

# AGES OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

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## Interiorized Monasticism

### *1. The Transmission of the Witness*

The universal crisis in monasticism suggests that an historic cycle is coming to a close. However, here as elsewhere, we must guard against simplification and distinguish between changeable forms and the permanent principle, between the transmission of the essential message of the Gospel and the appearance of new witnesses.

We can discover a similar transmission in the very origins of monasticism. Since the time of the first martyr and deacon, St. Stephen, the witness of blood has been the sign of the highest and most expressive fidelity. The ideal of the martyr, of that glorious company of "the wounded friends of the bridegroom," of those "violent ones who take heaven by storm" and in whom "Christ fights in person," makes the first centuries unique. On his way to his glorious death, St. Ignatius of Antioch confessed: "It is now that I begin to be a true disciple...do not hinder me from being born to life."<sup>1</sup> Likewise for St. Polycarp the martyrs are "the images of true charity...the captives laden with venerable chains, which are the jewels of the veritable elect of God."<sup>2</sup> This is why Origen made his somewhat harsh remark that a time of peace is propitious to Satan, who steals from Christ his martyrs, and from the Church her glory.

As a living image of Christ crucified, the martyr preaches him by being a "spectacle" to the world, to angels and to men. "Your

<sup>1</sup> Rom 5:3-6.

<sup>2</sup> Philipp. III.

bodies are pierced by the sword, but never can your spirit be cut off from divine love. Suffering with Christ, you are consumed by the burning coals of the Holy Spirit. Wounded by divine desire, your martyrs, Lord, rejoice in their wounds," sings the Church.<sup>3</sup>

"Can you drink the cup that I must drink?" our Lord asked the apostles. This formidable question equates martyrdom with the eucharistic chalice. The soul of the martyr bears the presence of Christ in a very special manner. According to an ancient tradition, every martyr at the moment of his death hears the words addressed to the wise thief—"This day you shall be with me in paradise"—and enters immediately into the Kingdom.

The peaceful existence of the Church, protected by law as of the fourth century, will never suffer any diminution with regard to the power of her message. The Holy Spirit immediately "invented" the "equivalent of martyrdom." In fact, the witness of the martyrs to "the one thing needful" is passed on to monasticism. "The baptism of blood" of the martyrs gave way to "the baptism of asceticism" of the monks. The celebrated *Life of St. Anthony*, written by St. Athanasius, describes this father of monasticism as the first who had attained holiness without tasting martyrdom.<sup>4</sup> When humanity had sunk below itself, monastic asceticism raised it above its own nature. Monasticism's *metanoia*, or transformation, deepened Baptism's second birth which brought to life already the "little resurrection." While the body awaits this glorification, the soul is already immortal.

The liturgical texts call the monks "earthly angels and heavenly men." Monastic holiness forms a type of man who is a "true

<sup>3</sup> *Octoechos*, Greek.

<sup>4</sup> See D. H. Leclercq, "Monachisme," in *D.A.L.*, XI, 1802. Mankind had fallen to a level below his nature; monastic asceticism elevated him to one above it. The *metanoia* or conversion deepened the second birth of baptism that brought about the "little resurrection." Even if the body had to await the "great resurrection," the soul was already immortal. See also *Athanasius: The Life of Anthony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, Robert C. Gregg, trans. (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1980).

likeness," a living icon of God. One can say that at least here, confronted with the world's compromises, the *metanoia*, the complete reversal of all the economy of the human being, its perfect metamorphosis, had succeeded.

The dreadful Thebaid, cradle of so many spiritual giants, the arid and burning desert, was illuminated with their light. These astonishing masters taught the refined art of living the Gospel. In the silence of their cells and caves, in the school of these "theodidacts," those taught by God, the birth of the *new creature* was slowly effected.

## 2. The Universal Character of Monastic Spirituality

Father Georges Florovsky recalls that "too often one forgets the provisory character of monasticism. St. John Chrysostom declared that monasteries are necessary because the world is not Christian. Let it be converted, and the need for a monastic separation will disappear."<sup>5</sup> History has not vindicated St. John's hope. Monasticism will surely keep its unique testimony to the end of the world.

However, the baptized world is sufficiently Christian to hear the monastic message and to assimilate it in its own way. Here is the whole problem. As formerly, martyrdom was transmitted to the monastic institution, so today, it seems, monasticism evokes a certain receptivity in the universal priesthood of the laity. The testimony of the Christian faith in the framework of the modern world necessitates the universal vocation of *interiorized monasticism*.

