearance of an interest in psychology not depending on any consideration of an object, of an object transcending the consciousness to which it is related, is nothing but the effect of an optical illusion on the part of ourselves, members of modern society as we are. This illusion itself, of course, like any other psychological phenomenon, could not come to birth without an object to produce it, and this object was the result of one of the unfortunate defence-reactions of the Catholic Counter-Reformation.

In the desire to resist Protestant subjectivism, and since that was at work primarily in regard to interpreting the Bible, an understandable but intrinsically absurd reaction, on the part of the would-be defenders of tradition, was to take the Bible away from the faithful, and in particular to forbid translations of it in the vernacular.

The Bible being the very fabric of the liturgy (especially in the Roman tradition), the result was to deprive budding mystics, women especially, from all, or nearly all, access to what we may call the very sources of patristic mysticism, the Bible and the liturgy, the Bible in the liturgy, whereas the creative and redemptive Word of God is supremely manifested in the celebration of the liturgy.

Nothing is more admirable, in Saint Teresa, than her thirst for Scripture, with her attachment to the prayer of the Church. But in the conditions in which she found herself placed not only could she have no more than an indirect and severely limited access to this first and essential source of mystical life, the Word of God, always present, always alive in the life of the Church, beginning with her life of prayer, but there was also another obstacle. Had she taken upon herself, a mere woman in the lay state, to discourse about these things as Hadewijch was still able to do, although already at her own risks and perils,³ in a Church becoming ultra-sensitive to an already purulent heresy, she could not have involved herself in such matters without at once being not only condemned but reduced to silence and inactivity.

So what is astonishing, in these circumstances, is not that she had to concentrate, as she did to such effect, on the psychological aspects of mystical experience, but that, with a perspicacity and a mixture of good sense and a typically feminine indefectible assurance, she succeeded in doing so while maintaining very soberly, very discreetly, yet firmly, the strict dependence of all

³ Not only does it seem that she ended her days removed from the community which she had directed, but it is also very significant that some recent investigators who have tried to assess her work have thought that she was the Bloemardine whose influence Ruysbroek had to combat. Eckhart himself, it should be noted, although a priest of a teaching order (indeed a master in theology), was to be the first victim of the state of affairs then beginning.

that she had to say on traditional Christian doctrine, the Gospel of Christ as the apostles preached it. She insists that the most important thing about a spiritual director is that he should be a good theologian, and anyone not wearing blinkers can satisfy himself that all her experiences, in her own eyes, would be complete nonsense unless they were bound up with the knowledge, and that alone, as Saint Paul would have said, of Jesus and of him crucified.

Better still, her attachment, as she said, to the 'sacred humanity', that is, not simply to the humanity of Jesus detached from his divinity, but to this humanity as that of the Son of God made man to save us, would not otherwise make sense. Nor would the misunderstanding which followed on this point between herself and Saint John of the Cross.

For her, in short, all her unprecedented analyses of mystical experience in its psychological aspect would have no meaning unless related to the object not only of a transcendent God but also, explicitly and formally, of the God who becomes accessible for us through and in the redemptive incarnation of his Son.

This becomes unquestionable if one compares Saint Teresa's writings with those of Saint John of the Cross and notices how regularly one completes and, if need be, corrects the other, while the two remain inseparable, both in their inner experiences and in their apostolic activities, carried out in a close sympathy, which does not mean always perfect agreement.

Saint John of the Cross and Theology

Above all, it can be said that the work of Saint John of the Cross brings to light the dogmatic, but, in the first place, biblical and sacramental, substratum, apart from which Saint Teresa's most brilliant interpretations could be only more or less adroit attempts which did not quite reach the reality to which she so firmly clung.

Despite John's serious studies at Salamanca, he certainly made no claim to be a dogmatic theologian in the sense of the word understood at the time in the universities. But, just at the time when the Counter-Reformation, in Spain, was directed against

the widespread infiltration of 'alumbrados', especially in the most fervent circles, we must suppose that he had benefited from what was left of the Christian humanism under Erasmian influence of which, at Salamanca itself, Luis de Leon (not without some unpleasantness) had been one of the best representatives. Like the poetry of Saint John of the Cross, his rich and informal biblical culture is obviously rooted in this recovered tradition. And that is where we must look for the inspiration of the intimate union, or rather reunion, in him of the dogmatic perspective and the psychological one.⁴

As Edith Stein was to show in her thesis,⁵ followed by Karol Wojtyła in his own,⁶ the whole mysticism of his 'nights' is in fact a mysticism of the Cross of Christ becoming the Christian's Cross, leading him, in the way opened by the Son of God made man, to a veritable anticipation of the resurrection, in which he regains, transfigured, all that he had to start by abandoning.⁷

Along with that, nothing is more reasonable in Saint John's thought than the synthesis (which evokes irresistibly Saint Gregory of Nyssa, although it could develop only through the influence of 'the mystics of the North', as Jean Orcibal calls them⁸) of the fundamental theme of the espousals of the individual soul with Christ and what we may call the 'cordial' theme, that of divine love flowing from the Head to the members through their association with his life-giving Cross.

But it is also necessary for a proper understanding of him to grasp the precise meaning of his 'nights', first that of the senses and then that of the spirit – in line with the ascesis of Evagrius – but which, by the very notion of 'passive nights', as he calls them, effect for the first time not only an agreement between

⁴ See Jean VILNET, *Bible et mystique chez saint Jean de la Croix*, Paris, 1949. The writer justly remarks (p.XI) that he 'has tried to enter a region still little explored'. It is characteristic that reviews of his book signed by acknowledged specialists in the work of Saint John usually treat it as a curious excursion into a side-line of the holy doctor, whereas Vilnet emphasizes that it is a question of something absolutely essential in this doctor's eyes.

⁵ Cf. *The Science of the Cross*, referred to a little below.

⁶ Karol WOJTYŁA, *Doctrina de Fide apud S. Joannem a Cruce*, Rome, 1949.

⁷ Cf. the conclusion of *The Spiritual Canticle*.

⁸ Cf. Jean ORCIBAL, *Saint Jean de la Croix et les mystiques rhéno-flamands*, Paris, 1945.

ascesis and mysticism but the bringing of the former into the latter, that being quite definitely the Mystery of Christ crucified in ourselves. Too often expositors, French or British, understand these nights as if they were only a prelude to mystical experience properly so-called. But that is to misunderstand completely the very tone of the theme as announced to the *Cantico Espiritual*, with the risk of turning into a mere postscript its exultant conclusion, which is taken up and deployed so wonderfully in *The Living Flame of Love*.

As H.C. Puech has well seen, the theme of night in Saint John of the Cross (as with the famous anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* in the fourteenth century) is enriched by psychological comments – providential trials, apparent aridities – not to be found even in Denis. But there is more to be said, something that is doubtless not easy to realize for anyone who has not experienced the positive aspects of night in Spanish life, especially in the South.

For this theme, far from being exclusively negative, implies the ending of everyday life, in this climate a matter of toil and hardship rather than of enjoyment, in the happy and peaceful return of a deeper life, with the enjoyment of family talk, where there may be a *tertulia*, friends coming in, in a flowery *patio* where only the sound of a fountain can be heard.

So Saint John's night, it must be said, while containing the finest psychological analyses, goes beyond them. For what it envisages is precisely the central, pivotal, point of the mystery, that the resurrection is not just a redress for the Cross but its fruit. What is more, the seed of this fruit, living and perennial, was already in the Cross, as the anagogy of the Fourth Gospel, seeing the Cross and the Glory as a continuity, so vigorously expresses it.

That, of course, is at the furthest possible remove from dolorism. On the contrary, it is the affirmation of faith that the Cross, expressing, achieving, the high point of revelation, anticipates the resurrection and all its fruits of eternal glory. Thus this mysticism, it can be said, correctly interpreted, is not confined to joining up again the psychological perspective to that of the most traditional Pauline and Johannine faith. We must go on to say even that it absorbs and transcends mere psychology in faith.

For it is essential to this mysticism, as Saint John of the Cross constantly repeats, that it considers mystical experience as the foretaste, certainly, of heavenly experience, but not for that reason beyond faith, but *in faith itself*.

We find again here the theme of Saint Gregory the Great, as elucidated by William of Saint Thierry, that in this experience love is knowledge, anticipated vision, but not in the sense that, in reaching the fullest participation in the Cross of Christ through death to ourselves, we should have an indirect knowledge of God in the experience of sharing his love. This hypothesis, once defended by Étienne Gilson, has been shown to be indefensible by Père Déchanet. But it is not only for William but also for Saint John of the Cross that there could not be, even in the beatific vision, a knowledge of God for which it would not be essential to be not only accompanied by love but also developed by the very love that is shared with him. For *this* love and God are inseparable.⁹ Thus it is not only possible to say in a rough sort of fashion, but also perfectly right to maintain, that one can have, while still remaining in the domain of faith, a real anticipation of the beatific vision. That is what Saint John of the Cross tells us, and there is absolutely no ground for introducing, on the pretext of justifying what he says, a radical distinction between theological language and a spiritual one.¹⁰ For him, as for all the Fathers, this new kind of double truth would be even more inadmissible than that between philosophical and theological truths which the nominalists tried to introduce. And so, one may say, Saint John's mysticism, properly understood, brings us back to the perspective both of the New Testament and of the Fathers, the perspective of faith and not that of some essentially psychological spirituality which abstracts from it.

Saint John of the Cross, then, heralds an explicit return, not only to the substance, but to the very formulations of early Christian mysticism. Without neglecting in any way the psychological investigations conducted by writers of our own time, this would have the double effect of rescuing Christian mysticism from the

⁹ Cf. Jean LECLERCQ, *La Spiritualité du Moyen Age*, p.252 and my *The Cistercian Heritage*, London, 1958, p.150ff.

¹⁰ This strange notion, introduced by J. Maritain, has been too easily accepted by such respectable theologians as Garrigou-Lagrange and Congar.

sort of psychological esotericism in which our contemporaries have been too much inclined to confine it for too long and of restoring it as essential to any fully developed Christian life, restoring to it at the same time its fundamental basis in the New Testament.

That was to be the work of three twentieth-century Carmelites, faithful disciples both of Saint John of the Cross and of Saint Teresa, but disciples who themselves became masters, namely Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus, the Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity and Sister Teresa-Benedict of the Cross, born Edith Stein, a convert from Judaism, a martyr to her fidelity to her people, who was to show herself a philosopher and a theologian of that mysticism of the Gospel and of Saint Paul which was common to all three of them.

Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus

In Saint Thérèse, in her 'little way of childhood', the fundamental theme of the Gospel, that is, of our divine sonship communicated by the Son of God made man in our association with his Cross, becomes formally, once again, the controlling theme of all mysticism. In her, as in Saint John of the Cross, but in an especially simple way, so effective for the least learned, yet without in any way playing down the demands of the Cross, we are presented with a new form of the transporting of asceticism, if one may so put it, into the heart of mysticism. That is what we find in her own interpretation of the way of childhood which she practises and taught, explained by herself as the simple way of completely trusting faith, which amounts for all of us to the 'Da quod jubes, et jube quod vis' of Saint Augustine.¹¹

At the same time, as would be shown with impressive realism in her serene acceptance of the foundering in aridity suffered during her last days on earth, she gave us the most convincing proof that mysticism does not consist so much in ecstasies or 'visions', even of the divine essence, appearing to raise us above the level of

¹¹ The critical edition of the text by Père François de Sainte-Marie (Lisieux, 1957) should be used.

faith, as simply in complete abandonment to naked faith, becoming one, through an effective love of the Cross, with the very love of the crucified God, even in the depths of obscurity.¹²

Elizabeth of the Trinity

In an equally simple and direct way, Elizabeth of the Trinity restores to us, in her Paulinism, so completely absorbed in the final evocation of the mystery as formulated in *Colossians* and *Ephesians*, the essentially laudatory character, eucharistic in the etymological sense, of faith as it grasps the whole of existence so as to conform it, or rather to let Christ conform us, to his Mystery. 'Christ in us', the hope of glory, associating us with the eucharist of his whole life, of his whole being in tension towards the Father, makes us then become literally *laudem gloriae*. We find indeed a rediscovery of the most authentically biblical and evangelical mysticism in the experience lived and related by this other young nun, herself also crucified by sickness.¹³

This is at the same time, but expressed in the directest terms, the substance of the Rhinelanders' mysticism of unity, a unity of life, of love realized in our insertion into Christ, bringing us back to the Father, in the glorifying and glorying power of the Spirit. That is the whole meaning of her famous cry 'O my God, the Trinity that I adore!'¹⁴

Edith Stein

Lastly it was Edith Stein, a convert from Judaism, by way of Husserl's phenomenology, as leading us back to objectivity – in the sense of submitting to the supreme object of our subjectivity as we approach the Gospel, perpetually alive for us through the nourishing of our faith by the liturgy – who was to give

¹² Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Thérèse of Lisieux, The Story of a Mission*, London, 1953.

¹³ Cf. again Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Elizabeth of Dijon*, London, 1956.

¹⁴ Père Conrad de Meester has produced a critical edition of what remains of her writings (Paris, 1983).

the philosophico-theological justification of this evangelical and Pauline mysticism. She did so in language well suited to our time, before witnessing to its truth by martyrdom.

After her dissertation on *The Prayer of the Church*, as the source and home of all Christian experience, her commentary on the *De Veritate* of Saint Thomas begins by giving us the fullest expression of the Rhinelanders' basic theme, rooted in the theology of the Fathers, especially in regard to the Word made flesh, that all this Christian mysticism, which is nothing but our entering into the Mystery of Christ, has no other purpose than to bring us to coincide, in living our own true lives, with that vision which God has had of us from all eternity in his divine Son, of what he has called us to become in his Son made flesh of our flesh.

This would be further developed in another philosophical work on the relation of created being to divine being, and then in the admirable theological synthesis only sketched out by her *The Science of the Cross*, an introduction indeed, an initiation, to that absorption of her whole being in the mystery of Christ constituted by her martyrdom. And that was a deliberate offering of Sister Teresa-Benedict of the Cross to the sufferings of her Jewish brethren, becoming for her, in her, the filling up of the sufferings of Jesus for his whole people, children of Abraham both according to the flesh and according to faith.¹⁵

¹⁵ *The Science of the Cross*, London, 1960. See *Edith Stein* by Sister Teresia de Sancto Spiritu, London, 1952, *The Collected Works of Edith Stein*, Washington, D.C. 1986, and *Edith Stein* by Freda Mary Oben, New York, 1988.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

MYSTICISM AND NON-CHRISTIAN CONTEMPLATION

Towards the end of the seventeenth century occurred what Louis Cognet has called 'the rout of the mystics'¹ in Catholicism itself. But, strangely enough, just at this moment there developed, in Protestantism, a mystical stirring which was no doubt a mixed business but could claim for itself a number of distinguished persons such as, pre-eminently, Gerhard Tersteegen, on the frontier, then a rather vague one, between Germany and the Low Countries.²

The disturbance about quietism explains to a considerable extent both phenomena: a reaction of fear among Catholics, a sympathy for those recently condemned among Protestants, themselves, at this time, seeking for spiritual renewal. That produced what is called pietism, in which, even more than in quietism, the best and the worst were in alliance. Typical of the interaction of the two phenomena was the extraordinary popularity enjoyed for some time by Fénelon among Protestants, to which the highly ambiguous figure of chevalier Ramsay gives witness.

The reaction against quietism in Catholicism and then the reaction against pietism among Protestants had the joint effect of throwing suspicion upon the very word 'mystical' (until the nineteenth century only the adjective was used) and upon its derivatives, such as 'mysticism'.

¹ Louis COGNET, *Le Crépuscule des Mystiques*, Tournai, 1958 (cf. the Introduction).

² See my *Spiritualité protestante et anglicane*, Paris, 1965, p.264ff.

Decadence and Resurgence of Mysticism

It can be said that in the second half of the eighteenth century, not only for the apparently triumphant rationalists or materialists of every complexion, but in almost all religious circles, Catholic or Protestant, regarded as respectable, both words had become synonyms for a more or less unhealthy form of religious enthusiasm.

It is interesting to note that one of the first signs of a return to a positive meaning for these expressions was, in England, the Tract called *The Mysticism of the Fathers*, published by Keble in 1841. But its topic is the 'mystical' interpretation of Scripture, the justification and even glorification of which he is the first to attempt, not only since the Enlightenment but also since Scholasticism in its prime, apart from the almost solitary exception, which was to have no future, of Erasmus and others among the first Christian humanists of the sixteenth century.

But to find the first similar attempt to bring back what we call 'mysticism', we have to go back to the publication, in 1842, of *Mysticism, Divine and Diabolic* by Joseph Görres, in which, unfortunately, what chiefly concerns him is the sort of more or less extraordinary phenomena which can accompany mystical contemplation. One may say that the last considerable product of this confusion is, despite enormous erudition and many valuable points of detail, the huge treatise *Des Graces d'Oraison* published on the eve of the war of 1914 (*The Graces of Interior Prayer*, London, 2nd ed., 1950) by Père Poulain, S.J., who identifies mysticism with extraordinary graces, described explicitly as of themselves unconnected with the normal development of Christian life and in no way necessary to sanctity.

The reaction will come first, as one would expect, from the Dominicans, the most notable representative being Père Garrigou-Lagrange with his *Perfection chrétienne et contemplation*, Paris, 1927 (*Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, St Louis and London, 1937). It has the great merit of establishing clearly that what is essential to true mysticism does not lie in anything 'extraordinary', but in a union with God which becomes the object of an experience of properly Christian contemplation and also that such an experience, however unusual it may seem to

be, is actually in the direct line of the normal development of baptismal grace.

It is noteworthy that at about the same time, and, it seems, quite independently, the philosopher Maurice Blondel was defending much the same positions.

Limitless Extensions of the Term 'Mystical'

Meanwhile, with the progressive discovery of Far Eastern religions in particular, the word 'mystical', which had become so vague at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, came to be applied to the most various spiritual experiences to be met with in these religions as well as to those of Christianity.

A reaction soon occurred, curiously enough in those circles of liberal, undogmatic Protestantism, in which, however, around Schleiermacher, its great initiator at the beginning of the century, there had been a tendency to swallow up Christianity in the amorphous mysticism into which, eventually, pietism had largely sunk. But, towards the end of the century, an exactly opposite position was taken up by Albrecht Ritschl, the great initiator of what came to be called 'liberalism in terms of the Gospel', an attempt to define, but without returning to dogmas, a religiosity of biblical inspiration. For Ritschl, and his great *History of Pietism*, as negative as it was monumental, the mysticism called Christian was only the effect, in Christianity, of the Hellenization supposed, in these circles, to be the origin of the dogmas. It would be, then, a characteristic of the paganized Christianity, Catholicism, into which only a decadent Christianity could relapse.

After that, although in a direction opposite to that taken by Ritschl, the confusion seemed to have been scientifically established by the work of the famous Dean of Saint Paul's in London, R.W. Inge. He produced in parallel one of the most lastingly influential of modern works on Plotinus and another book, *Christian Mysticism*, according to which the synthesis between Plotinus and Saint Paul seemed to be a matter of course, prepared for, moreover, by the Johannine tradition, then generally supposed to be imbued with Platonist philosophy, even

by a writer so learned and so orthodox in intention as Baron von Hügel.

At this period, when there was a comfortable assurance that the problem of Christian origins had been scientifically overcome by nonsense of this sort, tending equally both to the exaltation and the depreciation of mysticism and of Hellenism, Jewish scholars, like Israel Abrahams, familiar with the history of Jewish spirituality, were almost alone in denouncing this interpretation of the Johannine writings in particular as a typical aberration of Christian scholars.

The result of all this was an impression, apparently confirmed by Friedrich Heiler's most influential book, *Prayer*,³ according to which mystical prayer, as typical of pre-Christian Greek religiosity, was contrasted with prophetic prayer, directed, supposedly, not toward union with God but to activity guided and supported by God in the world. Christian mysticism, from this point of view, could be only a bastard product. Anders Nygren, a little later, with undeniable brilliance, opposing the sympathy shown by Heiler to this hybridization, not only, like Ritschl before him, denounced it as a typically Catholic corruption, but also provided as seemingly definitive justification of this charge. That was to demonstrate, so he thought, as antithetic, on the one side, the *agape* of the New Testament, the generous love, creative and salvific, of which God alone, the only and only God of the Bible, could be the subject and, on the other side, the Platonist *eros*, constituted entirely by desire, which, even when raised up to the divinity, can have it only as an object, and as one thus brought down to a level radically inadmissible in a biblical and Christian perspective.⁴

That is the position reached in the three volumes of his *Eros and Agape*,⁵ and still taken to-day as a matter of course by Protestants of our own time, successors of Barth or of Bultmann. Even Catholics have adopted it, including an eminent authority on Hellenism, Père Festugière, O.P.⁶

³ *Prayer*, London, 1937.

⁴ See on Nygren my study in *Irenikon*, vol. XVII, 1940, p.24ff. and the thesis of Donald DIETZ, *The Christian Meaning of Love*, San Antonio (Texas), 1976.

⁵ Cf. note 3 of chapter sixteen.

⁶ Cf. *L'Enfant d'Agrigente*, Paris, 1949.

Nevertheless, very different but equally competent writers like Père Spicq, O.P., in his massive study *Agape in the New Testament* (Paris, 1950), have had no difficulty in showing Nygren's undue simplification in regard to the New Testament itself (despite undeniable discoveries of important aspects of biblical revelation in general and in the New Testament especially) or, like Kenneth Kirk in *The Vision of God*, in denouncing Heiler's unacceptable simplifications about the two types of prayer which he had distinguished, or again, like Burnaby, in his Hulsean Lectures at Cambridge, *Amor Dei*,⁸ in exposing Nygren's misunderstandings of the Fathers and especially of Augustine.

Nygren himself, later on, in the very fine study already mentioned, *Reconciliation as an Act of God*,⁹ made a correction of his extravagant schematism which is of capital importance.

It is my hope that the present book will show, not only the inadmissibility of the charge laid, in the name of authentic Christianity, against traditional Christian mysticism, but also the complete fallaciousness of the theory which makes it only an intrusion into Christianity of a spirituality thought to be wholly Greek and pagan. Far from being such, the 'mysticism' of the Fathers and of the tradition, both Catholic and Orthodox, has its source, and the source too of the word itself, only in the Christianity of Saint John and Saint Paul, and before that quite simply in the Gospel of Jesus, as understood by the apostles, in a context which is purely biblical and Jewish. It is only by analogy – this should be sufficiently clear in the light of a joint study of Plotinianism and of the Fathers of the same period – and an analogy which applies only within very narrow limits that one can compare Christian contemplation (to which alone, let us insist, the term 'mystical' properly belongs) and Platonist or neo-Platonist contemplation. And if the former has borrowed from the latter a stock of images or notions, they have been subjected to a radical reinterpretation.

