By the same author

★

THE MEANING OF THE MONASTIC LIFE
NEWMAN: HIS LIFE AND SPIRITUALITY

CHRISTIAN INITIATION

by

LOUIS BOUYER
of the Oratory

LONDON
BURNS & OATES

This translation of L'Initiation chrétienne (*Librairie Plon, Paris*) *was made by*

J. R. FOSTER

NIHIL OBSTAT: HUBERTUS RICHARDS, S.T.L., L.S.S.
CENSOR DEPUTATUS
IMPRIMATUR: ✠ GEORGIUS L. CRAVEN
EPISCOPUS SEBASTOPOLIS
VICARIUS GENERALIS
WESTMONASTERII: DIE XXIII NOVEMBRIS MCMLIX

The Nihil obstat *and* Imprimatur *are a declaration that a book or pamphlet is considered to be free from doctrinal or moral error. It is not implied that those who have granted the* Nihil obstat *and* Imprimatur *agree with the contents, opinions or statements expressed.*

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
THE CHAPEL RIVER PRESS, ANDOVER, HANTS, FOR
BURNS AND OATES LIMITED,
28 ASHLEY PLACE, LONDON, S.W.1.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

THIS book is intended for every Christian, actual or potential, as an initiation into Christian truth and life, which are inseparable. Those liable to be put off by a few very elementary introductory considerations of a more or less philosophical nature can jump immediately to the third chapter, *The Discovery of the Divine Word*. After all, St Thomas himself, the most philosophical of theologians, tells us that we can perfectly well assent to the faith merely on the grounds of the sublimity of Christian truth.

However, the Christian, because he is a Christian, must be a complete man. The assimilation of the faith will therefore stimulate him to return to what precedes faith, to what makes it take root in the intelligence.

Moreover, this book is written not so much to be read as to be re-read. If we are to make God's truths our own, they must attract us to them. That demands more than a reading. It certainly demands more than the reading of this book, or of all the books in the world.

I

THE DISCOVERY OF THE SPIRITUAL

In the world that we have made for ourselves, God often seems to be a long way off or even to be unreal, because the life that we lead in this world takes no account of spiritual realities. Our civilization thus tends to mutilate our faculties as well as to limit our view of the world. Nothing is left but matter. To rediscover God we have to rediscover the spiritual in ourselves as well as in the world around us.

But it would be wrong to imagine that spirit and matter are two separate realities, so different as to defy any attempt to see a link between them. This kind of spirituality has been an important factor in the modern divorce between ordinary, everyday life and the religious life, a divorce which has quite naturally led us to confuse the spiritual with the unreal.

On the contrary, what we must rediscover is how the reality of the spiritual is already implicit in our experience of the material world, so long as this experience is a fully conscious one.

Technology, which is absorbed, and is liable to absorb us, in the material world, can provide us, if we think about it for a moment, with a first opportunity to become aware of the spiritual. Technology, in fact, as elaborated by man, points to activities in him which cannot be reduced to mere material processes. There can be no technology without an idea. But an idea is something that cannot

be reduced to a mere image, a mere carbon copy of material things.

An idea, even that of a material object, postulates the intellectual operation known as abstraction. To define, or even simply to describe, this operation is certainly no easy matter. The various philosophies in fact begin their quarrel over the account that should be given of it. But the very need for explanation springs from the irrefutable fact that an idea is something not given to us in the material world. The material world may contain an indefinite number of stones, plants, animals and objects made by man himself from matter—his tools, for example—but it does not contain and certainly cannot produce out of its own resources what is known as the idea of a stone, plant, animal or tool. For the idea applies to all the concrete objects corresponding to it, but, properly speaking, cannot strictly be identified with any one of them. " Plant " in the abstract is not this or that plant, a forget-me-not or a baobab; it is both at the same time. Still less is it the plant in a pot on my table or the one I can see in the garden. It is all these plants and yet none of them.

It may be suggested that it is a confused picture consisting of a mixture of the forget-me-not and the baobab, the azalea on my table and the lilac putting forth its first clusters of flowers in my garden. But try to visualize such an image and, even if you obtained any result at all, you would have to admit that this image is one thing and what you have in mind when you think of " plant " is something quite different. This other thing, this mysterious entity which is certainly not unconnected with the material world, yet cannot be produced by or reduced to it, introduces us to the reality which we call mind or spirit.

But if we pass on from abstraction and the ideas it produces to the judgement which handles these ideas and draws from them a conclusion for which truth is claimed, then the basic originality of spirit will become still more obvious. Let us take as an example the simplest judgement possible; it will serve our purpose sufficiently. " The white azalea before my eyes is a plant; it possesses all the characteristics of one." This judgement is not only remarkable for all the forecasts it enables me to make and all the operations it enables me to carry out, which form the basis of technology and the amazing power it gives us over material objects. It is even more remarkable for the concept of truth which it brings into play and for the way in which I handle this concept. It presupposes that after evoking from the material world this peculiar world of my ideas which is connected with the material world, but no more produced by it than reducible to it, I have now reached the stage of putting these two worlds side by side and proclaiming their coincidence at one precise point. Where and how do they in fact coincide? When I say that " this " *is* " such-and-such-a thing ", it is not in the material world that " this " and " such-and-such a thing " coincide, for, if " this " belongs to this world, the idea " such-and-such a thing " certainly does not. Yet this " truth " in which the two meet is not a mere delusion; the empirical reality of the consequences of my judgement proclaims that " truth " itself is also " something ". But what kind of thing? And what is it in myself which thus enables me to put the two worlds, that of matter and that of my ideas, side by side and to decide on a coincidence between them which cannot be purely material?

Philosophers have needed nothing more than the analysis of this very simple intellectual operation to conclude not only that the world of spirit overflows that of matter, but that in man it attains real freedom. If this were not so, if my judgements were merely the product of a mechanical automatism and nothing more, there would be nothing to distinguish a true judgement from a false one, and, what is more, nothing to account for the conviction that there are such things as truths which forms an integral part of any judgement, even one which is in fact erroneous.