Past history gives us two solutions. The first, that of monasticism, preaches a complete separation from a society which lives according to "the elements of this world," and from its economic,

<sup>5</sup> "Le Corps du Christ vivant," in *la Sainte Église universelle: Confrontation Œcuménique*, Paris/Neuchâtel: Dalachaux et Niestlé, 1948, pp. 9-57. See "The Church: Her Nature and Task," in *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View*, Collected Works, vol. I (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1972) pp. 57-72.

political and sociological problems. This is "the flight to the desert" and the later autonomous existence of communities that care for all the needs of their members. The "monastic republic" of Mount Athos is a striking example of a social, self-governing life, separated from the world and even opposed to it. It is perfectly clear that since everybody cannot share this vocation, the monastic solution remains limited. It is not the solution for the world in its totality.

The second solution was the attempt to Christianize the world without leaving it in order to build the Christian City of God. The theocracies of the East as well as the West manifest this effort under the ambiguous forms of empires and Christian States. The resounding failure of this attempt proves that one can never impose the Gospel from above, nor prescribe grace as a law.

Is there a third solution? Without prejudging, one can at least say that this third ought to appropriate the two others in an interior way, that is, in applying their principles beyond their outward forms. "You are not of this world, you are in the world." These words of the Lord recommend a very special ministry, that of being a sign, a reference to "the wholly other." Formerly, it was realized differently. At present, it seems to show itself above the "desert" and the "city," for it is called to surpass every form in order to express itself everywhere and in all circumstances.

The Western Church has canonized monasticism and the lay state as two forms of life. One corresponds to the "counsels," the other, to the "precepts" of the Gospel. The unique absolute is then broken. On one side, the perfect advance, on the other, is the weaker position of living by half measures. Certain ascetics justified conjugal life only because it produces virgins and populates monasteries.

The essentially homogeneous character of Eastern Church spirituality ignores the difference between "the precepts" and "the evangelical counsels." It is in its total demand that the Gospel addresses itself to everyone, everywhere.

"When Christ," says St. John Chrysostom, "orders us to follow the narrow path, he addresses himself to all. The monastics and the lay person must attain the same heights."<sup>6</sup> We can see indeed that there exists only one spirituality for all without distinction in its demands, whether of the bishop, monk, or lay person, and this is the nature of monastic spirituality.<sup>7</sup> Now, this has been shaped by lay-monastics, which gives to the term "lay" the maximal spiritual and ecclesial meaning.

In fact, according to the great teachers, the monastics were only those who wished "to be saved," those who "led a life according to the Gospel," who "sought the one thing needful," and "did violence to themselves in all things."<sup>8</sup> It is quite evident that these words exactly define the state of every believing lay person. St. Nilus thought all monastic practices were required of people in the world.<sup>9</sup> As St. John Chrysostom said: "Those who live in the world, even though married, ought to resemble the monks in everything else. You are entirely mistaken if you think that there are some things required of ordinary people, and others of monks...they will have the same account to render."<sup>10</sup> Prayer, fasting, the reading of Scripture and ascetic discipline are imposed on all by the same prescription. St. Theodore of Studion in his letter to a Byzantine dignitary drew up the program of monastic life and specified: "Do not believe that this list is of value only for a monk and not *entirely and equally for a lay person.*"<sup>11</sup>

When the Fathers spoke, they addressed all the members of the Church, the mystical body, without any distinction between clergy and laity. They spoke to the universal priesthood. Our contemporary pluralism: different theologies for the episcopate, the clergy, monastics and the laity, unknown at the time of the Fathers, would

6 In *Epist. ad Haeb.*, 7, 4; 7, 41; *Adv. oppugn. vitae monast.*, 3, 14.

7 Cf. Pourrat, *La spiritualité chrétienne*, I, ix.

8 St. Nilus, *P.G.*, 79, 180D. See *The Philokalia*, vol. I, pp. 200-250.

9 *Epist.* I, 167, 169.

10 *Hom. in Epist. ad Haeb.*, 7, 41

11 *P.G.*, 99, 1388

be incomprehensible to them. The Gospel in its entirety is applicable to every particular problem in every environment.

On the other hand, certain great figures among the monastics show clearly that they went beyond their own state, as well as beyond every formula or definite form. We find an example of this in the luminous figure of St. Seraphim of Sarov. He did not attract disciples nor was he master of any school. Yet he is the master of all, for his witness in the Orthodox Church surpasses all that is a type, category, style, definition or limit. His Paschal joy did not come from his personality, but is the echo of Orthodoxy itself. In ordinary language he said extraordinary things which he had received from the Holy Spirit. After a terrible struggle, shadowed by a silence that hid a life no monk could endure, St. Seraphim left the extreme practices of the hermits and stylites and returned to the world. "An earthly angel and a heavenly man," he transcended even monasticism. He was no longer a monk retired from the world nor a man living among people. He was both, and in surpassing both, he was essentially a witness to the Holy Spirit. He said this in his famous conversation with Nicolas Motovilov: "It is not to you alone that it has been given to understand these things, but through you to the whole world, in order that you may be strengthened in the work of God and be useful for many others. *As to the fact that you are a lay person and that I am a monk, there is no need to think of that...* The Lord seeks hearts filled with love for God and their neighbor. This is the throne on which he loves to sit and on which he will appear in the fullness of his heavenly glory. 'My child, give me your heart, and all the rest I shall likewise give you', because it is in the heart of man that the Kingdom of God exists...The Lord hears the prayers of the monk as well as those of a simple lay person, provided that both have a faith without error, are truly believers and love God from the depths of their hearts, for even if their faith is only a grain of mustard seed, both of them will move mountains."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Little Russian Philokalia*, vol. I, St. Seraphim (Platina, CA: St. Herman Press, 1991), pp. 116-117.