Moreover, it must be added, Christians could not have carried out this adaptation unless first the neo-Platonists, certainly by way of Philo, very probably through Ammonius Sakkas, and more

⁸ 2nd ed., London, 1947.

⁹ 1934.

generally through the widespread influence of the Septuagint's translation of the Bible, had themselves become indebted, much more than is usually believed, to typically Jewish, and no doubt even Christian, ways of thinking. Once again, it is strange to see the unwillingness on the part of so many scholars of our time to admit so obvious a fact which one of the masters of Middle Platonism, Numenius, had no difficulty in recognizing.

In any case, it is an untruth still too easily taken for granted to say that, even if mysticism is not of Greek and more particularly of Platonist origin, it is actually a phenomenon common to all the great world religion, to those both of the East and of the West, to Judaism and to Islam, but, above all, so it is often thought, to the various kinds of Hinduism, Brahmanism or Buddhism, and, whether deriving from them or more or less akin to them, Chinese Taoism as well as the proliferating forms of Buddhism in China and Japan.

There are even Catholics who consider themselves super-orthodox, such as certain neo-Thomists (among whom a syncretism as undisguised as René Guénon's has found, curiously, over a long period, enthusiastic publishers and other sympathizers), who seem, not only to have taken up with the notion that there can be authentic mysticisms other than the Christian one, but also to be disposed to allow that all these mysticisms, in the end, come to the same thing in experiences, which are, if not altogether alike, at least akin. But what are the facts?

Phenomenological Study of Various Mysticisms

It is interesting to find learned men among Protestants, even those most suspicious of all dogmas, like Rudolf Otto, who maintain, for strictly scientific reasons, that despite more or less superficial appearances contemplation is, in their view, a matter of radically different experiences, both in their actual content and in their general bearings.

That it has taken so long for this to become realized is due, of course, to the persistence and uncriticized influence, often among those who suppose themselves to be opposed to it, of the subjectivism which became part and parcel, first of

human sensibility, as the Middle Ages drew to an end, and then decisively of modern thinking, at least from the time of Kant.

So there grew up an invincible tendency among Christians themselves, even those, curiously, who prided themselves on possessing the most sensitive orthodoxy, to reduce all spirituality to a mere question of psychology. And further, along with this, went the strange supposal, uncritically adopted even by those who proclaimed themselves followers of Saint Thomas Aquinas, that psychology itself could be exhaustively studied without any need to consider what he called the intentionality of all our mental activity, the fact that it always bears upon a formal object and that this, moreover, corresponds with a reality existing independently of ourselves, that it is not a fiction of our minds.

It required the developments of Husserl's phenomenology, and before that the influence of Brentano upon him, for an escape to be attempted, in fact and not only in theory, and in this field of study in particular, from so strange an aberration. The most surprising thing of all is that so many Thomists, or thinkers supposing themselves to be such, see red when anyone mentions phenomenology. So far, and as a result of this influence, there is hardly any Catholic work in French on Edith Stein which has not deplored her combination of Thomism with phenomenology, and it is no doubt for the same reason that no French translation has appeared except the Belgian version of one or two of her works, which has received scarcely any notice.

On the other hand, it is precisely as a result of applying a rigorous phenomenological method to the mere psychology of 'mystics' in general, in the vague sense of the expression now current, that even an almost agnostic Protestant like Otto has been able to demonstrate irrefutably the irreducible specificity of Christian mysticism.

For the conviction that all the experiences called 'mystical' today not only are valid in their own right, but prove in the end to have an equivalent content, can be maintained only so long as one persists in disregarding the object which is attracting them.

If one does take that line, the logical consequence, as the ancients, notably Plato, speaking of *mania*, have seen very clearly,

is an inability to distinguish between pathological insanity, or mere drunkenness, or even the passion of love, from poetic experience or any other sudden illumination of the spirit or the different varieties of experience, religious experiences in particular. This is what proved to happen to Aldous Huxley and his disciples who readily persuaded themselves that the mere effect of an alkaloid like mescaline would be the equivalent of the highest mystical experience without its being necessary to concern oneself with any belief or faith.¹⁰

Zaehner, in his *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane*, has done justice to this illusion in showing that it identifies irreducible psychological states with one another, both in their immediate content and in their lasting effects, only by fixing attention, not even on secondary details of the experiences in question, but on mere concomitants affecting any human constitution and not belonging to the experience in itself.¹¹

But well before Huxley, it must be repeated, Rudolf Otto, so exceptional in his generation as a student of comparative religions, had established, beyond all possible dispute, the radical diversity of two experiences commonly called mystical, those of the Indian Sankara and those of the Christian Eckhart.¹² He had chosen to study them together because at first sight they could seem astonishingly similar. For each presents the same characteristics of expressing himself sometimes with images or concepts connected with personal relationships, in fact with the love between a man and a woman, sometimes by the evocation of an eventual fusion of two essences, supposed to have been distinct at the beginning.

Yet Otto's analysis shows plainly that the treatments by Eckhart and Sankara of these series of images and concepts is entirely different, indeed contradictory of one another. For the course of their experiences, their dynamism, move in opposite directions Eckhart wants to show the intimacy, the totality, of the union, the resultant unity, and will summon up, so to say, for his purposes, everything that seems to indicate the abolition

¹⁰ Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception*, London, 1954. Cf. *Perennial Philosophy*, London, 1945.

¹¹ R.C. ZAEHNER, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane*, Oxford, 1957.

¹² Rudolf OTTO, *Mysticism, East and West*, New York, 1932.

of any distinction between the two substances. But from the beginning to the end he presupposes the final as well as the original subsistence of two persons who, far from abolishing one another in the encounter, the exchange, the consummation of their love, appear both of them in the full reality of their own existence only at the very term of this conjunction, when it can be said that only now are they revealed to one another, the one for the other.

Sankara, on the contrary, at the beginning, as at the end, has in view nothing but the revelation, the reappearance, of a unity, a fundamental oneness of two beings who would seem to be essentially different only on a superficial view of them. The metaphors, drawn from the vocabulary of love, which he calls to his aid to describe the process of this final grasp of consciousness, interest him only as representing the intensity, the unreserved passion which moves the Hindu 'mystic' towards the apprehension of this indistinction between his being and total being, lost to view in the banal, superficial, existence of everyday.

Mysticisms of the Self and Cosmic Mysticism

In his Gifford Lectures, *Concordant Discord*, R.C. Zaehner¹³ went on to work out comparative studies of this kind in a masterly way, showing clearly what is fundamentally common to all experiences of what can be called religious contemplation and the difference, or rather the manifold differences, in their development.

All begin with an intuitive sense common to all human beings who live at a certain level of height or, if you will, of depth, that there is a unity in which all reality is bound up closely together, although its principle is above and beyond all particular reality. But the development of this intuitive sense can take place in very different ways as it searches for this *unum necessarium* (or *unus?*). In each of these ways each traveller advances with greater or less success.

¹³ R.C. ZAEHNER, *Concordant Discord* (Gifford Lectures 1967-1969), Oxford, 1970.

To keep to Hinduism, the growth of our information, which discoveries like those of Mohenjo Daro have brought beyond what had been thought possible and in unexpected directions, verify, across an endless variety of approaches, the existence of an original irreducible duality. It is found in the survival, despite the intellectual imperialism of the Aryan authors of the Vedas, of an ancient local stock, which sends out shoots throughout the Upanishads in the most varied combinations, always lending themselves to assessments which are not only different but sharply opposed.

On one side, we have a mysticism of what Fichte would have called the transcendental Ego, something in me which is not at all like an 'I' in the strict sense but rather a 'self' and a self which cannot be given any definite attributions, with whatever divine name it may be decked.

Parallel with this, although the two lines, in Hinduism, seem to involve one another continually, without ever being able, and with good reason, to join up, we have a mysticism which can be described only as 'cosmic'. Moreover, as opposed to the Greek meaning of 'cosmos', which contrasts order, definition, with chaos, here, paradoxically, we are faced with a world which goes beyond any characterization, on however large a scale, which could limit or immobilize it.¹⁴

In the former case, the world is seen only as an illusion, a divine frolic, from which one must detach itself, returning to the furthest depths of the 'I', where it is taken over by a 'self' which is not identifiable with any definite 'I', either our own or any other.

In the latter case, on the other hand, it is the 'I', every 'I' of whatever kind, which seems to be the illusion to escape from, and this can be done only by a total ecstasy on the part of the 'I', in which the whole 'I', the whole self, must be, as it were, turned inside out like a glove, so as to lose itself in the illimitability, the indescribability, of a being which goes beyond every being and all cosmic being itself, on any conceivable level.

All this, plainly, should result in two radically opposed types of experience, and at first this does seem to be the case. But the

¹⁴ This corresponds to numbers 1 and 3 of Zachner's summary, *op.cit.*, p.204.

irreducible complexity of the Upanishads leads to the subtlest and (at least for the Western mind) the most bewildering combinations or, perhaps one should say, slidings of the one type of experience into the other. But we shall soon see, from a Christian perspective, the deep meaning of this irresolvable uncertainty.

That is still not all, for there is in Hinduism, developed especially in that singular treatise the *Bhagavad Gita*, a Vishnuist mysticism, which at first sight seems strangely close to Christian mysticism, since it is, in a certain sense, a mysticism of faith and grace, of grace summoning faith and of faith giving itself up to it.¹⁵

But the personality which is here the object of the one and the subject of the other proves to be in itself only a mere *avatar*, a particular manifestation of a divine being which might just as well put on the form of some other, so that, just as we were supposing ourselves to be on familiar ground, we find ourselves suddenly all at sea again.

The Double Problem of Buddhism

Then there arises the primordial problem raised by Buddhism, that of its relationship with the Hinduism from which it emerged, and quite apart from the problem or problems raised by its development.

At first sight, and this is the opinion of several Hinduists and Buddhists, the most primitive Buddhism is simply a particularly radical form of what we can call cosmic religion, for which it is the 'I', every 'I', or even the self that is illusory, and its nirvana is just the definitive liberation which happily reabsorbs the self from which it had been distinguished by a fatal error. That is the conception which has been circulated in the West chiefly by Ananda Coomaraswamy.¹⁶

But there is another which, in the opinion of good judges both among Western Indianists and Buddhists who seem to follow the

¹⁵ Zaehner distinguishes in the *Bhagavad Gita* a mysticism of the abolition of time (no. 2) and the mysticism which may be called personalist (no. 4).

¹⁶ On the figure who, in England, has fascinated Catholics such as those of Eric Gill's circle, cf. ZAEHNER, *Mysticism Sacred and Profane*, p.30.

most primitive tradition, that of the Buddha himself, appears to be the true one and is quite different. What Buddhist liberation should aim at, on this view, is actually just the removal of all those representatives of ultimate reality which conflict with one another in Hinduism and go on proliferating into the most unexpected hybridizations.

At first sight, this liberation seems to end in pure nihilism. But, say the supporters of this interpretation, that is the mistake, the supreme illusion. The nirvana to which one must arrive and abandon oneself unreservedly is not indefinable because there is nothing there for those who reach it, or rather return to it, but, quite on the contrary, because it is the only perfect beatitude, the only true reality, which outdoes not only all that we might say about it but also every representation of it, every concept.

Let us leave it there, although what has just been said is only an extremely simplified sketch of the insights into Indian religions provided by a study such as Zaehner's.