It is quite true that there are people who are unmoved by this kind of reasoning. But that is the case with all reasoning that demands a certain amount of abstraction. There are very few people who can follow a delicate mathematical calculation beyond a certain point; but that does not entitle us to question the validity of higher mathematics.

However, there are other more accessible ways of discovering the existence of spirit, within our own experience of the material world. Perhaps the most striking is that of aesthetic experience, the experience, not of truth, as in philosophical thought, but of beauty. For it is in and through physical sensation that an aesthetic impression reaches us. I see the shape and whiteness of an azalea, I perceive, or rather I sense, the softness of its petals, and in so doing I find it beautiful. Beauty is, as it were, given to me in these deliverances of the senses. It is obviously inseparable from them. But is it identical with the sensations which it accompanies? It is difficult to believe this. The more I analyse these sensations, the clearer it becomes that there is not one of them, taken individually, which could not be given by

objects or beings that I should not dream of considering beautiful. Why, then, should the particular conjunction of these impressions in the flower in question seem to me beautiful? What is beauty?

There is a simple explanation which at first sight looks tempting. Beauty, it says, is no more than the impression of the desirable. A beautiful fruit is a fruit which we should like to eat, a beautiful body one which arouses sexual desire. But what about a beautiful flower or a beautiful landscape? It is difficult to maintain that the admiration which they awaken is only a delusion, some deviation of the instinct which urges us towards whatever can effectively satisfy our body's elementary physical desires. This solution has been attempted, but it is a mere sophistry. For the attraction which draws us towards a beautiful fruit or any beautiful thing in order to satisfy our instinctive desire can only be confused very superficially with aesthetic admiration. The confusion is explained by the fact that desire of any kind, like admiration, will fasten preferably on something healthy, something full of life. Yet beauty can survive in a creature no longer capable of inspiring any kind of desire. Above all, when admiration has been aroused, it does not melt away into desire. It may be a concomitant of desire, but the greater it grows, the greater its moderating influence on desire. No doubt it does not eliminate desire, but it does liberate it. A person who notices the beauty of some apples in a dish will stop spontaneously in the very act of taking one to eat. A man impressed by a woman's beauty will not perhaps be deterred thereby from approaching her, but he will only do so with a respect which desire of itself does not recognize. It is a

striking fact that a representation of the human body which aims above all, as Greek art did, at capturing its beauty should succeed in overcoming desire. To a cultured person with any capacity for understanding the aim of this art a Greek statue is perfectly chaste in its nudity. Only someone who did not grasp its beauty could consider it indecent.

Then there is the effect of music on us, particularly of that element in it which goes beyond the imitation of familiar sounds or the facile evocation of emotions bound up with the verve or sweetness of the sounds and rhythms. The music of a Bach or a Mozart has nothing in its raw material to distinguish it from any other noise. Its effect on us can be accompanied by lively or sad emotions. But surely it is clear that the stimulating or calming effect which it unquestionably exerts on us is accompanied by something quite different. To the joy or nostalgia, often curiously intermingled, which it inspires in us is surely added something which cannot be reduced to sensations or images or even to abstract ideas and the words which denote them. This " something different " is perhaps the easiest, probably the most enigmatic and certainly the most undeniable experience of the spiritual at our command, coming to us as it does in matter itself.

This possibly supreme form of beauty seems to lead us of its own accord towards a spiritual experience which at first looks even more dematerialized than any of those we have examined already. That is because it envelops our whole experience both of the world and of ourselves. In fact it dominates our whole physical life down to the smallest detail. We refer to that aspect of spirit which presents itself to us as " good ".

Moreover, good itself has two aspects. The first, looking outwards upon the world, is happiness. Here again, can we identify happiness with pleasure? Even if we could, the identification would not take us very far. For pleasure itself, even the sort which looks most purely physical, cannot be identified with the mere satisfaction of a strictly material desire. Satiety is not the same thing as pleasure, and to reduce pleasure to a mere mixture of incipient satiety and unsatisfied desire is an unjustifiable simplification. All the animals know this mixture, but it is not so certain that they know everything we mean by pleasure. In any case, even if pleasure and happiness do usually go hand in hand for a certain distance, a moment arrives fairly quickly when they part company. One can enjoy many pleasures, and enjoy them intensely, without being happy. Conversely, one can enjoy none of them, or even be overwhelmed with worries, and yet be much happier than when one had them all.

Happiness, in fact, has something total about it, and, what is stranger, it is possible to know this totality even when every individual satisfaction is absent.

No doubt there are various kinds of happiness. But even if we grant the name to a momentary repletion, accompanied by a measure of intoxication, we are never completely taken in. We know very well that this kind of happiness is only an illusion which we try to create for ourselves, or a mask worn for the benefit of others. *Real* happiness remains something plenary. But at the same time this plenitude does not weigh us down. Enjoyment or satisfaction that drugs us can imitate it, but we are never completely deceived. Whatever one may say, true happiness is not blind, nor does it fetter or engulf us.

We know very well that it is lucid, but with a lucidity that no shadow can cloud, and that it is free, but with a freedom that is no longer simply negative. Indeed, it is just because we know this so well that we are sometimes tempted to say that true happiness is a chimaera. But if it were, how could we be so certain of what it is, even if we cannot define it, and why is it that we cannot stop looking for it, even if such were our desire, or at any rate our wish?

When we succeed in discerning something of the lofty nature of happiness, we have already penetrated beyond the first aspect of good. Whether we realize it or not, we have passed insensibly from this outward-looking aspect to its more secret aspect, an inner face that can also be described as looking over our heads at something higher than this world. I refer to moral good, of which we are most immediately and keenly conscious in the sense of duty.