Both, the monastic and the lay person, are a sign and a reference to "the wholly other." St. Tikhon of Zadonsk wrote in the same vein to ecclesiastical authorities: "Do not be in a hurry to multiply the monks. The black habit does not save. The one who wears a white habit and has the spirit of obedience, humility, and purity, he is a true monk of *interiorized monasticism*."<sup>13</sup>

The monasticism that was entirely centered on the last things formerly changed the face of the world. Today it makes an appeal to all, to the laity as well as to the monastics, and it points out a universal vocation. For each, it is a question of adaptation, of a personal equivalent of the monastic vows.

### 3. *The Three Temptations, the Lord's Three Answers, and the Three Monastic Vows*

The three monastic vows constitute a great charter of human liberty. *Poverty* frees from the ascendancy of the material. It is the baptismal transmutation into the new creature. *Chastity* frees from the ascendancy of the carnal. It is the nuptial mystery of the *agapé*, the marriage covenant in divine love. *Obedience* frees from the idolatry of the ego. It posits our relationship as children of the Father. All, whether monks or not, must ask God for these things in the tripartite structure of the Lord's Prayer: *obedience* to the will of the Father, the *poverty* of one who is hungry only for the substantial and eucharistic bread, and *chastity*, the purification from evil.

In Old Testament times, whenever the Israelites, as nomadic pilgrims, encountered the material civilization of "the settled countries," they discovered there three temptations: idols, opposed to *obedience*, prostitution, opposed to *chastity*, wealth, opposed to *poverty*. The prophets did not cease denouncing and fighting against the primacy of efficacy over truth, material success and its power as the standard of value, and justification of everything by

<sup>13</sup> Anna Guippius; *Saint Tykhone de Zadonsk* (Paris), p. 15, in Russian edition. Saint Tikhon also referred to this as "untoursured monasticism"—ed. note.

force. Today's world has adopted these principles more than ever before. Formerly, against such principles were directed all the efforts of the prophets. They preached *worship* of the one God, the *purification* of the people, the practice of *charity* toward the poor.

The New Testament, in the account of the Lord's three temptations, takes up the same subject, but now under the form of a supreme and definitive revelation. The text stresses: "When the devil had tried every temptation, he departed from him."<sup>14</sup> The Servant of Yahweh, the *obedient* one, the *poor* one, who had "no place to lay his head," the *pure* one—"Behold, Satan has nothing in me"—went to the heart of the desert as the prototype of the monk, and proclaimed *urbi et orbi*, to the city and to the world, the triple synthesis of human existence.

Patristic thought attributes to this account a central place among the first events of the Gospel. Christ had come to fight against the evil, enslaving powers, and it is this liberating quality of his work that is in the forefront here. St. Justin<sup>15</sup> compared the temptations of the first and second Adam and showed in Christ the universal attitude of every son of God. Likewise, Origen saw here a decisive event that illuminates the ultimate struggle of all the faithful, for what is at stake is, neither more nor less, "to make every man a martyr or an idolator."<sup>16</sup> He underscores the fact that the temptations were an effort to make of Christ a new source of sin, since its scope would put it on the level of original sin. For St. Irenaeus,<sup>17</sup> the temptation failed to make man definitively captive, and consequently the brilliant victory of Jesus orients the combat of the Church and frees the true follower from all satanic ascendancy. "I have given you authority to tread...over all the power of your enemy."<sup>18</sup>

14 Lk 4:13.

15 *Dialogue with Trypho*, 103, 6.

16 *Ad. Mart.*, 32.

17 *Adv. Haer.*, V, 20, 2.

18 Lk 10:19.

Thus, from the beginning the Fathers saw in the account of the temptations in the desert, the "ultimate words" (*ultima verba*) of the Gospel message. Indeed, against the archetype of man in divine Wisdom, the tempter set up his counterplan, the man of demonic wisdom. St. Paul even mentions a demonic Pentecost (2 Corinthians 11, 4). All human history unfolds in a striking summary where everything is unsettled in one way or another. Satan advances three infallible solutions for human destiny: the alchemist miracle of the philosopher's stone; the *mystery* of occult sciences and their boundless powers; and finally, one unifying *authority*.