In relation to Christian mystical experience, as the previous chapters have tried to present it, what has to be said, it seem to me, is that, as the Russia philosopher Vladimir Soloviev has clearly seen and shown, the only thing in all these 'Indian mysticisms' which could lead us, if not to a similar experience, at least not simply to reject it but to prepare for it at least negatively, to remain open to it, is the last account which has been suggested above of what could have been the experience of Cakya Muni and what he decided to propose to his disciples. Beneath its apparent negativity it seems to combine a trusting readiness for an encounter with the positive reality, blessed not just supremely but uniquely, of what is Wholly Other than all that merely human conceptions could reach of the absolute, unique, reality on which the whole world depends.¹⁷

In the *Bhagavad Gita* we seem to have, at first sight, something which is more explicitly close to Christian mystical experience – or perhaps copies it. But a doubt remains: this experience,

¹⁷ Cf. V. SOLOVIEV, *La Justification du Bien*, Paris, 1939, p.232, and on the Buddha a good summary of recent research in M. ELIADE, *op.cit.*, vol. 2, 1985, p.72ff., and on the history of Buddhism, p.210ff. See also vol. 5, 1985, on Tibetan Buddhism, p.278ff.

although so powerfully described, is still enclosed in a framework of representations totally foreign to it. What are we to say? Could it be a case, from the Christian point of view, of a happy inconsequence in Hinduism, or, in its endless producing of metaphysical improvizations grafted on to apparently polymorphous spiritual experiences, could it be that a seemingly fortuitous encounter with the 'Gestalt' of Christian experience has taken place? The impression made is so attractive, but the context of it so much opposed to it, that it is not surprising to find that a growing number of scholars are coming to think that the *Bhavadgita* is much less old than it is generally thought to be and that it shows no more than an indirect influence from the old Syrian mission, which has left such traces all over the Far East and survives in the Malankarese and Malabar Churches.

In any case, it cannot be denied that, in the two general orientations which were pointed out at the beginning in the supposedly mystic ways of India (also found far beyond it) – either of welcome for what, in this world itself, draws us to a reality which transcends it or of a return within the self which brings us back, apparently still more directly, to this same transcendence – there seems to be at least some apprehension, confused both in its avowals and in their expression, yet also real, of the true God, the fruit of the intimate prompting of the Spirit who, always and everywhere, urges all men to yield to that attraction of the Word which is still exerted upon everyone coming into the world, although it is a broken world and we are born in it tainted by the original sin of our race. Who can tell what presentiments of the only true mysticism this urging, this attraction, may arouse? Even those who give themselves up to it cannot find words to describe it. And one must add, it seems, that they have no more chances of grasping it than are given by a vague awareness.

As for the Christian himself, to repeat, touched by the revelation of the Son of God made man, whom his sacramental life has, as it were, grafted upon him, who is nourished by him, it is still only in faith that it is open to him to hand himself over in reality, consciously moreover, if obscurely, to the divine light and the divine charity and so to have, if not a beginning of vision, at least a foretaste of it.

But faith comes to us only through a revelation in human language, the only one which the Son of God made man

could make his own. For these two, faith and the word, it is impossible to seek or imagine any possible substitute. There is a merely preliminary faith, a preparation, a disposition, an introduction, in the Old Testament. No doubt it provides at least partial, sketchy, equivalents. The Bible itself suggests this. But it seems to consider them as glimpses here and there, momentary flashes, indeed as quite special. They seem never to have formed a collective tradition growing all the time, which does not mean without shocks, except in Israel.

To return to Far Eastern religions, India in particular, it seems probable that this is what happened, most notably in the case of the Buddha and the most understanding and faithful of his disciples. Elsewhere the possibility of such a thing cannot be excluded but it seems chimerical to claim genuine probabilities.

The particular problem of Jewish mysticism is quite different and perhaps that of Muslim mysticism also; they will be briefly considered at the end of this chapter.

But first there are two things to be added. One is that even the possibilities which are left open for approaches of this kind by the sorts of ecstasy or enstasy here touched upon are ambiguous and certainly laden with formidable temptations for fallen humanity.

Cosmic ecstasy is obviously in danger of turning into a sheer idolatry of the 'powers', themselves in part fallen, who underlie the vitality, the beauty, of the cosmos. At first, enstasy, the flight from the world into a pure interiority, might seem safer. It is, however, laden with still more formidable dangers, if we suppose that the worst idolatry is that of the first fallen angel, the idolatry of oneself. For in any other there remains the certainty that God is *different*. And an apparent salvation found in a detachment in which only the self remains is dangerously close to the most radical idolatry, for which there is no cure. The error of Narcissus is the fatal one. The confusion, indeed, is not complete, but the danger of it is never greater. As Evagrius wonderfully grasped and expressed it, the loftiest contemplatives are those who have most need to guard against the major sin of pride.

That is why, conversely, one can ask whether there may not be perhaps more effective and more numerous apparent approaches to authentic mysticism in popular forms of the Indian

religions, however laden with childish superstitions, especially in Buddhism, rather than in the intellectualized forms which we are always tempted, by a typically Greek confusion of thought, to regard as therefore the most spiritualized.

Here I am thinking in particular of those forms of Mahajana Buddhism which have led to the cult of a quasi-divinity such as the Chinese Kwanon, in which what is dominant is the recognition of an infinite heavenly pity, calling not only for trust on our part but also unreserved abandonment. I know a Chinese Catholic priest, a convert from Buddhism, who declares that what has most helped to make him responsive to the Gospel is just his mother's Buddhist piety, very humbly but deeply characteristic of the popular religion to which I have just referred.

For, to return to Soloviev's favourable judgment on primitive Buddhism, what seems to verify it most clearly is this pity which seems to have been shared by all his faithful disciples, the simplest as well as the most distinguished. Of course, it is not the positive, creative and salvific charity of the Gospel. But it has to be admitted that it is capable of going very far towards that. I shall give only one other example, chosen from the other end of the scale, in a form of Buddhism which is one of the most aristocratic and, at first sight, the most equivocal, swamped as it may seem to be by magic, the Tantric Buddhism of Tibet. I refer to the admirable personality, so discreet and truly humble, practising with exceptional generosity that forgiveness of injuries which seems so difficult for Christians, revealed to us in the *Memoirs* of the present Dalai Lama.

Protestant Mysticism

The case of religions of the Word is, of course, quite different from that of religions so far discussed. The prejudice against mysticism on the part of so many Protestant theologians of our own time and of every complexion is understandable when we realize the number of *Illuminati* whom Protestantism, more or less willingly, has sheltered; they often show all the characteristics of false mystics, who have never been any less numerous

among Catholics. But there are instances of something very different, from whom I shall select only Gerhard Tersteegen, already mentioned. I hope to write of him as he deserves elsewhere. As for Protestants of good faith who have retained the great Trinitarian and Christological dogmas, it must suffice to avouch the possibility of experiences which differ in no way from those of Catholic or Orthodox mystics, including perhaps the very greatest.

Jewish and Islamic Mysticism

Among the Jews, those at least whose expectations of the Messiah have not been extinguished, there is the whole mystical tradition of the Merkabah, which Gershom Sholem has described and analyzed; its themes are just a development of those found in the Old Testament which lead us most directly towards the New. If Jesus did not hesitate to say of Abraham that he had 'seen his day', there is no reason to refuse these authentic sons of Abraham the possibility of following in his steps. And if they have mingled confused reveries with their most authentic experiences, Father Thurston, S.J., has shown that many Christian mystics, Catholics, have fallen into the same errors without any need on that account for us to regard their experiences as inauthentic. Still less should one condemn on such grounds people of good will, nourished with the divine Word but without guides who have the promises of the Gospel.

The problem of mysticism, or rather mysticisms, in Islam, is more complex. But there are undeniably in the Koran and the tradition on which it draws, Shiite especially, but also Sunnite, enough remarkably persistent biblical survivals for the rightminded to be capable of progress in the mystical way, sometimes far enough to put to shame the average Christian or Jew.¹⁸

¹⁸ Let us recall only the works of G. SOLEM on Jewish mysticism and, on Muslim mysticism, those of R. ARNALDEZ and H. CORBIN. The admirable approaches of L. MASSIGNON are unhappily faulted by some projection of his faith upon texts which seem unable to admit it.

Conclusion

Lastly there is an objection to be discussed, levelled against work like that of Otto or Zaehner, although they have received the fullest approbation from representatives of the religions in question. It is that the part played in the different mysticisms by the representation of the religious object proper to the different mysticisms is only an appearance, a label stuck on to the expression of the experience of various contemplatives deriving not from this but from their ambience.¹⁹

To this two things must be said in reply. The first is that, in studies like those of Zaehner or Otto before him, what is studied is not the interpretation given by the subjects of the experiences considered but their direct expression, and more generally the effect on them, all the behaviour resulting from the experience by which its content may be revealed to phenomenological analysis, a very different matter.

But the objection itself has its origins, explicitly moreover, in the obstinate prejudice of these critics that the only authentic mysticism is simply the experience of nothing definable, and so, they conclude, a mere experience of the void. But that is a failure to understand in the first place that an experience without any content is a contradiction in terms. To repeat, every experience, in the widest sense of the word, presupposes an intentional object. It can be defined only by the relation of the subject to this object (whether it be real or illusory).

And, further, when one sees personalities as admirably integrated, as critical of themselves and of all their possible impressions as are those of the great contemplatives, one must be singularly unaware or impudent to allow oneself to deny the reality of the objects of their experiences (whether it is a question of what we observe in non-Christian contemplatives or in Christian ones).

To say this, which recognizes the irreducible differences, does not imply that these various experiences, if they are not identical,

¹⁹ On this see the essays (not without their ambiguities) collected by Steven T. KATZ, *Mysticism and religious traditions*, Oxford, 1983. [For criticism of Katz, see William J. WAINWRIGHT, *Mysticism*, Brighton, 1981, p.19ff. – Tr.]

must be at least equivalent. On the contrary it is very remarkable, and highly significant to see, after Bergson as he revealed himself to us in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, an ultra-critical philologue as Zaehner was, himself originally a completely unbelieving Jew, and a Marxist as well, becoming convinced simply by a scientific study of the texts, first of the reality of the experiences which they describe or which they attest, then of unconfusable distinctions which separate them and finally of their hierarchy. So it was that this search for God, in which man succeeds only in discovering God searching out himself, appeared, to the philologue as to the philosopher, as approaching its goal only in Judaism and reaching it only in Christianity, Catholic and/or Orthodox.

CONCLUSION

EXPERIENCE, MYSTERY AND SACRIFICE, THE MARRIAGE FEAST OF THE LAMB AND OUR FILIATION

Certainly mysticism, in the sense which this book has tried to make clear in examining the development of the word's meaning in the Church, is in the end an experience. It is the supreme Christian experience and, if not reaching its fullness (this can be only for the life to come), tends towards it as far as possible here and now. Further, if we follow Gregory of Nyssa, 'heaven' will not be a static fulfilment, but the definitive freeing from all that still hinders us from letting ourselves be taken up unreservedly by the God of the Pasch into the infinity of his *agape*.

Mystical Experience, But in What Sense?

But how are we to understand this experience? Is it simply, even essentially, a matter of reflexive consciousness, of an immediate realization by our thought that we are plunged into the mystery, that it is no longer we who live but Christ who lives in us? If we find ourselves left with this view of things as exactly the truth, an impression which could be produced by the study on which we have been engaged, then we should be very far from the mark. We should certainly be very far from what was meant by those who worked out the theory of it, such as Saint Gregory of Nyssa or Saint Maximus the Confessor, despite the accuracy of their theological analyses, or even by reason of their very penetration.

For this would always be to remain prisoners of the great illusion of modern thought and, to a considerable extent, of modern spirituality, that one has genuine experience only when one's consciousness of it is immediate and total, as though the experience in question were not fundamentally the experience of something that transcends us but, so to say, the experience of our own experience in its very subjectivity.