The uncertainties and variations of the moral sense—the recognition of *what* we ought to do—have often been pointed out, and they have been made a pretext for reducing this sense to a mere reflection of the customs and prejudices of the society in which we live. But if the moral sense, the sense of *what* we ought to do, is not directly given to man, but has, on the contrary, to emerge from ready-made opinions which are simply a reflection of our surroundings, the sense of duty which moves and animates it is quite a different matter. Of course, it can doze off, it can more or less atrophy in those who are habitually unfaithful to it, although it is liable to wake up again at rather disconcerting moments. But it is present in all of us, with the same unquestionably absolute

character. Once again, we can make ourselves more or less deaf to its voice. But, once heard, that voice cannot be mistaken, for its tone never varies. It always creates the same curious obligation, which we only feel when we also feel free to disobey it, and which we feel with a keenness proportionate to our real or imagined freedom.

For if the moral sense is always being built up and refined, or, in other words, if the sense of *what* we ought to do is only formed by trial and error, the sense that there are some things which must be done and others which must not is so evident that it cannot be ignored. It is true that a man can refuse to look at it, but in doing so he knows that he is being disobedient. He often has great difficulty in defining what his duty in fact is, but no thinking man can deny, deep down in his heart, that he has one, without denying his status as a man.

It may be objected that the sense of duty, of moral obligation, is only the survival of social constraint, that it is a reflex, unaware of its origin, but attributable in its entirety to the pressure on us of the group to which we belong from childhood. But that is to forget that the sense of obligation only comes into being precisely at the moment when constraint is consciously eliminated or surrenders its power over us. Once again, we only feel bound by conscience in so far as we feel free, and the freer we feel the more bound we feel. There is surely no clearer proof of the existence in us of spirit, and of its sovereignty over all our experience.

However, the moral life is not restricted merely to the experience of an obligation inside us or above us or both. It pervades all our human relations. Not only is the

existence of a feeling like friendship, which cannot be reduced to enjoyment or mere material interest, a remarkable testimony to spirit, but even in our most emotional and carnal relationships there is a spiritual aspect which cannot be denied. There is more to any real love than desire or pleasure. In the least hint of tenderness there is something more than mere physical sensation. And passion itself, which seems to originate in the mere desire for physical possession, can rise, by growing deeper and purer, to sacrifice.

Instead of considering the various preceding observations as so many separate " proofs " of the existence of mind or spirit, we should regard them as a body of heterogeneous but harmonious evidence. When man in general, and modern man in particular, who is, as it were, buried or engulfed in matter, begins to feel his way about in it, he finds in every direction signs of a higher reality colouring, as it were, his experience both of himself and the world. It is some of these signs we have noted. But we should not have noted them had we not already possessed, prior to these experiences, a sort of intuition of the spiritual which, obscure as it may have become, remains present at the base, as it were, of all our experiences, of the most material ones as well as of the others.

Nineteenth-century psychology held the view that our experience was built up on elementary sensations, and thus created the illusion—for it is one—of so-called scientific materialism. But contemporary psychology is moving further and further away from this arbitrary point of view, which falsifies from the start our conception of reality.

It is truer to say that particular sensations, and before

them our body's whole experience in its relation to the material world in general, are silhouetted against a vaster experience, which is the fundamental unity of our consciousness. There is no such thing in the raw material of our experience as pure sensations. All our sensations are originally bound up together in the unity of an experience in which the sensory only exists inside the affective, that is, the fundamental tendencies of our psychic make-up. But the affective itself is unified in it by what we have distinguished as the sense of the true, the beautiful, the good, which again is only one single spontaneous intelligence perceiving itself in and through its common perception of its body and the universe in which it is immersed.

To be sure, this first intuition of our being is profoundly obscure. It is only illuminated and clarified by the distinctions introduced into it. But if we stop at the first and easiest to define, at least apparently, namely sense-impressions, we are still very far from doing justice to the potentialities of this elementary consciousness in which we awake to life. And we have still not arrived there as long as the different ways in which we are forced to recognize the spiritual as opposed to mere sensation have not met. We are finally forced to the discovery that the human soul is not just a collection of tendencies or even a complex of spiritual faculties. It is at the same time the site and the agent of one primary total activity which embraces the faculties of apprehending the good, the beautiful and the true, the tendencies of the affective side of our nature, in which the spiritual and the material are indissolubly mixed, and the sensations themselves. Mind or spirit, in fact, is not just a part of us, a by-product

of the body. It is that totality, that higher yet omnipresent unity in which our whole experience is gathered up and in which purely material experience is only a nucleus, whose apparent opacity is, in fact, itself shot through with much subtler influences. How can spirit be reduced to matter, when matter is only the name we have given to that rudimentary nucleus, distinguished so simply in the mind's total experience simply because it forms the lowest region of it? The most rudimentary sensation can only be conceived, if we come to think of it, as an aspect of consciousness. And consciousness, with its inseparable unity of intelligence and will, is spirit.

II

THE DISCOVERY OF GOD

THE conclusion we reached in the preceding chapter was that, just as matter alone cannot produce anything resembling spirit, so our conception of the latter is not mentally based on our sensory experiences. The most that could be said is that we reconstruct this conception by reflecting on these experiences. The reality of spirit as the unity and totality of human experience is given to us from the start. But it is given in a confused manner. Through the progressive differentiation of our individual experiences reflection only rediscovers this first reality. Experience and the reflection aroused by it begin by dividing reality up and apparently dismembering it. But richer experience and riper reflection put it together again and seem to reconstruct it. That is how we discover, or rather rediscover, spirit; at the end of a series of developments none of which could have taken place had it not been present in embryo from the beginning.

But this circular trip is not purposeless. It takes us from the unity of a dawning consciousness, unaware of its own riches, to the higher unity of an adult consciousness which has catalogued and taken possession of them.