To transform stones into bread<sup>19</sup> is to solve the *economic problem*, to suppress "the sweat of one's brow," to eliminate all ascetic efforts, and creation itself. To cast oneself down from the temple is to suppress the temple and even the need for prayer. It is to substitute magic power for God, to triumph over the principle of necessity, and to solve the *problem of knowledge*. Now knowledge without limits brings submission to cosmic and carnal elements, the immediate satisfaction of all covetousness, a duration made up of "little eternities of enjoyment," the destruction of chastity. Finally, to unite all nations by the power of a single weapon is to solve the *political problem*, suppress war and inaugurate the era of the peace of this world.

The first act took place between the God-Man and Satan. If Christ had prostrated himself before Satan, Satan would have retired from the world, because there would be nothing for him to do there. In ultimate captivity, humanity would live without knowing the freedom of choice, for it would never attain to good or evil.

Temptation would weigh once again and heavily in the prayer of our Lord: "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me."<sup>20</sup> What the Father did not do, Satan could do, and he offered the

19 It is to make "bread without sweat."

20 Mt 26:39.

very real possibility of definitively withdrawing the cup and escaping the cross. The tragedy of God and of man would then have been resolved in a demonic "happy ending."

We must take an exact measure of the adversary and grasp the scope of the evil that forces God to leave "the summit of silence," and to utter the cry: "Why hast thou forsaken me?" It makes temptation very real, without doing anything fictitious or setting any stage. In leaving Lucifer the free will to pervert himself into the Evil One, God has posed to himself the question of being the *Unique* or not, at the risk of finding himself a Being alone, suffering and abandoned. To the God who entered time, Satan proposed an infallible messiahship that would have no risk of suffering, and that would be founded on a triple suppression of freedom, on a triple slavery of man: the violation of his freedom by miracle, mystery and power.<sup>21</sup>

The divine refusal changed nothing in the disposition of the tempter. His project continues to be offered to us, and it is this second act that conditions history.

The cruel times of the persecutions force one to salute the Christian empire. The paradoxical canonization of Constantine, declared "Saint," bears witness to the positive element of his gesture, justified dialectically by the principle of "economy." The Church was imposed on the pagan world. She obtained a wide hearing. Would the Church succeed? This is another question. In this confrontation, one party is going "to soil its hands," another will keep them clean from the compromise. Both are necessary and both complement each other. Moreover, it was not the official, functional Church that spoke the words of life. This task was given to the fathers of the Councils, and above all to those great spiritual masters, the monastics. The entire significance of monasticism is in the freedom of spirit that the exceptional culture of

21 This aspect of the three temptations is at the center of "The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor" of Dostoyevski.

charismatics would enjoy in the fringes of the world and of the established Church.

We must admit that the empire proclaimed Christian was built on the three solutions of Satan, certainly not entirely nor consciously, but in mingling light with darkness, God and Caesar, the suggestions of Satan and the refutations of Christ. It was an ambiguous empire, for it distorted the cross. No "Christian State" as a State has ever been a crucified State. It is about the Church that John of Saroug asks the question: "What bride has ever chosen a crucified one as a spouse?" On the contrary, misguided notions about the protective power of the cross delivers defenseless princes and politicians without defense to the three temptations. Constantine founded an empire whose greatness and prosperity were more dangerous than the cruelties of Nero.

It was at this moment that monasticism entered upon the stage of history. It is the most categorical *no* to all compromise, to all conformity, to all cooperation with the tempter, disguised now in imperial robes, now by the episcopal miter. It is the resounding *yes* to the Christ of the desert. One can never insist enough on the salvific character of monasticism. "Our Lord has left us as a heritage what he himself did when he was tempted by Satan," said Evagrius.<sup>22</sup> From its origin, Egyptian monasticism understood its spirituality as the continuation of the fight begun by the Lord in the desert.

*While the empire found its secret temptation in the roots of Satan's three invitations, monasticism was openly built on Christ's three immortal answers.* It is astonishing that no exegesis has ever recognized the triple word placed as a cornerstone in the very being of monasticism. *The three monastic vows reproduce exactly the three answers of Jesus.* As monk, Christ fulfilled them in accepting the cup and in ascending the cross "that he might destroy the works of the devil."<sup>23</sup> "Having cancelled the bond which stood

22 *Antirrétique* (ed. Frankenberg), p. 472.

against us with its legal demands, this he set aside, nailing it to the cross."<sup>24</sup> Christ destroyed the satanic plan of triple slavery, and from the summit of the cross he announced the divine charter of triple freedom. St. Paul emphasizes this by his energetic warning in the passage that begins with "see that no one deceives you,"<sup>25</sup> or takes away that freedom of which the cross is the dazzling pledge. Every monastic is a *staurophore* (a cross-bearer), also a *pneumatophore* (Spirit-bearer), for the cross is the triumphant power of the Holy Spirit manifesting Christ crucified. "Give your blood and receive the Spirit," is an ancient saying which reveals that in every monastic, freedom takes flesh by the action of the Holy Spirit, each becomes an icon of freedom by that Spirit. Such were the first charismatics before democratization was necessitated by the increasing number of monastics, and before the need for organization led to the imposition of harsh monastic law. Those who knew how to make this law a source of grace responded to the authentic grandeur of monasticism. Above every organized institution, monasticism remained essentially an *event*.