Nothing is more characteristic in this respect than the development of the meaning of a word like 'ecstasy'. For the ancients, no doubt, there is something psychological about it, some awareness in mystical ecstasy. But that is not the first, nor the dominant consideration, still less the exclusive one. The point is that we are now truly, objectively, snatched away from ourselves: it is 'no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' Whether I realize this more or less vividly, with an immediate, felt, reflexive consciousness (seizing upon the precise fact that I am so conscious), far from being essential, is always seen, by the ancients at least, as secondary, indeed as non-essential. All that matters is to be fully convinced that Christ lives in us and, above all, to act conformably with this, not to experience more or less clearly the feeling that it is really so. Saint Antony said: 'He who knows that he is praying has not yet begun to pray', and it is significant that Evagrius, despite his intellectuality, does not hesitate to repeat it.

In this respect it is certainly not only when we are considering non-Christian forms of spirituality and contemplation that it is requisite to give equal importance, perhaps even greater importance, to the religion of the people than to that of intellectuals, who alone are capable of working out such things, as it were, from outside, analyzing them and explaining what they experience. This is all the more of capital importance when it is a question of Christian spirituality in what is most specific to it, mysticism as we find it springing from the Christian mystery, the mystery of Christ in us. In a passage found in the synoptists Luke and Matthew, the chief witness to the fact that Saint Paul did not draw the idea of mystery from resources of his own but from the teaching of Jesus, there is the cry which Jesus uttered: 'I thank you, Father, that you have hidden these things from the wise and learned but revealed them to children.'

That is not, of course, to downgrade the value for our faith and for its enrichment in the reflections on mystical experience of a mystic like Master Eckhart who was also a thinker of remarkable perspicacity, or, more simply, of a Hadewijch of Antwerp, a person endowed with both a culture and an intuition exceptional for depth as well as shrewdness and expressed in sublime poetry. We have to remember that Eckhart himself carried out his astonishing labour of speculation in order to explain and justify the experience of numberless contemplatives, for the most part not specially or even at all intellectual, indeed only very modestly 'cultivated'. Again, at the origin of all the theologico-spiritual development which we have followed in the works of the Fathers, there is the spirituality of men who were not only little given to intellectual speculation but also sceptical about its benefit: for such were the first monks of Egypt and Syria, and that was the spirituality which those eminent intellectuals, the Fathers, humbly received at the beginning and wanted to explain to themselves and make their own, with all their intellectuality, or even in spite of it.

Better still, there lies the reason why they kept up a preference for neo-Platonism, namely, its justification, still groping its way, for apophaticism, as opposed to the overweening intellectualism, sure of itself and dismissive of all that it failed to understand, of the most brilliant of the Arian thinkers, especially Eunomius of Cyzicus whose writings they regularly criticized.

That is why we shall approach the conclusion of this study by returning to the mysticism of the Macarian Homilies which were briefly mentioned at the end of the chapter on the mysticism of the Fathers. For, if there is one thing that characterizes them in contrast with the work of men such as Clement, Origen, Basil, the two Gregorys, pseudo-Denis and, above all, Evagrius, it is that their author not only has no interest whatever in speculation, but also is obviously scarcely capable of it – and does not much mind!

But it is undeniable that these Homilies, particularly in the East, have had and still have an unparalleled influence. Even in the West, translated only after much delay, they seem to have been more read and appreciated by the devout than our modern histories of spirituality are ready to allow.

Just because of their essentially popular, non-intellectual, character, they have given rise, during the last fifty years, in theological circles where spirituality is above all a matter of learned researches or speculative interpretation, to a cascade of frenetic controversies. The final result of all this seems to be not only derisory but ironical to the point of comicality.

We have shown elsewhere how it came to be supposed that these very simple texts, which have nourished for centuries the piety of excellent religious, were the very breviary or the official text of a heresy which was described as monstrous, namely Messalianism, combining an interpretation of mystical experience of the crassest sort with a more or less complete amorality. That anyone should have thought to discover all this in these texts is a typical example of the mistaken readings possible for captious, self-confident, intellectuals when they happen to pore over what was written by simple people for simple people and so see in artless and imprecise expressions, by which the simple, by reason of their very simplicity, are the least likely to be duped, the intentions of a subtle perversity.

The high point of this affair, typical of scholars living in retirement and constantly becoming excited about texts composed by and for quite different people, was reached when suspicion began to grow that *The Great Letter*, in which the author of the Homilies summed up their themes, must be the source of an important treatise by Gregory of Nyssa, his *De Instituto*, on the nature of the monastic life. From this the suspicion spread to mysticism almost in its entirety, not only that of the simple but covering the whole period and including the most famous systematizations of ancient monasticism. Some idea of the lengths to which such an aberration could go can be gained from the fact that this imaginary pan-Messalianism involved Diadochus of Photike himself . . . whom all the contemporary evidence presents as the outstanding opponent and critic of the real Messalianism.

When I was writing *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*, it could be supposed that all this fictitious edifice had been brought to the ground by Werner Jaeger, who seemed to have established that the *De Instituto* was written earlier than *The Great Letter*. This, however proved not to be the case, and the stubborn supporters of the pan-Messalianism of the Fathers were overjoyed when Dörries (a scholar with a reputation as

great as Jaeger's) produced good arguments for their opinion in the matter, at the same time seeming quite ready to accept that the unknown author who, as everyone agrees, hides himself behind the name of Macarius, could be the Symeon of Mesopotamia whom the anti-Messalians had denounced as the father of Messalianism. Alas! The final work of Dörries on the matter, while maintaining the anteriority of *The Great Letter*, concluded, after having examined it more closely, that it was free from all that the Messalians could be charged with, and that, if it may indeed be the work of a certain Symeon, we must conclude either that it is not heretical or that this supposed heretic was not one, at any rate when he wrote it . . .

We should not have wasted time in detailing these learned discussions going round in a circle except for their showing with what difficulty intellectuals, who regard spirituality as above all a matter of ideas, manage to give a reasonable interpretation of texts which are concerned only to stimulate the spiritual lives of the least sophisticated.

For there are three major themes in the so-called Macarian homilies, first what may be called a mysticism of light, in direct contrast with the obscurity of life without Christ, then an insistence on prayer as the fundamental practice of the spiritual life and lastly the maintaining of its progressive development, which has no end here below. It will be noticed that these three themes certainly underlie the spirituality recommended and explained by Gregory of Nyssa. But here, in the Homilies, there may seem to be an indiscriminating contrast between the supernatural light which, little by little, bathes the life wholly devoted to Christ and the darkness in which one remains engulfed until one has given oneself up to following him without reserve. An abstract analysis will lead easily to the accusation of illuminism. So too the exaltation of prayer, to unwary logicians in their studies, will mean the depreciation of everything else. And, above all, the insistence, counterbalancing incidentally the apparently too easy optimism of the first theme, on the coexistence, never perhaps wholly overcome in this life even by the best, of the sin into which one goes on falling and its constant menace with the grace that is always available, will be turned into a principle of immoralism by the same sort of minds. But it is enough to read these texts with a

minimum of good sense to see that they contain nothing of the kind.

As Diadochus of Photike pointed out so well (himself, of course, accused by our inquisitors of a treacherous compact with those whom he claimed to be attacking), it is all a matter of realizing that, before faith and baptism, the devil, established within us as our master, repelled Christ's entrance, but that, after the first conversion, one may and should think that Christ is now established in the fortress of our hearts, waging our own warfare against the world and the evil one who desires to become our master once more. Isn't this the formal teaching of the Gospels?

All this shows the profound error of professional theologians who scrutinize the expressions given by the simple of the faith which they love as though they were the dissertations of uncouth and slyly heretical students. This popular spiritual literature of which these Homilies are eminently representative may seem to coarsen and so to confuse the notion of mystical experience. In fact they will often mingle with it accounts of all sorts of visions, prodigies which may accompany it or be its channel, but which do not belong to its essence. The only final test of authentic experience is the generosity which springs from charity, from the gift of self to God found in Jesus Christ and, inseparably, to the men who are our brothers. Where this is not found, the firm handling of the most precise conceptual distinctions between what is and what is not of the essence of this experience has little value. Where this supernatural charity is undeniably found, mistakes which seem to affect only an imaginative surround – concepts being more or less lacking – are much less serious than they appear to the pedantry of their censors. That is why the Church, without ever allowing visions and prodigies to be considered what really matters, not only does not condemn but approves them, even when their profusion or the attention given them may seem debatable, provided that the fruits of authentic faith and charity are in evidence. Certainly neither Lourdes nor Fatima nor other places of the kind constitute the summit of Christian mysticism, according to the most exact theological criteria, but to draw from this the conclusion that the events which happen there and the experiences to which they give rise have no mystical value, in the most truly Christian sense of the expression, would be a profound mistake.

The theologians who fall into it would have said disdainfully to the woman with the issue of blood, to whom Jesus said that her faith had saved her, 'Superstitious wretch, depart from me!' He knew of what he spoke, they did not, we must conclude, even if that goes against our grandest theories.

To return to the Macarian homilies, far from casting suspicion on the spirituality, obviously evangelical and charismatic in the sense of *Acts*, which Symeon the New Theologian is to develop in the same direction, or on its further ramifications, first at the monastery of Sinai, then at Athos, which will produce what is called 'the Jesus prayer' and all the Hesychast mysticism of the light of Mount Tabor – the anticipated vision, as at the Transfiguration, of the glory of the eternal Kingdom – we must recognize a practice and an expression of it less worked out in their theological implications than the mysticism developed in the West during the same period, in the tradition of Origen, the Gregorys and pseudo-Denis. But it retains, on the other hand, a warmth of concrete realism, a care for integrating all that is human and indeed the whole world with spirituality, with mysticism in fact in its most exact sense, which is fundamentally biblical. So we must congratulate ourselves that, in the Eastern half of the Church in particular, although not exclusively, as we shall see, a tradition was maintained and constantly developed in which, as it has been justly remarked, it is the heart rather than the *nous* (the intellect) and the whole of man rather than the soul alone that are the keywords for the insertion of the mystery into us.

It would be also completely erroneous to suppose that in Byzantium itself this other tradition was pursued apart from that handed down by the Alexandrians and the Cappodocians, whose last great representative in the patristic age had been Maximus the Confessor. For his *Mystagogia* was the primary source and permanent inspiration for a whole uninterrupted series of mystical theologies of which one may say that they were, in the first place, theologies of sacramental liturgy. Although some of these treatises remain unpublished, they were produced uninterruptedly until the fourteenth century. One of the earliest and most influential was the *Ecclesiastical History* (that is, a description of the Church, in the original sense of *ἱστορία*) by Germanus of Constantinople (itself constantly added to in the

manuscripts to keep pace with liturgical developments; the last was that of Nicolas Cabasilas in his two gems, *The Explanation of the Liturgy* (of the eucharist) and *Life in Jesus Christ*. It is significant that Nicolas, after some hesitations, when the controversy about Athonite Hesychasm broke out, came down firmly on the side of Saint Gregory Palamas and his *Defence of the holy Hesychasts*. In fact, the admirable equilibrium of the Orthodox revival, which was about to be wiped out at Constantinople, by the Turkish conquest of 1453, and which expressed itself in the final stage of Byzantine iconography, in the mosaics and frescoes of the Pantanassa and the Peribleptos at Mistra, is the fruit of the encounter and mutual recognition of the popular and the learned tradition of Christian mysticism in the East.