What is true in the case of the discovery of mind or spirit in general is also true in the case of the discovery of God. Really, the discovery of God is itself only a higher degree, a final extension, of the discovery of

spirit. It could be said that, as we discover together our body and the physical world in which it is immersed, so we discover together spirit in ourselves and in God. It has been suggested that the etymology of the world religion is connected with this fundamental discovery of the bond between ourselves and God, a closer bond than that between our body and the world, although a very different one.

In the discovery of God by man, then, we start from a deeply-rooted, pre-existing intuition. Subsequent experience may sometimes tend to obscure or cloud it, but persevering thought will find it again enriched and illuminated. However, here even more than in the case of the discovery of spirit, the activity of the reasoning intelligence alone cannot be certain of arriving at the goal if it is isolated from human experience as a whole. In particular, the intelligence will be fatally crippled in its climb, and stop prematurely in half-discoveries, or even sheer sophistries, if the intellectual search is not accompanied by the normal development of that moral experience in which the soul recovers possession of itself in its deepest and highest manifestations.

Moral experience, as we have said, cannot be reduced simply to the experience of duty or obligation, which is simultaneously higher, transcendent and inward. It also includes the experience of our relationships with others, capable as they are of evolving into the purest and richest forms of friendship or love. Religious experience could be described as what moral experience becomes when its various forms are unified at the top. In the religious experience, in fact, the mysterious experience of moral obligation is illuminated by the discovery of the quite

special relationship in which we find ourselves with someone: someone who is capable of creating an incomparable love in us, someone who wishes to form with us a friendship of which all others are only an image or sketch, someone above all who loves us before we have ever thought of him, who loves us with a love the discovery of which will completely transfigure for us the whole meaning of the word " love ".

The experience which we have just described is the highest peak to which the discovery of God will bring us. But, once again, this experience is, as it were, foreshadowed and prefigured by an elementary, fundamental experience. For it is not enough to say that we find religion at the basis of all human civilizations and cultures. It would be truer to say that religion appears, as primitive setting and impulse, behind every activity in the world and every view of the world elaborated by man. And if, in the history of civilizations, there are undeniably moments when religion seems to fade away and lose its hold on men's actions and thoughts, it would be wrong to imagine that this phenomenon is the result of a natural evolution, of a progress from childhood to maturity. On the contrary, it occurs at times of crisis, a crisis which seems to be provoked by senility rather than adolescence. So long as a civilization is developing in a way that remains creative, religion develops with it. When religion declines it is always because this civilization is beginning to live on its reserves, on its original impetus. To the superficial glance it may seem to be as its zenith. It may still seem to be developing, but in reality it is breaking up, and it is because it is breaking up that religion declines.

What shows clearly that religious scepticism is a symptom of decay and not a sign of progress is that it is always accompanied by superstition. The very same people who today consider themselves too advanced to go on believing in Christ or the Trinity provide many of the customers of the fortune-tellers and twopenny-ha'penny prophets whose claims fill the advertising columns of the newspapers. Similarly, when Rome was declining, the very same blasé intellectuals who wondered how two augurs (priests of the old religion) could look at each other without laughing were also ready to yield to superstitions previously confined to the uneducated lower classes. In the same way, contrary to a view often held, it was not the Christian Middle Ages that saw the growth of the belief in spells and consequently of the number of trials for witchcraft, but the Renaissance, when the first currents of sceptical and materialist thought were spreading through Christendom.

The sense of the holy is such a fundamental attribute of the human spirit that, if it is prevented by circumstances from expanding in the discovery of God, it will seek occult, debased and illusory satisfactions on the level of magic and other superstitious beliefs and practices, which are only multiplied by the apparent elimination of religion.

Modern religious psychology, based on an improved knowledge of the history of religions, can help us to grasp the characteristics—they are the same everywhere—of this sense of the holy, which appears, right at the mysterious heart of spiritual consciousness, as the most deeply-rooted of human intuitions. Through and beyond all his experience of the world and of himself, man in every age and in every part of the earth seems to be

moved and attracted by the holy. Still less capable of definition than mind or spirit, the holy makes itself manifest in a mixture of fear and attraction.

The holy makes its first appearance as something to be feared. But only a very superficial view could confuse the fear inspired by the holy with the mere fear of material misfortune. The great catastrophes unleashed by the powers governing the material world are no doubt the object of *holy* fear to primitive man, but only because he fears something besides the physical effect. What does he fear? That is just what cannot be defined. Behind the world, primitive man sees a power greater than the world. It is greater not only because it is stronger, but also because its strength is of a different order.

What shows best how completely " other " the divine appears to man is the paradoxical fact that it attracts him at the same time as it frightens him. And its attraction is just as overmastering as the fear which it inspires. To use Rudolph Otto's words, the *mysterium tremendum*, the mystery that makes man tremble, is at the same time the *mysterium fascinans*, the mystery which fascinates him.

Let us recall the Gospel's description of the Apostles' attitude at the time of Jesus' transfiguration. At first they prostrate themselves and are overcome by an irresistible fear. Then Peter exclaims: " It is good for us to be here . . . ". This mixture of apparently contradictory emotions is a typical concomitant of the sense of holiness, from its first appearance in humanity to its loftiest manifestations, or at any rate from what look like its most primitive forms to its most highly developed ones.

In what are known as the higher religions, aesthetic and

moral factors will be infused into this basic human experience. But the religion will only *last* if, in this process of deepening, the character of the primitive intuition is preserved or rediscovered. If not, it will wither away or dissolve into the various different forms of intellectualism, aestheticism or moralism. For those are the springs of unbelief—apart from the practical materialism of a civilization no longer interested in anything but enjoyment and the means of procuring it—in highly developed civilizations. But, once again, when it is stifled like this, the religious instinct will reappear in forms that are perverted and debased, because they are cut off from normal relationships with the higher activities of the intelligence and will.