Christ's three answers resounded in the silence of the desert. Therefore, it was here that the monks came in order to hear them again and to receive them as the rule of their monastic life, *in the form of the three vows*.

St. Gregory Palamas describes the type of holy monastics thus: "They have given up the enjoyment of material goods (poverty), human glory (obedience), and the evil pleasures of the body (chastity), and they have preferred an evangelical life; thus the perfect have arrived at maturity according to Christ."<sup>26</sup> In a letter to Paul Asen on the subject of clothes and exterior signs of the monastic degrees, St. Gregory counseled "to perfect the manner of life and not the changing of clothes." In the great figures of

23 1 Jn 3:8.

24 Col 2:14.

25 Col 2:8.

26 *P.G.*, 150, 1228.

monasticism we see how they went beyond every formal principle and every form; they passed from symbols to reality.

"I will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart."<sup>27</sup> This "advance of one alone toward the only One," shows the primacy of the anchorite and eremitical life over the cenobitic form. It points to an aristocracy of the spirit that frees itself from everything, even from a community and its rules. However, if one leaves society to find freedom, it is in order to find the human world again, and in a better way.

This level of freedom transcends institutional limits, and offers, as its universal significance, a solution to human destiny. The interiorized monasticism of the royal priesthood finds its own spirituality in taking to itself the equivalent of the monastic vows.

Formerly, fidelity implied the blood of martyrs or the exploits of the desert, spectacles striking in their visible grandeur. When the Constantinian epoch ended, the combat of the Christian king gave way to the martyrdom<sup>28</sup> and the heroism of the faithful in their daily life, which is not particularly spectacular.

#### *4. The Vow of Poverty in the Interior Monasticism of the Laity*

Our Lord's answer: "Not by bread alone does man live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God," indicates the transition from the old curse, "In the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread," to the new hierarchy of values, to the primacy of spirit over matter, of grace over necessity. In the house of Martha and Mary, Jesus passed from the material meal and physical hunger to the spiritual banquet, to hunger for the one thing necessary. The version of the beatitudes in St. Luke's Gospel accentuates the reversal of situations: "Blessed are the poor...those

27 Hos 2:6.

28 Rev 20.



who hunger." Even physical poverty "in the sweat of your brow" is no longer a curse, but a sign of election placed on the humble, the last and the least, as opposed to the rich and powerful. The "poor of Israel" available for the Kingdom, and more generally "the poor in spirit," receive as a gift, freely given, "the food of angels," the Word of God in the eucharistic bread.

If the stones mentioned in the temptation had become bread, this miracle would have expelled "the poor man" above all, not the beggar who is the object of charity bazaars, but the poor One who shares his *being*, his eucharistic flesh and blood. Thus, every truly poor person, "in the sweat of his heart," shares his being. This form of poverty was preached by Fathers of the Church such as St. John Chrysostom. The Gospel requires what no political doctrine would demand from its adherents. Globally, only an economy based on need and not on profit has any chance of succeeding, but it entails sacrifices and renunciation. In an anarchy, one cannot enjoy material goods. True needs vary according to vocations, but the essential principle is found in independence of spirit regarding all possessions.

Absence of the *need to have* becomes a *need not to have*. The disinterested freedom of the spirit in regard to things restores its capacity for loving them as gifts from God. To live in what is "given in abundance" is to live between destitution and the superfluous. The monastic ideal does not preach formal poverty but a wise frugality of needs.

The measure of poverty, which is always very personal, requires a creative inventiveness and excludes every simplistic, sectarian mindset. The problem is not in the deprivation but in the use. It is the quality of gift that one puts in the proverbial glass of water that justifies one at the last judgment. This is why St. James makes clear the meaning of alms: "to visit orphans and widows in their affliction."<sup>29</sup> If there is nothing to be shared, there remains the

<sup>29</sup> Jas 1:27.

example of the unjust steward of the Gospel parable who distributes the goods of his master (inexhaustible love) in order to win "friendships in Christ."