The West, at about the same time, saw the final relegation of the liturgy into an almost completely ceremonial affair, the Bible also being reduced to an arsenal of 'proofs' wielded by a decadent scholasticism.

As a result of this lacuna, the visionary, prophetic, mysticism of Saint Hildegard of Bingen or Saint Elizabeth of Schönau, as later that of Saint Gertrude and the two Mechtilds, then that of Saint Catherine and the first Franciscans, finally that of the English with Richard Rolle, took a line of its own and at best accompanied rather than encountered the great speculative mysticism of the Rhinelanders. The two currents did sometimes meet, but too rarely. That was the case with Hadewijch above all, and later, more superficially, with Tauler and Suso.

But we may ask whether, in our own time, following upon the extraordinary semi-autodidacts, Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus and Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity, we can see a similar reconciliation taking place in the life and work of Edith Stein, with whom we can perhaps compare the singular figure of Maximilian Kolbe, still too little studied or even known.

But (Edith Stein's *The Science of the Cross* illustrates this) it is not only in the contemplation of the unlearned, of which the recent development of the charismatic movement is a particularly striking example, that authentic experience in Christian mysticism can be recognized as well as in the great mystical writings, speculative or psychological. For opposed to the quite recent idea about mysticism, reducing it to certain states of soul which can be studied in more or less complete abstraction from the object

which attracts them, there is the conception of the Fathers for us to return to according to which it is this object, the Mystery, active and effective by its presence alone, that determines what can legitimately be called mystical in Christian experience.

In other words, that justifies the clear statement – which at the same time needed so much courage! – of both Blondel and Garrigou-Lagrange that the whole of authentic mysticism is present in germ even in baptismal experience, the experience of baptism received in faith. This was the basic meaning of the teaching of Saint Symeon the New Theologian. And it implies that all Christian experience should be considered mystical in which living faith really hands us over to the transfiguring power of the Mystery of Christ in us. That is what Dom Anselm Stolz in his splendid little book, *The Doctrine of Spiritual Perfection* (London, 1938), was the first to reaffirm, causing not only scandal but bewilderment to specialists in these matters, or persons supposing themselves to be such.

It is indubitable, therefore, that the development of this experience tends to develop a contemplation which is a foretaste of eternal blessedness, that is, a consciousness illuminated by the truth that 'it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me'. But, we must add at once, for the Fathers and for Saint Paul, the primary and essential thing is not the way in which it is felt, or even so much that we are affected by it at all, as that it is actually the case. At the beginning of the century, a monk of Buckfast, Dom Louismet, had so well understood this that he was able to write a whole series of books on the mystical life without even mentioning the psychological aspect, of course provoking the criticism that he did not know what he was talking about . . . from people who certainly knew much less! Indeed this reaction, though perfectly comprehensible, had been exaggerated. But it had put first things first.

In eternity, no doubt, the flowering of mystical contemplation, freed from all shadow, will be the final effect of our union with the mystery of Christ or, as Saint Paul says, of Christ fulfilling himself completely in us. But, here below, the reflexive awareness that it is indeed so depends, for its clarity and immediacy, both on the psychological dispositions of the particular person and on God's particular plan for him.

It is not indeed imaginable, or even conceivable, that anyone should be able to advance towards holiness without a corresponding advance in the intimacy, the intensity, of his conviction of 'Christ in us, the hope of glory'. But the interpretation of the theme of night by Saint John of the Cross should suffice to warn us, like Saint John's anagogy, that the Resurrection is not only the result of the Cross but proceeds from it and, correspondingly, that it is in the deepest obscurity of the Cross that the light of glory is already undoubtedly present, even if it is only from the cloud that it filters.

The Nature and Meaning of Sacrifice

This consideration raises inevitably a final question. The reader may well have had it in mind for a long time. It is this: what relation is there between the Mystery, and therefore the mysticism which is so closely bound up with it, and sacrifice?

At first sight, it may seem strange that Saint Paul, for whom the Mystery is the centre of everything, and little by little spreads over everything, should touch on the theme of sacrifice only in a single place in relation to Christ and his Cross, and then only in the last of his great Letters, in *Ephesians*, 5, 2, where he tells us: 'Christ has loved us (or you) and given himself up for us as a fragrant offering (προσφορά) and sacrifice (θυσία) to God.'

The first point to make here is that Paul seems to regard love, *agape*, and sacrifice as identical in Christ. Perhaps it would be better to say that sacrifice appears here as the consummation of love. In any case what is no less remarkable about this passage is what immediately precedes it: 'Become imitators of God as (his) dearly loved children and walk in love . . .'

We are taught, then, three things: (1) having become children dearly loved by God (of course, in the Unique beloved), we ought to love him in return; (2) *agape* is, then the property of God; (3) Christ has both revealed the love of God to us and made it possible for us to practise this same love by offering himself in sacrifice.

In fact, although this application to the Cross, and precisely to the Cross of this mystery of our salvation and adoption, is unique

in Saint Paul, it is a theme running through his letters that all our Christian life should become sacrificial.

Romans, 12 1, invites us to

offer our own bodies [that is, our whole life in this world] as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God.

More particularly, the exercise of the apostolate, and above all its consummation in martyrdom, is described, in *Philippians*, 2, 17, as a libation accompanying, or rather, it seems, crowning what he calls 'the liturgical service of your faith'. In everyday Greek this word λειτουργία meant a public service to the community, rendered by a specific individual, especially for some religious occasion. This is indicated by *Philippians*, 2, 30, where the words 'to complete your service to me' refer to what Epaphroditus was able to do in person, on behalf of the Philippians, to help the apostle's needs and certainly for the future of his apostolate to all who came to him in prison. Verse 17, then, seems to have a double meaning in that the apostolate itself, with its tendency towards martyrdom, is a sort of sacrificial offering proper to the apostle, with a view to the faith of his disciples or in that a particular service contributes to the sacrificial character which their faith should itself possess.

In fact, it seems that the two meanings involve one another and are both implied in Paul's close-packed language.

Then the Letter to the Hebrews, certainly not composed by the apostle himself, but probably written and despatched under his supervision, does not indeed mention the Mystery but presents the Passion of Christ as the sacrifice to which all the others tended, beginning with the most august, the Day of Expiations, coming to an end in his unique fulfilment of them.

But what is of greatest interest is the way in which it clarifies the meaning of this sacrifice. In particular, all its ninth chapter describes this perfect sacrifice as a passing from earth to heaven, to the immediate presence of God where Christ is found as our precursor both going before us and drawing us after him.

This seems to have been also exactly the view of Saint John who, in the Apocalypse as in the Gospel, shows us the Son of Man descending from heaven solely to return with us in his train, by the Cross to Glory, while the Apocalypse not only calls

Christ's drawing us with him 'sacrificial' but sees in it the sacrifice of 'the Lamb immolated before the creation of the world'.

The first Letter of Peter, without using the word 'sacrifice', undeniably has it in mind when it says, in terms very close to those of John and the Letter to the Hebrews:

Christ died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit

which is very much like *Hebrews*, 9, 11ff.

When Christ appeared as the high priest of the good things to come, through a greater and more perfect tabernacle than that made with human hands, that is, of this creation, and not by the blood of goats or calves, but by his own blood, entered once for all into the most holy place.

And again in chapter 10, 19ff:

Having therefore free access into this most holy place in the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us and through the veil, that is, his own flesh, let us draw near with faithful hearts and in full possession of faith.

This at once takes us back to Peter's Letter and the simple words:

Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

That, obviously, is the last word of the revelation made to us by the God of the Bible, the God of the Pasch, the Passover, not only in the sense that he passes over the houses where the paschal sacrifice has been offered but because he draws us after him to the land of promise, from the kingdom of darkness to that of light, to take us at last, as Saint Paul says in *Colossians* (1, 13) 'to the kingdom of the Son of his love'.

Better still, according to *Hebrews*, the sacrifice of Christ, which is one with his manifestation to sinful men and the gift of love which is proper to God so that they may share it and live thereby the life of sons, is the sacrifice of the only son which God asked

of Abraham, putting him to the test as a parable, because only God, of course, could bring this about and, in so doing, make us capable of it (11, 19).

At that point it can seem that the very notion of sacrifice, as thought of by man without the help of revelation, is turned upside down, since it is no longer for man to offer it to God in order to conciliate him, but it is God who offers it to man, in fact offers himself.

Actually we have to say that, instead of being turned upside down, this notion is both brought back to its origin and transfigured, or rather fulfilled in a way that surpasses all men's hopes.

For there is no doubt that the most primitive meaning of sacrifice, as Saint Augustine so well said, is a divine reality, the supreme divine activity.

The explanation of this is simply that all sacrifices, in their materiality, have been meals – divine meals, certainly – but this does not mean that they were not really so; they were meals which had kept or recovered their original meaning and reality. Nothing could be more absurd than the violent controversy which broke out after the last Council between the 'integrists' and the 'progressives' about whether the eucharist is, essentially, a meal or a sacrifice. The question is the height of absurdity. Even to think of asking it marks an extreme degradation of theological thinking. For there have never been sacrifices which were not meals, as was made abundantly clear in the book by P.K. Yerkes on the subject, admirably discussed by E.O. James in *The Origins of Sacrifice* (London, 1953, p.256ff. Cf. *Sacrifice and Sacrament*, *ibid.*, 1962). A meal is an action in which man returns to the source of his life, to renew it in the original creative activity of God from which he first received it and must continually receive it.

That is why, in all the world's great religions, sacrifice appears not only as instituted by the gods but as renewing, or rather continually maintaining, their fundamental action which gives life; and this life, although it becomes ours, remains nonetheless theirs.

This is brought out, for example, in the sacrifice of a bull by Mithras, which refers to the beginning and the end of our world order. Better still, in the Vedas, Agni appears as the fire which

consumes the sacrifice. And, at an earlier period, he seems to be identified with the sacrifice: he not only performs it but seems to be its substance.

A clearly secondary development is the idea found in the cosmogonic myths of the Near East, contemporary with the establishment of cities on the basis of a sacred royalty which acquires magical characteristics, together with the belief that the gods created men only that they might be themselves nourished by the sacrifices offered to them. This is part of that degradation of religion into magic, the reversal of the roles of gods and men, which is the essence of magic.

It would require the biblical Word, that of the New Testament especially, to give men the idea of a life which, in God himself, is nothing but love, love which gives and forgives, giving itself. So it shows itself to be, in creation, salvation, the filial adoption of mankind, because it is so in the life of the Trinity, with the final consequence that its supreme gift to its creatures can only be that of living themselves in giving and in giving themselves, after the pattern of the eternal giving.

That is what Jesus affirms and definitively effects on the evening of the Supper, when he makes the meal a memorial of the creation and the redemptive work inaugurated in the Pasch, the memorial of his own death as revealing and communicating, in the dying life of the Son of God made man, the eternal life of God. So reconciling us with the Father in his own body, consecrating us by the Spirit into his own consecration, he makes ready for the expansion of divine love in our own hearts, that gift of the Spirit which is the fruit of the *transitus*, the Passover of his own Passion and Resurrection, his glorification and ours in the bosom of the Father.

So the Mystery, ultimately, is revealed and communicated in the mystical experience of believers as the eternal eucharist of the Son, giving back to the Father, in the Spirit, the love which is the very life of the Three, its living unity in their mutual and reciprocal gift, the unique sacrifice in which we are all offered and offerers in the unique offering consummated by the eternal Son at the climax of our history of sin and death, thus transfigured into that of our divine adoption.