It is, on the contrary, this deep foundation of religious experience, obscure in its beginnings, often obscured in the course of its development, but co-extensive with human history and humanity itself, that provides the basis for the development of the different paths by which thinking man attains intellectual possession of his most fundamental intuition.

All these paths are those of the reflection provoked by the different aspects of our experience. Their principal interest consists in showing us that God, like the reality of mind or spirit in ourselves, is to be found not simply outside the world but at the end of every avenue down which our experience of the world can lead us.

The existence of God, as that of a necessary being, and more precisely as that of the only necessary being, on whom all others are completely dependent, is made evident by what is known as the contingency of the world. By that we mean that among all the beings and all the

objects with which our daily experience brings us into contact there is none whose existence contains within itself its own necessity. The proof of this is that there is in fact none whose endurance is assured, and *a priori* none of which we can be sure that it has always existed. What may not have existed at any given moment, what tomorrow or later will certainly not exist, is obviously not necessary. In other words, it does not carry within itself a sufficient reason for its own existence.

It is no good saying in reply to this that such-and-such a contingent object was brought into existence by some other one, when the second is obviously no more necessary than the first. If a chain is not fastened somewhere to a nail, the number of links in it is of no significance; even if they stretch to infinity, the chain will not stand up in the air on its own. Similarly, however numerous a series of beings may be, and even if it were infinite (a meaningless supposition in any case), if none of them is necessary and they all depend on each other, then the series will have no more reason for its existence than each of its members taken separately. Adding them together will not endow them with what they lack individually.

The mind is therefore irresistibly led to postulate the existence of a being that is necessary behind all these beings that are not.

It is true that an objection can be made to this argument. Even if no individual thing in this world is permanent, the elements of which they all consist seem to be. In that case, in order to explain the constant renewal of the individual objects which we can see succeeding each other, it looks as if we need only turn to the idea of continually changing combinations of the same elements.

The objection is an interesting one because it forces us to make a clear distinction between the idea of causation, or necessary reason, and the mere idea of precedence. Assuming that the elements of the world were eternal, in the sense that they had always existed and always would, could we say that it is unthinkable that the whole world, elements included, should cease to exist or had never existed? In other words, is there anything in the world which one cannot conceive as never having existed or liable to disappear? It still seems obvious that experience provides us with nothing of this sort. It testifies to instances of more or less prolonged permanence; but even if it testifies, in the case of some things, to indefinite permanence, it does not show us anywhere anything that we cannot incontrovertibly conceive of as in fact deprived of the very existence that we in fact observe. That it does or does not exist is a fact of experience. But nothing enables us to assert of any being within our experience: " It would be impossible for it not to exist ".

In this respect, the difference between the existence of the world and everything in it and any mathematical truth is striking. The universe in which through a point outside a straight line there passes a line, and one only, parallel to this straight line may one day have ceased to exist. Again, in the universe which confirms this hypothesis, there may be no more triangles. But we know with absolute certainty that, if there ever exists in fact a triangle in a universe in which Euclid's hypothesis applies, the sum of this triangle's angles will be equal to two right angles. That is an absolutely necessary truth, whilst, on the contrary, neither the existence of any triangle whatever nor even the existence of the Euclidean

universe is necessary. In fact, they do exist. That they may have existed for a long time or even, if you like, always, does not alter the fact that they do not carry in themselves the reason for their existence. There must then be another being which *is* necessary, *does* possess in itself its reason for existing and causes all the rest to exist. We call this being God.

Again, we are dealing here with a closely reasoned argument which has apparently impressed some of the greatest minds in the history of the world as well as the veriest novices in logic. But, once again, it must be admitted that there are other minds, not all of them mediocre ones, which are quite impervious to such arguments. Let us recall what we said about mathematics. No one questions the validity of its calculations, but very few people are capable of following them beyond a certain point. But in fact the reason why no one questions mathematics is that its results are confirmed for everyone to see by their applications.

It is true, of course, that there are no experiments in religion, as there are in physics, which can be repeated at will and checked beyond a shadow of doubt. But there are also many other ways in which man can be brought to a discovery of God which will seem to him beyond question and which those without his experience have no legitimate reason to doubt.

The question arises whether aesthetic experience can put us on the road to a discovery of this sort. We may feel some hesitation about this at first, but it looks as if there is no real reason why we should. We are not merely using an empty phrase when we say that at certain moments the beauty of the world conveys a

directly religious impression. Plato's theory of recollection is a magnificent attempt, if not a completely satisfactory one, to give depth and justification to this apparently banal formula. According to Plato, in our soul there is a sort of latent memory of a contemplation of eternal beauty which the soul enjoyed before being plunged into the material world. When something in this world seems beautiful to it, that is because the memory of this lost vision has been awoken in it by a mysterious and, as it were, in-built reflection.

Without accepting the mythical hypothesis of the soul's pre-existence, we can perfectly well agree that, when a certain kind of experience of the beautiful reaches a sufficient degree of purity and intensity, it opens the spirit to a sort of perception of something beyond the world, something which at certain privileged moments seems to shimmer over the objects even of this world. How convincing an experience of this sort can be for the person who has undergone it has been made clear by some very great poets. Wordsworth succeeded better than anyone else, perhaps, in conveying the experience. Hence Henri Bremond wondered, with some plausibility, whether there is not at least a presentiment of this discovery in every genuine poetic experience. This does not mean that poetry is to be confused with prayer. But it seems scarcely possible to deny that for some people, and such people may be more numerous than is commonly thought, it can be a genuine approach to prayer.

In this respect, moreover, the poet is only recapturing by consummate art one of the simplest experiences of primitive man. For it seems indisputable that, among primitive man's most elementary experiences, the

experience of the holy mentioned above forms a sort of luminous kernel at the heart of the nebula of aesthetic experience. Or, to be more accurate, the aesthetic experience and the religious experience proper of civilized man can only be distinguished as emanating from a primitive feeling containing the germs of both.