He who possesses nothing becomes, like St. Symeon the New Theologian, "the poor brother of everyone." Simeon, Anna, Joseph and Mary were "the poor of Israel" looking for the consolation of Israel, but they were already rich in God, for the Holy Spirit was upon them.<sup>30</sup> Thus the Blessed Virgin kept all these things in her heart, made them her very being, and the Holy Spirit made of her "the Gift of Consolation" and "the Gate to the Kingdom."

### 5. The Vow of Chastity

"You shall not tempt the Lord your God." To tempt is to test. To tempt God means to try the limits of his magnanimity. Has he not created man "in his image," almost "a micro-god" (*microtheos*)? "You are all gods, sons of the Most High." Conscious of his greatness, this "little god" dares to claim the attributes of his high dignity. To tempt the Lord in this case is to make use of God, of the power equal to that of God, in order to satisfy one's every desire.

In the second temptation<sup>31</sup>—to cast himself down from the top of the temple—it is not a question of the exploit of Icarus. The latter only symbolized domination over the cosmic elements. The temptation here is to covet the much vaster power to which St. Luke refers when he writes: "I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you."<sup>32</sup> This power includes dominion over space. To throw oneself down from the roof of the temple would be to overcome earth's gravity and to rule the heavens and the spirits. "Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you (the submission of which Satan speaks); rejoice rather in this,

<sup>30</sup> Lk 2:25.

<sup>31</sup> Mt 4:6.

<sup>32</sup> Lk 10:19-20.

that your names are written in heaven." The *name* designates the person. The text speaks of the joy of seeing oneself admitted into the spiritual heaven of the divine presence. We see here the message of the freedom of the children of God and of their heavenly power as opposed to all temptation by the power of earthly magic.

In the hands of "gurus," this magic power arouses the collective passions of crowds. It hypnotizes, charms and dominates. For everyone this magic means the power over space and all that it contains on the material plane. It violates the mystery of nature, profanes the sacredness of the cosmos, the creation of God.

We must remember the close relationship between woman and the cosmos. The whole gamut of pagan mysteries prefigured this even up to the cult of the Virgin Mary—"Blessed Land, Promised Land, Abundant Harvest." These liturgical names are the cosmic symbols of the new Eve—*Virgin and Mother*. This mysterious linkage explains the command not to tempt God, not to sully and profane *chastity*. This virtue goes beyond the physiological and expresses the entire and chaste structure of the human spirit. It constitutes the charism of the sacrament of marriage. In a wider sense, it inspires the meaning of the sacredness of every particle of God's creation, inviolable in its expectation of salvation that is to come from one who is chaste.<sup>33</sup> The power of chastity is the opposite of the power of magic and signifies the return to the true "supernaturally natural power" of paradise.<sup>34</sup> "Thou shalt not tempt thy God" means then that you shall not make of your conformity to God the accomplice of your passions, the opposite of chastity.

Origen speaks of the "chastity of the soul"<sup>35</sup> which the Fathers of the desert called "the purification of the heart." Even those

33 See Rom 8:21.

34 According to St. Clement of Alexandria, the sacrament of marriage brings "an edenic grace." *P.G.*, 8, 1096.

35 *P.G.*, 12, 728C.

monastics who were once married attained this spiritual progress. There was already a transcendence of the physiological state itself.

Chaste love is attracted by the heart that remains virginal beyond every physical consideration. According to the Bible, there is a total "knowledge" of two beings, a conversation of spirit with spirit in which the body strikingly appears as the vehicle of the spiritual. This is why St. Paul says that man should learn "to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor."<sup>36</sup> As pure material, suitable for liturgical use, the chaste man is entirely, body and soul, the matter of the *sacrament* of marriage, with the sanctification of his love. The charism of the sacrament effects the transcendence of the self. This is the transparent presence of one for the other, of one toward the other, so that both can offer themselves together as a single being to God.

Chastity—*sophrosyne*—integrates all the elements of the human being into a whole that is virginal and interior to the spirit. That is why St. Paul speaks of the salvation of every mother by means of chastity.<sup>37</sup> The Pauline dialectic of the circumcision of the flesh interiorizes it even to "the circumcised...heart."<sup>38</sup> The same dialectic interiorizes chastity: "He who is not spiritual in his flesh becomes carnal even in his spirit," and again, "the virginity of the flesh belongs to a small number, the virginity of the heart should belong to all."<sup>39</sup>

Love penetrates to the very root of instinct and "changes even the substance of things," says St. John Chrysostom.<sup>40</sup> It raises the empirical aims to the ends created by the spirit, and makes of them a pure source of immaterial joy.