To return for the last time to the parallel and the contrast of the Christian Mystery with the pagan mysteries, we can now see

how, whereas the ritual of the latter, like all ancient sacrifices, sustained and renewed the everlasting circle of cosmic life, ever reborn from death but only to return to it, the Christian ritual, the eucharist, does not just express what is left of creation's sacred character, unable to extricate itself from the human and cosmic fall, for now the crust of a world turned cold and turned in upon itself is pierced by the creative and recreative Word of God in which he is expressed and presented to give himself to us. Thus overcoming the death of his creatures by taking it into the divine life of love, the Christian Mystery frees us from our fatal pride and egoism by winning our consent to that death which they have brought upon us and restoring us to the eternal life which is nothing else than eternal love.

Nuptial Mysticism and the Mysticism of Essence

We can now find a fuller answer to the question about the relationship between nuptial mysticism and the mysticism of essence. And this will lead us to the deepest difference between the pagan mysteries and the Christian Mystery in their continuity within discontinuity.

It seems that the perspective of mystery is the only one which allows us first to grasp the linking up of Triadology (the doctrine of the Trinity) with Christology and then that of this with ecclesiology. The unity in divine love which is the goal of all authentic mysticism implies that the unity of creation must be restored, completed and transcended in its union both collective and fundamentally personal, with the divinity, following from the incarnation of the Word-Son, in whom the Father from whom everything comes is expressed and communicated to us. The Son having become flesh of our flesh and having taken upon him all the consequences of the fall, but for sin which that has brought about and multiplied, humanity, in all the inseparable persons who constitute it, and with them all the world, finds itself summoned and stirred, under the impulse of the Spirit, to become united in the free acceptance by its members of a union, an identification in love, with the Son himself. From this results the final consequence to which everything tended, in creation as in the very life of the Creator, the universal recapitulation

in the Son by the Spirit, who proclaims that we are all called to sonship in the Son and who consummates the giving of our freedom to the returning of love, in the Son, to the Father, from whom everything proceeds, in God himself and outside him.

This is the ultimate meaning of the Mystery of 'Christ in us, the hope of glory', himself fulfilling all in all as they give back to the Father, universally, the love of which the Son is the first object and the second subject and of which the Holy Spirit is the consummation.

It follows that nuptial mysticism (the union with the Son of every soul in the Church of the newly begotten whose names are written in heaven) and the mysticism of essence (the return to the Father of all that had emanated from him, in time as in eternity) imply, involve and consummate one another.

And this leads us to see how this mystical conjunction of love and death, which the pagan mysteries proclaimed and claimed to achieve, transporting us into the tragic consummation of the union of the divinities of the lower world with the gods of heaven, was only a foreshadowing of what the mysticism of the Gospel could alone make clear by bringing it about.

From Divine Paternity to Virginal Maternity and The Marriage of the Lamb

The Gospel, the one good news, is the announcement of the divine paternity, the proclamation of what it is, that is, the heart of the Mystery, an incomparable love, love in its purity, infinite generosity, which exists and subsists only in giving, giving all one has and all one is, culminating in the gift of giving oneself in return.

So the sonship of the eternal Son is simply the production and so the perfect Image of infinite generosity in the unity, the uniqueness, of whom a multitude of creatures is eternally conceived by the Uncreated, as a springing forth of his goodness to the edge of nothingness. And so there is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Love, the Spirit of the Father resting eternally upon the Son, in whom the Father and the Son are only One in the meeting and the exchange of their love, and by whom, in the Son, all

the limited images of the illimitable Image of the infinite Father are summoned to liberty, that is, to the possibility of themselves giving, like the Son, in the Son, love for love to the Father, the source of all.

Further, in humanity, in which the world reaches its summit, becomes conscious and expresses itself, the duality of masculine and feminine reflects this disposition of the creation, predestined in the Son to participate in the divine life by reuniting with the Son, from whom it has been detached, one might say, as Eve is shown to us as being detached from Adam so as to be freely joined with him. In maternity, which associates her with the Creator, she is destined to become the place, the focus where will be consummated, in the union of the Son with this humanity, its return to the Father, with him, in the Spirit.

So paternity, in its essence, is seen as wholly divine, special to the deity in its most absolute transcendence. But maternity, although simply human, is that which, in man, or rather in humanity so far as feminine, prepares and brings about the reunion with the Son, in an ineffable conjunction with the Spirit, which makes possible, despite everything, even the initial fall, foreseen, enclosed, in the supreme manifestation of uncreated Love in the created order, the coming of the Son to take upon himself our life, fallen as it is. The Spirit, by which Mary conceived while remaining virginal, like the Father himself, finally fulfils us in our response to the love of the Son which will bring us along with him in his eternal return to the Father.

Maternity, then, in which humanity, through woman, reaches its end in God, is like an inverted image, on the created level, of what the Holy Spirit is in the life of the Uncreated. Whereas Mary brings life only by enveloping it, so to say, in herself, the Spirit, *intimior interion meo*, accomplishes it, becoming, as it were, its soul. And whereas maternity is consummated in a tearing away which separates child from mother, we become sons in the Son only in consummating our surrender to the urgings of the Spirit. And again, whereas the Son's own surrender to the love of the Father, on the level of fallen creation, is consummated in his sharing of our death, our reunion with him, in this very death, consummates our ecstasy, our ravishment with the Risen One, our Ascension in his own, in which is celebrated the Marriage of the Lamb in the final universal return to the Father.

In a further study entitled *GNOSIS, la connaissance de Dieu selon les Écritures*, I hope to complete this one by showing how the Mystery is revealed and received in us by faith, and, in a third and final one, *SOPHIA, le monde en Dieu*, to develop finally what has been sketched out in *Le Trône de la Sagesse* and already taken some way in the concluding pages of *Cosmos*, namely, the femininity essential to Creation, finally revealed in the maternity of the Virgin and the bridal chamber of the Church.

La Roche Bernard et Fustenex,
Christmas 1985.

BIBLICAL INDEX

(and reference to Judaica)

Old Testament		<i>Amos</i>	18
<i>Genesis</i> 1ff	84	<i>Job</i> 12, 17	10
2, 7; 3, 20	89, 102-3	28	93
5, 24	126		
12	85	<i>Psalms</i> 23, 15	167
<i>Exodus</i> 3	88	<i>Psalms</i> 33, 9	166
20ff	88	<i>Proverbs</i>	92
<i>1 Samuel</i> 8-10	91f	<i>Ecclesiastes</i>	93
13, 14	94	<i>Song of Songs</i>	18
<i>Isaiah</i> 6	148		
8, 6	121	Judaica	
12, 3	121	<i>Fourth Esdras</i>	94
19, 11ff	10	<i>Parables of Enoch</i>	94
24, 14ff	10	<i>Berakoth</i> , II, 2	97
40, 13	9	<i>The Struggle of the</i>	116
50	89	<i>Sons of Light with the</i>	
54	89	<i>Sons of Darkness</i>	
62	89	<i>Seder Amram Gaon</i>	97
64, 3	7		
<i>Jeremiah</i>	18		
2-3	89		
2, 13	121		
3, 16	7		
31	89		
<i>Lamentations</i>			
4, 20 (LXX)	166		
<i>Ezekiel</i>	18, 88, 209		
16	89	New Testament	
23	89	<i>Matthew</i> 5, 20-48	96
36	89	5.48	98
<i>Daniel</i> 1-2	76ff	9, 1-8	177
2, 10-11	77	11.25ff	97
2, 19-21	78	11.28	97
2, 27-8	78	17, 12	95
7, 27	94	12, 22	95
<i>Hosea</i> 1-3	89	20, 28	95
		22, 3	126

- | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-------------------------------|----------|
| <i>Mark</i> 1, 1 | 96, 115 | <i>John (cont.)</i> | |
| 4, 11 | 97 | 17, 19 | 124 |
| 8, 31 | 95 | 17, 22f | 124 |
| 9, 12 | 95 | 20, 12 | 119 |
| 9, 31 | 95 | | |
| 13, 2 | 96 | <i>Acts</i> 12, 12 | 116 |
| 15, 39 | 96 | 12, 25 | 116 |
| | | | |
| <i>Luke</i> 9, 44 | 95 | <i>Romans</i> 5, 1-5 | 12 |
| 10, 21ff | 97 | 5, 5 | 225 |
| 18, 31 | 95 | 5, 6-10 | 12 |
| 23, 48 | 189 | 5, 12-19 | 100 |
| 24, 7 | 95 | 5, 13-14 | 101 |
| | | 5, 20, 21 | 101 |
| <i>John</i> 1, 4 | 117 | 6, 3-11 | 105, 106 |
| 1, 12 | 117 | 7, 22 | 107 |
| 1, 14 | 117f | 8, 15-16 | 109 |
| 1, 16 | 118 | 8, 16 | 128 |
| 1, 18 | 117, 120 | 8, 21 | 239 |
| 1, 32 | 127 | 8, 23 | 128 |
| 3, 1-21 | 122 | 8, 29 | 117 |
| 3, 1 | 95 | | |
| 3, 12ff | 122 | <i>1 Corinthians</i> 1, 17-25 | 10 |
| 3, 14f | 123 | 2, 1-2 | 5 |
| 3, 16 | 111 | 2, 3-5 | 6 |
| 6, 27-50 | 122 | 2, 6-9 | 7 |
| 6, 40 | 120 | 2, 10-16 | 9 |
| 6, 61-3 | 122 | 3, 10 | 145 |
| 7, 37 | 121 | 4, 1 | 18 |
| 8, 28 | 95, 123 | 8, 7 | 145 |
| 10 | 129 | 10, 3 | 166 |
| 11, 40 | 120 | 10, 16-17 | 108 |
| 11, 52 | 117 | 11, 26 | 108 |
| 12, 24 | 128 | 13 | 109f |
| 12, 31-3 | 123f | 15, 3-8 | 102ff |
| 12, 32 | 95 | 15, 12-22 | 102 |
| 12, 45 | 120 | 15, 35-57 | 102f |
| 14, 16-17 | 127 | 15, 45 | 100 |
| 15 | 129 | | |
| 15, 5 | 130 | <i>2 Corinthians</i> 1, 22 | 128 |
| 16, 7 | 128 | 3, 18 | 109 |
| 17, 1ff | 118 | 4, 16 | 107 |
| 17, 1 | 124 | 5, 1-4 | 106 |
| 17, 2 | 121 | 5, 15 | 104 |
| 17, 3 | 111, 120 | 5, 19 | 104 |
| 17, 4 | 125 | 11, 2 | 126 |
| 17, 16 | 124 | | |

<i>Galatians</i> 3, 27-8	106	<i>1 Timothy</i> 6, 16	186
4, 5	109		
		<i>Hebrews</i> 5, 6	127
<i>Ephesians</i> 1, 22	105	5, 10	127
1, 23	108, 118	6, 20	127
3, 3-4	136	7	127
3, 3-5	144	10, 20	127
3, 5-7	17	11, 10	85
3, 5-10	16	11, 13	176
3, 8-19	17		
3, 10	132	<i>1 Peter</i> 2, 21	127, 167
3, 15-17	107		
3, 22	105	<i>2 Peter</i> 1, 4	165
4, 13	106, 118	1, 17-18	177
4, 15-16	107		
4, 22-4	107	<i>1 John</i> 2, 2	128
5	110	1, 20	128
5, 27	126	1, 27	119
		3, 1	117
<i>Philippians</i> 2, 6-11	99	3, 2	117, 119
4, 12	22	3, 9	128
4, 13	130	3, 10	117
		3, 16	112
<i>Colossians</i>	13f	4, 8	112
1, 9-11	144	4, 10	119
1, 12-20	15	4, 16	112
1, 15	117	5, 2	117
1, 18	117		
1, 24-7	15	<i>2 John</i> 1	117
1, 25-8	145	4	117
1, 28-2, 3	15	13	117
2, 2-3	145		
2, 15	116	<i>3 John</i> 4	117
3, 10	145		
4, 2	145	<i>Apocalypse</i>	
4, 3	16	(<i>Revelation</i>)	
		14, 4	5, 126
		21, 2	126
<i>2 Thessalonians</i> 2, 7	5		