However, the very way in which aesthetic experience flowers out of the experience of the senses is liable to make it ambiguous, so that it is not surprising that the religious experience rooted in it can be easily led astray. Idolatry is the result of confusing the picture with its subject, or matter with the reflection on it.

The discovery of God will therefore appear more clearly and surely in a deepening of the moral experience.

St Augustine has shown unforgettably how the pursuit of happiness, if it is sufficiently persistent and clear-headed, must end in the discovery of God. Every man seeks happiness; that is the goal, whether clearly or vaguely perceived, of all his efforts. It would be an absurd denial of one of his most natural inclinations to reproach him with this. Yet all the blessings offered or actually bestowed by this world sooner or later disappoint him. Either they elude his pursuit, or, having won them, he loses them, or, if he does not lose them, he has the most disillusioning experience of all: the blessing which, in process of being sought, seemed bound to bring perfect satisfaction leaves its disappointed possessor still hungry. In these circumstances, either our nature has no meaning, which is more or less unthinkable, or there is a Good, satisfying and changeless, to which we are finally to attain, for which we are made. But such a Good must be infinitely perfect. Nothing less seems capable of

satisfying the longing which we all carry within ourselves. This perfect, infinite Good is God.

Newman, in his turn, has expressed better than anyone else how the other side of moral experience discloses God to us, in a still simpler and clearer way. The absolute character of the moral obligation, the appeal it makes to our loftiest and apparently supreme faculty—our freedom of will—the transcendent way in which it rises above this very freedom—all these things tempt us to discern, behind and above our conscience, someone greater than ourselves who speaks to us in the very depths of our being, who is always there waiting for us. That " someone ", who speaks to our conscience so intimately and with such authority, is God.

We may say that here, in the purest and loftiest moral experience, and in the carefully considered analysis of it, we meet again, developed to their fullest, the two terms whose primitive and irreducible conjunction characterized the Holy from its very first contacts with our experience: fear, but fear of the Supreme, which is also the wholly other, and at the same time attraction, the irresistible attraction of a second self, nearer to us than we are ourselves and at the same time infinitely better.

Is this, then, the loftiest and most direct discovery of God that we can make in this world? It seems undeniable that there is a still higher and more certain way, that of what is known as mystical experience.

It is impossible to deny the importance of the fact that throughout man's history, in the East as well as in the West, we meet a sort of pleiad, or even galaxy, of luminous personalities, who all testify to substantially the same experience. These men differ in every conceivable way.

They differ, sometimes to the point of hostility, in race, civilization, background, social conditions, and beliefs or philosophical views, too—that is, if they have any, which is not always the case. The only thing in which they do not differ is the calm assertion which they all make that they know God, that they have discovered him in an intimate and indescribable experience. It is an experience which stands apart, which they themselves are the first to call mysterious, obscure and incomprehensible. Yet this experience has transfigured their life and their whole vision of the world. Above all, it has given them definite proof of the existence of God, proof based on evidence that is unassailable, immediate and more certain than the fact that we possess hands and feet. In this respect, although obscure or even impenetrable in so many others, their experience seems to them clearer and more indubitable than any other. Not only is it for them light itself; it is an invasion of their whole being by the light, by a light without peer, the light that a Christian writer, struck by its holy character, calls the unapproachable light.

We find the same clear and precise assertion of this experience in a Greek of late Hellenistic times like Plotinus as in a Hindu of the early Middle Ages like Çankara. A Muslim Arab of the eleventh century, Al Ḥallaj, describes it in the same terms as a Christian Spaniard of the sixteenth century, St John of the Cross. It has reappeared nearer our own times in men like Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. A twentieth-century German banker, Jaegen, seems to have had just the same experience as a Castilian Carmelite of the sixteenth century, St Teresa of Avila.

What are we to make of their assertions, which are as

harmonious on this point as they are often discordant on every other?

Are we to dismiss them as impostors? But the most critical analysis of their lives and personalities forces us to recognize in them not merely people of the greatest integrity, but peaks in the moral life of humanity.

It may be suggested that we are faced here with visionaries or even pathological cases. But some of them show every sign of being personalities endowed with a sense of balance, a realism and a robust common sense that would be envied by many men of action who have made their mark on the world. And in fact these same people have very often been men of action too, and strikingly firm and clear-sighted ones. But the most surprising thing of all, perhaps, is that when traces of neurosis are indeed to be found in them, as, for example, in the case of St Teresa, it looks as if their mystical experience, far from issuing from it or aggravating their condition, has developed in diametrical opposition to their weaknesses and has finally overcome them in a way that one would be tempted to call miraculous.

Far, too, from being distinguished by any sort of tendency to fanaticism, or by a lack of any critical attitude towards their own experiences, the great mystics mentioned above display the most clear-sighted (and sometimes harsh) contempt for visions, ecstasies and all the more or less abnormal phenomena easily confused with mysticism. No one has done more than they to warn possible disciples against the danger of confusing the two things. No one has employed more delicate psychology or more precise criticism to distinguish and dissociate these different kinds of experience.

It may be suggested that we should question their experiences on the pretext that they are not granted to everyone. But we have not all made—nor could we make —the experiments on which the great principles of science are based, yet no one would dream of casting doubt on them. It is true that these experiments can at least be checked by processes which have nothing mysterious about them, even if they sometimes remain extremely complex. In this respect it is no use denying that the conditions of mystical experience, and of religious experience in general, are quite different. It cannot be reproduced at will merely by using a certain process. We have to commit ourselves, to let our whole being be remoulded.