Familiarity with icons purifies the imagination, teaches "the fasting of the eyes" in order to contemplate beauty chastely. In the beauty of the body, the soul is its form, and in the beauty of the soul, the image of God delights us. Islamic wisdom has under-

36 I Thess 4:4.

37 I Tim 2:15.

38 Rom 2:26-29.

39 St. Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps.* 147.

40 *P.G.*, 61, 273.

stood this, as can be seen in the saying: "The paradise of the faithful gnostic is his own body, and the hell of the man without faith or gnosis is equally his own body."<sup>41</sup>

Bishop Nonnus of Edessa, in contemplating the beauty of a dancer (the future St. Pelagia), "took it as a subject for glorifying the sovereign beauty, of which her beauty was only the reflection, and feeling himself transported by the fire of divine love, shed tears of joy...He was raised," continues St. John Climacus, "to a wholly incorruptible state before the universal resurrection."<sup>42</sup>

An erotic imagination decomposes the spirit by an inextinguishable thirst for hell. On the contrary, the sign of chastity, according to Clement of Rome, is when a Christian, looking at a woman, has no carnal thought in his mind. "O singular woman, you are the entire species for me," says the poet of the "one" in singing of chaste conjugal love.

The story of Tobias admirably describes the victory over concupiscence. The angel's name, Raphael, signifies "the remedy of God." It is the chastity that is present in every *great love* when it is kindled by the "blazing fire of the Eternal One."<sup>43</sup>

Berdyayev clearly describes this inward chastity: "Love is called upon to conquer the 'old' and to discover a new flesh in which the union of two is not a loss but an accomplishment of virginity, that is, of its entirely new completeness. In this incandescent point the transfiguration of the world can uniquely begin."<sup>44</sup>

"To throw himself from the pinnacle of the temple"<sup>45</sup> means to alienate himself and to render himself useless. To this tempta-

41 See H. Corbin, *Terre céleste et corps de résurrection*, p. 161.

42 *P.G.*, 88, 893.

43 cf. Song of Songs, 8:6.

44 *Destin de l'homme* (Paris), p. 260, in Russian edition. [*The Destiny of Man*, (NY, Harper and Row, 1935).]

45 The treatise *Beracot* of Talmud of Babylon (fol. 55) contains the following passage: "The one who climbs in a dream onto a roof will climb to greatness; the one who comes down from a roof will come down from greatness." Satan's secret desire is to make the Son come down from the summit of divine greatness.

tion and to the *concupiscence* that inclines a man to seize the power that Christ possesses, even over the angels, the response is *chastity*. "To cast himself down" designates the movement from the high to the low, from heaven to hell. This was Lucifer's exact itinerary and that of the fall of man which brought about concupiscence. Chastity is an ascension. It is the Savior's itinerary, from hell to the Father's Kingdom. It is also an inward ascension toward the burning presence of God. It is in the spirit that one casts oneself into the presence of God, and chastity is only one of the names of the nuptial mystery of the Lamb.

## 6. The Vow of Obedience

"You shall love the Lord your God and him only shall you worship." The liturgical definition of man, the being who sings "Holy, holy, holy," the *Trisagion* and the *Sanctus*, excludes all passivity. True obedience to God implies the supreme freedom that is always creative. Christ shows this in his manner of fulfilling the whole of the Law. He fulfills and raises the Law to his own mysterious truth. He makes the Law grace. Likewise the negative and restrictive form of the Decalogue—"You shall not"—is fulfilled in giving way to the Beatitudes, to the positive and limitless creation of holiness.

Obedience in the Gospel is receptive to truth, and this above all sets one free. This is why God does not issue orders, but he makes appeals and invitations: "Hear, O Israel." "If anyone wills..." "If you wish to be perfect..." It is an invitation to find freedom again: "If anyone wishes to come to me and does not hate his..."—the possessive adjective here indicates a captive state, and "hate" means to free oneself from it in order to find the true nonpossessive charity.

It is an enlightened teaching that comes from the school of "spiritual fathers." They warn of the great danger inherent in searching for a helper. The greater the authority of a father, the

greater should be his self-effacement. A disciple can indeed formulate the true and only aim of his request: "Father, tell me what the Holy Spirit suggests to you to heal my soul."<sup>46</sup> Abba Poemen defines the art of a *staretz* (elder): "Never command, but be for all an example, never a lawgiver."<sup>47</sup> A young man once went to an old ascetic to be instructed in the way of perfection, but the old man did not say a word. He asked the elder the reason for his silence. "Am I then a superior to command you?" he answered. "I shall say nothing. Do, if you want, what you see me do." From then on the young man imitated the old ascetic in everything and learned the meaning of silence and of free obedience.<sup>48</sup>

A spiritual father is never "a director of conscience." He is before all else a charismatic. He does not engender his spiritual son, he engenders a son of God. Both *mutually* place themselves in the school of truth. The disciple receives the gift of spiritual attention, the father receives that of being the organ of the Holy Spirit. St. Basil advises us to find "a friend of God," who gives the assurance that God speaks through him. "Call no one father" means that all fatherhood shares in the unique fatherhood of God, that all obedience is obedience to the Father's will in sharing in the acts of the obedient Christ.