INDEX OF ANCIENT AUTHORS

- Aeschylus 33
 Ambrose of Milan 166, 170
 Ammonius Sakkas 192ff, 200, 264
 Apuleius 50ff
 Aristotle 21, 64, 182, 201
 Arnobius 48
 Athanasius 117, 160, 173, 227
 Augustine 205ff, 208f, 231, 236ff,
 264, 290

 Basil of Caesarea 161, 173, 216,
 228, 280
 Benedict, Saint 245
 Bernard of Clairvaux 236, 239,
 249

 Cassian 231ff
 Cicero 34
 Clement of Alexandria 20, 25, 46,
 138ff, 149, 154f, 158, 173, 178,
 210, 216, 219, 277, 280
 Cyril of Alexandria 158, 170
 Cyril of Jerusalem 160f, 165, 170

 Demosthenes 66
 Denis the Areopagite (pseudo)
 179ff, 204, 211, 216, 221ff, 229f,
 231, 236f, 280, 284
 Denis of Alexandria 242
 Denis of Rome 242, 255
 Diadochus of Photike 234f,
 281, 283
 Didymus 158

 Eckhart 241, 244f, 252, 267, 280
 Elisabeth of Schönau 285
 Epiphanius of Salamis 162
 Euripides 55ff
 Eusebius of Caesarea 161, 162, 193
 Eutychius 170
 Evagrius of Pontus 179, 184,
 216ff, 229, 231, 237, 242, 273,
 279, 280

 Firmicus Maternus 20, 45f, 139

 Germanus of Constantinople 284
 Gerson 248
 Gertrude 285
 Gregory the Great 231, 234f, 256
 Gregory of Nazianzus 161, 162,
 167ff, 173, 174f, 186, 216, 228,
 229, 280, 284
 Gregory of Nyssa 161, 162, 173,
 175ff, 187, 207, 210ff, 217, 220,
 229, 231, 237, 238, 241, 242,
 254, 280, 282, 284

 Hadewijch of Antwerp 240ff, 252,
 280
 Hesychius of Jerusalem 170
 Hildegard of Bingen 285
 Hilduin 179, 231, 236
 Hippolytus 25, 26, 209

 Iamblicus 199, 201ff
 Ignatius of Antioch 131ff
 Irenaeus of Lyons 134ff, 141

 Jerome 70
 John Chrysostom 161, 162
 John of the Cross 249, 253ff, 287
 John Damascene 160
 John the Evangelist 167, 212, 229,
 264, 287, 289
 Julian the Apostate 200
 Julius, Pope 161
 Justin Martyr 20, 70, 133f, 138

 Leo the Great 169f, 231, 244

 Macarius (pseudo-) 229, 280ff
 Marius Victorinus 200, 203f, 222,
 246
 Maximus the Confessor 179,
 222ff, 242, 278, 284
 Mechthild(e) – the two 285

 Narsai 152
 Nilus 162
 Numenius 200, 265

- Origen 110, 137, 149ff, 161, 171, 173ff, 177, 179, 210, 215, 227, 229, 231f, 237f, 241, 244, 280, 284
 Paul 74f, 151, 156, 164, 200, 222, 229, 231, 237, 253, 264, 286f, 289
 Philo of Alexandria 193ff, 213, 241, 264
 Pindar 33
 Plato 3, 21, 33ff, 60, 63, 141, 180, 190f, 196f, 266
 Plotinus 3, 180, 183, 184, 188ff, 200, 206, 208, 216, 223, 227
 Plutarch 33, 48, 55, 61, 69, 71, 73, 196
 Porphyry 3, 70, 192, 201f
 Proclus 201, 202f, 246
 Procopius of Gaza 158
 Prudentius 46
 Ruysbroek, J. van 241, 245ff, 252
 Sankara 267ff
 Scotus Erigena 179, 231, 236
 Sophocles 33
 Sophronius of Jerusalem 173
 Suso, H. 285
 Symeon of Mesopotamia 282
 Symeon the New Theologian 284, 286
 Synesius of Cyrene 21
 Tacitus 48
 Tauler, J. 285
 Teresa of Avila 248ff
 Tertullian 70
 Theodoret 158, 160, 161, 162
 Thomas Aquinas 179, 236, 266
 William of Saint Thierry 236ff, 256.
 Rolle, Richard 285

INDEX OF MODERN AUTHORS

- Abrahams, I. 113, 263
 Alfarc, P. 207
 Ancelet-Hustache, J. 244ff
 Armstrong, A.H. 184, 189, 192, 199
 Arnaldez, R. 275
 Arnou, R. 183
 Axters 240
- Balthasar, H. Urs von 149f, 155f, 187, 217, 221, 258
 Bardy, G. 143, 174
 Barth K. 2, 3, 263
 Bergson, H. 1, 277
 Bidez, J. 22
 Bigg, C. 151
 Bizet, J.A. 247
 Blondel, M. 262, 286
 Bouyer, L. 28, 30, 84, 87, 94, 99, 112, 163, 164, 173, 179, 206, 223f, 237, 260, 263
 Boyer, C. 207
 Bréhier, E. 189ff
 Brentano 266
 Breuil Abbé 43
 Briem, O.E. 31
 Brown, R.E. 79
 Brunshwige L. 248
 Bultmann, R. 19, 81, 263
 Burnaby, J. 207, 264
- Cadiou, R. 193f
 Camelot, T. 142
 Cappuyns, M. 236
 Carcopino, J. 22
 Casel O. 1f, 19
 Cerfaux, L. 76
 Chadwick, O. 231
 Chroust, A.H. 191
 Cagnet, L. 247, 260
 Colombas, G. 229
 Colpe, C. 82
 Coomaraswamy, A. 270
 Congar, Y. 256
 Connolly, R.H. 152
- Copleston, F. 202
 Corbin, H. 275
 Corbin, M. 180, 186
 Cross, F.L. 127
 Crouzel, H. 149f, 210
 Cullmann, O. 113
 Cumont, F. 48, 68
- Dagens, C. 236
 Dalmais, I.H. 227
 Daniélou, J. 187, 213
 Déchanet, J.M. 236, 256
 Deden, D. 75f
 Dehn, G. 115
 Delacroix, H. 248
 Descartes, R. 251
 Diès, A. 191
 Dietz, D. 263
 Dodd, C.H. 96
 Dörries, H. 282
 Draguet, R. 228
 Duesberg, H. 76
 Dumézil, G. 75
 Durnouter, E. 249
 Dupont, J. 107, 135, 200
- Eliade, M. 24, 31, 38, 40, 64, 69f, 82, 271
 Elisabeth of the Trinity 258, 285
 Ellis, P.F. 113f
- Farkas, G. 235
 Farnell, L.R. 26
 Festugière, A.J. 2, 22, 63, 263
 Filthaut, T. 1
 Foucart, P. 25, 47
 François de Sainte-Marie 257
 Frankenberg, W. 218
- Gandillac, M. de 181
 Ganzo, R. 39
 Garrigou-Lagrange, R. 256, 261, 286
 Gerhard, J. 113
 Gerhardsson, B. 114

- Gillet, R. 235
 Gilson, E. 256
 Goodenough, E.R. 194
 Görres, J. 261
 Grant, R.M. 104
 Gross, J. 227
 Grundmann, W. 24, 67
 Guénon, R. 265
 Guérard, C. 20
 Guillaumont, A. 173, 218ff, 229
 Guthrie, W.K.C. 63, 191

 Hadot, P. 203
 Hanson, R.P.C. 150
 Harrison, J. 63
 Harnack, A. von 96
 Hausherr, I. 216, 221
 Hedegard, D. 97
 Heidegger, M. 245
 Heiler, F. 2, 179, 263f
 Henry, P. 203
 Hügel, F. von 263
 Husserl, E. 258
 Huxley, A. 249, 267f

 Inge, R.W. 262
 Ivanka, E. von 180

 Jaeger, W. 174, 281
 James, E.O. 38ff, 49, 51, 290
 Jeanmaire, H. 53ff, 65ff
 Jeremias, J. 90, 108, 113ff
 Jülicher, A. 96

 Kant I. 251, 265
 Katz, S.T. 276
 Keble, J. 261
 Kerenyi 75
 Kern, O. 63
 Kirk, K. 264
 Kittel, G. 115
 Koetschau, P. 153, 155, 158
 Kolbe, M. 285

 Lagrange, M.J. 63f
 Lange, N. de 154
 Laplace, J. 210
 Leblond, G. 207

 Lebreton, J. 142
 Leclercq, J. 234, 256
 Leipoldt, J. 24, 67
 Lethel, F.M. 223
 Libera, A. de 244, 246
 Lietzmann, H. 163ff
 Lightfoot, R.H. 97
 Lobeck 24
 Lloyd, A.C. 202
 Loisy, A. 26, 46, 70
 Lossky, V. 180,
 Lot-Borodine, M. 227
 Lubac, H. de 151ff, 162, 237

 Maréchal, J. 1, 209
 Marion, J.L. 223
 Maritain, J. 256
 Massignon, L. 275
 Meester, C. de 258
 Ménager, A. 235
 Méridier, L. 211
 Metzger, B.M. 1
 Morenz, S. 49
 Mowinckel, S. 103
 Mylonas, G.E. 24, 25f, 30

 Nauck, A. 33
 Neher, A. 89
 Nietzsche, F. 54f,
 Nock, A.D. 194
 Nygren, A. 2f, 179, 207, 263f

 Orcibal, J. 254
 Otto, R. 266f

 Pater, W. 65
 Peers, A. 248
 Pettazoni 48
 Pichery, E. 231
 Piret, P. 223
 Places, E. des 22, 202
 Porion, J.B. 240ff
 Poulain, A. 261
 Preuschen 177ff
 Puech, H.C. 255

 Quint, J. 245

- Rahner, H. 1
 Ramsey, A.M. 119
 Reitzenstein, R. 19, 82, 163
 Ritschl, A. 2, 263
 Robin, L. 190
 Robinson, J.A.T. 113
 Rohde, E. 54
 Rousseau, J.J. 249
 Russell, N. 227

 Saffrey, H.D. 184, 202
 Schmemann, A. 152
 Schmidt, W. 37ff
 Schönborn, C. von 173
 Schroeder 33
 Schultz 160, 162
 Schürmann, R. 245
 Schweitzer, A. 131
 Sholem, G. 87, 275
 Smith, C. 245
 Soloviev, V. 271
 Spicq, C. 264
 Stählin, O. 141, 172
 Stein, E. 254, 258ff, 266, 285
 Stolz, A. 286

 Thérèse of Lisieux
 (Thérèse of the Child Jesus) 257, 285
 Thurston, H. 275
 Trouillard, J. 201

 Vandenbroucke, F. 240
 Van Mierlo 240
 Vilnet, J. 254
 Völker, W. 143ff, 151, 179, 187
 Vrégille, B. de 234

 Ware, K. 227
 Westcott, B.F. 129
 Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, U. von 63
 Wiseman, J. 247
 Wojtyla, K. 254

 Yerkes, R.K. 90, 290

 Zaehner, R.C. 267ff
 Zielinski, T. 48