Nevertheless, there is nothing in this necessity which can justify scepticism. For, once again, the more we study the great mystics, the clearer it becomes that the path which they have followed, and invite their disciples to follow, is by no means a path leading to credulity or a weakening of the critical faculties. On the contrary, it is a path demanding the greatest purification of the mind and the senses and leading to moral and intellectual heights which make deceit and delusion equally impossible. We cannot advance along this path and make the great discovery until the personality, freed from the obscure weight of its instincts, the blind determinism of its psychic make-up and the subtlest desires that might still contain a grain of egoism or self-satisfaction, has become completely luminous and ready for union with the Light.

The more one studies and ponders the testimony of the mystics, the more convinced one becomes that, if we ourselves do not see, the reason is that our spiritual eyes

are atrophied or have never developed at all. But to deny on that account that others have seen would be to act like blind men denying that others can see just because they themselves are unfamiliar with the light.

There are typically modern objections to this argument which we cannot pass over in silence. The first is the Marxist one and the second is based on Freudian psychology.

To the Marxist thinker, the only substantial reality present in human experience proper is economic reality: the production and consumption of material goods. Religion's only role in history is that of a compensatory phenomenon. It is a dream experience created to comfort themselves by the economically unsatisfied. Then the satisfied, the property-owning classes, take possession of this instinctive activity and encourage it, in order to preserve the proletariat in its illusion, so that the class-struggle is stifled at birth.

Has this objection any validity? It clearly has no relevance to the authentic religion whose logical basis we have analysed. But it cannot be denied that it does apply accurately to many debased forms of religion in which the forms themselves have lost their original significance and become a dead weight on the spirit. Here we have an admirable illustration of the distinction so well drawn by Bergson between the closed religions, which are always more or less dead and do no more than preserve a petrified society, and the open, living, creative religions which periodically split open dead societies and give humanity a fresh burst of life.

As for the Freudian objection, it is based on a confusion

which is analogous, but more difficult to disentangle. Freudians assume that the fundamental impulse of human life is the sexual instinct, which obscurely seeks the prolongation of life beyond death in the union of the sexes. On this hypothesis, religion is only a sublimation of sexuality brought about by repression. The unsatisfied sexual instinct creates a phantom ideal, which becomes the goal, in an illusory victory over death, of desires looking for their fulfilment in an equally illusory union. Hence, so the argument goes, the importance of the themes of love and death in all religions, and also the fact that most of them favour sexual abstinence, as if that were a condition of religious experience.

The reply to theories of this kind must be far more cautious than the one to the Marxist theory. We must certainly recognize that Freud was right when he pointed to the indisputable connection between the experiences of love and death, and to the reappearance of this mysterious conjunction at the very heart of religion in all its forms.

But the great question is whether love (not to speak of death) can be reduced to sexuality. Freud and his followers only reach this conclusion by a series of ambiguities. What certainly can be asserted is that sexuality, if it is reduced to its exclusively physical aspects, cannot claim to account for all the human experience covered by the word " love ".

We can perfectly well agree with the Freudians that the experience of love, in its most basic forms and varieties, is rooted for man in the sexual instinct. However, the sublimation which Freud describes as a pathologist is only a camouflage for the instinct asserted at an early

stage which it cannot pass beyond, and it cannot account for all human experience. It no more explains the intellectual, aesthetic and ethical experiences than the religious experience which includes and transcends them all. As soon as we really attain one of these levels, we pass beyond the camouflage, which in fact has never issued in anything but a neurosis, and reach a complete remoulding and elevation of all human experience. What does remain perfectly true is that its basic elements, its physiological elements, will be subsumed in these experiences, even the loftiest ones. But they will also be genuinely transfigured. Freud is nearer the truth than the false spirituality which separates spirit and matter and then creates a false opposition between them. But none of his positive arguments justifies the reduction of spirit to matter, which is in any case impossible. At the most they stimulate us to take an equally clear-headed attitude towards the spiritual symbolism rooted in the very nature of the carnal, and towards the permanent temptation we feel to confuse the reality with the symbol.

III

THE DISCOVERY OF THE DIVINE WORD

THE paths which we have explored so far, all leading, as we have seen, to the discovery of God, are so many paths of *man* towards God. But the fundamental assertion of Christianity, of the Church, is that there exists another path, and that this one is a path, *the* path, of God to man.

In other words, if the Church is right, God has not remained content to let himself be sought by man. He himself has taken the initiative of coming to man. It is this assertion, with all its consequences, that forms the essential difference between Christianity (and Judaism before it) and all the other religions, religious philosophies or even non-Christian religious experiences. The Church by no means denies that by these paths man has arrived at a knowledge of God which, imperfect as it may be, is none the less real. Christianity does not exclude, indeed it confirms, all sorts of truths about God at which man has arrived without faith. But Christianity is much more than a sum of truths about God, however complete, at which man can arrive unaided. Christianity offers itself as the gift of God.

A very simple comparison will enable us to grasp the significance of this difference. Take Robinson Crusoe on his island. At the start, he thinks he is alone. Then clues gradually accumulate which lead him to suspect the presence of someone else on the island which he

thought was uninhabited. First of all, he notices footprints, which could conceivably be those of an animal. Then come indisputable traces of a human being, such as the still warm remains of a fire. Little by little, from these accumulated clues and the reflections which they arouse in him, Robinson begins to form a fairly clear idea of his still invisible companion. Then, one fine day, on the beach, he sees this companion coming to meet him. From that moment onwards, everything is changed. Not only will the knowledge he may have acquired of the other be corrected, enriched and completed; it will become a quite new kind of knowledge: personal knowledge. And this renewed knowledge will transform not only Robinson's idea, but his whole life, precisely because the other, a living person and no longer just an idea in Robinson's head, has entered it.

The Church announces a transformation of exactly the same kind in the relationship of man to God. If Christianity is true, God is no longer someone whose existence has been revealed to us by a number of clues, nor even someone of whom we have acquired a fairly profound knowledge by reflecting on these clues; God is henceforth someone who has spoken to us, who speaks to us today, and who not only speaks, as one man speaks to another, but has intervened and still intervenes in human life with obviously unequalled power.