John of Lycopolis counsels: "Discern your thoughts according to God. If you cannot, ask one who is capable of discerning them."<sup>49</sup> The aim is to destroy the wall raised by desires between the soul and God. To those who have practiced the art of humility, Theognostus says: "The one who has practiced submission and spiritual obedience and has made his body subject to his spirit, has no need of any submission to a man. He is subject to the Word of God and to his law, and is truly obedient."<sup>50</sup> And again: "He who wishes to dwell in the desert should not need to be taught. He

46 *Apophthegmata Patrum*.

47 *P.G.*, 65, 363, 65, 564.

48 *P.G.*, 65, 224.

49 See *Recherches de science religieuse*, 41 (1953), p. 526.

50 *The Philokalia*, vol. II, p. 361.

ought to be himself a teacher, otherwise he will suffer..."<sup>51</sup> However, this is for the strong. The advice explains the essential—no obedience to human elements, no idolatry of a spiritual father, even if he is a saint. Every counsel of a *staretz* leads one to a state of freedom before the face of God.

Obedience crucifies our own will in order to arouse the final freedom—the spirit listening to the Holy Spirit.

### 7. Christian Unity and Monastic Freedom

When there have been historical distortions, they have betrayed the magnificent type of monastic, one absolutely free in the service of his King.<sup>52</sup> They have made him a being broken by submission to harsh laws.

While we may notice, from the time of the Middle Ages, a divorce between mystical spirituality and theology, *the world of today has need of saints of genius*, in order to find again the unity of prayer and dogma. For the Fathers of the Church: "A theologian is one who knows how to pray." "For those who are not capable of receiving the burning rays of Christ, the saints are there to furnish them with a light. This illumination is inferior, but since they are scarcely capable of receiving it, it is sufficient to fill them."<sup>53</sup>

Whoever builds his life on the three monastic vows does so also on the three replies of Christ. By these three vows a Christian is not bound but is free. The Christian can then turn to the world and tell what he has seen in God. If the Christian has learned how to grow to the stature of "the new man," of maturity in Christ, the world will listen to him.

The one who *knows* because his faith sees the invisible. The one who can raise the dead, if God wishes it, because he already

51 *Vitae Patrum*, VII, 19, 6.

52 Mark the Ascetic declares: "After baptism, the exploit of every Christian is solely the affair of his faith and of his freedom" (*P.G.*, 65, 985).

53 Origen, *In Joann.*, I, I, 25.

lives "the little resurrection," the one who can glimpse *meaning* because he can put the true name to everything, having the name of Jesus "attached" as it were to his every breath—this one can inaugurate the last times and announce the *Parousia*.

The division of Christianity is not at all an obstacle, but a lack of true freedom, rooted in complete Truth. More than anyone else, monastics can bring about this unity because they would do it *liturgically*. Their "orthodoxy" does not harden anything into rules. It opens all the pathways. In their adoration and songs of praise, they exclude no one. They invite each and every one to "adulthood" in Christ. Such maturity places one beyond distorted situations in the body of Christ, at the level of the One and Only.

According to the beautiful sayings of St. Symeon the New Theologian, the Holy Spirit fears no one and despises no one. As an image of the Holy Spirit, monasticism is a living ecumenical *epiklesis*, a coming down of the Holy Spirit. Unity can be found only in this dimension of universal monasticism, if it makes itself as free as the breath of the great liberator, the Holy Spirit.

## 8

## The Human Being

The Bible knows nothing of the Greek dualism of mind and body in conflict, of the body as the prison of the soul. It knows only the moral struggle between the desire of the Creator and the desires of the creature, between what is normal—holiness—and sin-perversion, but in this conflict the entire person is engaged. Thus, the opposition between *man as animal and as spiritual* concerns the totality of the human being. According to St. Augustine, we are carnal even in our spirit or spiritual even in our flesh.

The soul vivifies the body and makes it living flesh. The spirit spiritualizes and makes of both a spiritual being. The spirit does not place the soul and body side by side, but manifests itself through the psychic and the corporeal, qualifying them by its energies. In accordance with this structure of the human being, asceticism constitutes a very exact science and a vast culture that renders the body and the soul transparent and submissive to the spiritual. On the other hand, we can "extinguish the spirit,"<sup>1</sup> cause the source of our life to dry up, have carnal thoughts and reduce ourselves to animal flesh, the prey of death and hell.

The biblical vision thus allows us to take an exact measure of evil and to discover its secret origins. Sin never comes from below, from the flesh, but from above, from the spirit. The first fall occurred in the world of angels, pure spirits.

Carnal perversion manifests and condemns the *sin of the spirit against the flesh*. That is why chastity transcends physiology alone

<sup>1</sup> 1 Thess 5:19.