To be more accurate, it is the Church's assertion that God has spoken to men through history and still speaks to them through the Church herself. Not only has he spoken to them, with growing clarity; in the end his living Word has been made flesh, in a man who is himself God made man, not only to enlighten man, but to transform him. Finally the Church asserts that this Word made flesh, this God made man, is always present with her and in her, still—indeed more than ever—active in transforming man and the world.

Such is the Church's assertion, the message she feels it her duty to proclaim, the Gospel (that is, " good news ") she feels able to announce to every man.

The question immediately arises: is this assertion well founded? What reasons have we for believing in its truth?

First of all, our experience of the world and of ourselves should alone be enough to make us ready to welcome a divine word, a divine intervention. And when these appear, as they do in fact in Christianity, the same experience inclines us to believe that this is what we were waiting for, although we could not define it.

We have enumerated above all the evidence in human experience which convinces us that God exists, and that he is as perfectly good as he is omnipotent. All that is true, but it is not the whole truth. There are aspects of our experience from which reflection can draw a certain conclusion in this respect. But these are not its only aspects. The same external world, the same mental universe which testify so clearly to the existence of a God who is all-powerful and absolutely good also testify to the existence of evil, an evil which is undeniably mysterious. It should be noted, too, that the more indubitable the evidence of our experience and our reason about God, the more this evil begins to look not only like a mystery, but also like a scandal.

No doubt philosophers will explain to us that the very perfection of the creative God inevitably involves the

relative imperfection of his work. A world created perfect would be a contradiction in terms: such a world would no longer be created, or even a world, it would be God himself. The presence, therefore, in this world and in ourselves of the evil of imperfection, incompleteness or simply limitation may upset us at first sight, but ceases to be a scandal as soon as we reflect upon it.

That is all very fine, but it does not go very far towards explaining the suffering of the innocent and death. Above all, it does not account for that disturbing experience known to every man and expressed so vividly by the ancient poet: *Meliora video proboque, deteriora sequor* (" I see the better and approve it, but do the worse "). Or, as St Paul was to say in stronger but scarcely clearer terms: " I do not do the good which I love and I do the evil that I hate: wretched that I am! Who will deliver me? "

To the problem, or rather to the scandal, of evil, contrasted like this with the certainty that there is an omnipotent and completely good God, the purely human religions give no more satisfactory answer than the philosophies. The religious philosophies have indeed only attempted to provide a solution in order to avoid the only too obvious bankruptcy of these religions. And, once again, the inadequacy of the purely philosophical solution emerges clearly when it is confronted with the ugly reality of evil in the world and in man.

On the other hand, the message of the Gospel, which claims to be the word of God, strikes us immediately as contributing a new note. The Gospel, which claims to be God's effort to enter into personal relations with us, begins, in fact, by saying that such relations could and

should have existed from the start, but that man and the spiritual creation in general foolishly broke them off. Hence the existence of evil as we know it. " Death entered the world through sin "; the evil which scandalizes us in a world, in a human race, created by God proceeds from the fact that the world and man wished to dispense with God and to put themselves in his place.

It should be noted that the originality of the Christian message lies not in speaking of a fall, but in explaining it in this particular way. Many religions and philosophies have been too forcibly struck by the disorder now present in the world and the human spirit not to have arrived quite naturally at the idea of a fall. But the way in which they have usually formulated it is no less depressing than the situation for which they wished to account. Platonic thought, for example, following the Orphic religion, says that evil is matter, the body, and in fact that the soul, pure or even divine in itself, has fallen into the mire. Hence the description of the body as only a tomb for the soul (a pun on the Greek words *soma*, which means body, and *sema*, which means tomb). But this " explanation " of evil merely passes judgement, a judgement against which there is no possible appeal, both on the world in which we live and on a whole part of ourselves. All it offers in return is an illusory optimism about a disembodied soul, a " spirit " which has no contact with matter, but no contact with our experience of reality either.

The Gospel does not speak of a fall of this kind, but of a voluntary fall by created wills rebelling against the loving will of the Creator, a fall that consists, as our personal experience surely tells us, in proud and selfish

egoism. This fall is the responsibility of the soul itself, which has dragged the body with it and shut itself up in the body far away from God. So the soul, the spirit created before matter itself, needs salvation as much as the body. But salvation is possible in another way than by the flight of a disembodied soul out of a world and a body abandoned for ever to their sad fate. Salvation is possible for the whole man, body and soul together, and salvation is possible for the universe itself, if only the living relationship which should have existed between it and its creator can be re-established.

For this very reason the Gospel does not confine itself to giving us a retrospective explanation of the evil which we see before us. It promises, and indeed offers, us a solution here and now, a solution which is not just an explanation but a rescue operation. The Gospel does not content itself with throwing light on evil; it proposes to overcome it. It does not simply enable us to see into the mystery of a disturbing reality, it proclaims to us that this reality can and will be transformed.

That is what makes the Gospel a divine intervention. God the creator, whom we had alienated through our own fault, comes back to us, " to seek and save what was lost ". He comes himself to remove the obstacles and barricades which we had stupidly erected between ourselves and him, or rather he comes to bear for us, instead of us and with us, a burden too heavy for our shoulders. He comes to suffer with us the evil which we called into existence. Powerless to touch him, it had fallen back on us. Identifying himself with us, the Word of God made flesh comes to " bear " it in order to " take it away ". That is the double meaning of the word

which John the Baptist uses: *Ecce Agnus Dei, ecce qui tollit peccata mundi*, which means " Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who bears " (and/or " takes away ") " the sins of the world ".

In this unique way that the Gospel has of touching our hearts we are given a first and far-reaching experience of one of the two kinds of testimony with which the Church backs up the " good news " which she proclaims: prophecy and miracle.

Of course, the word " prophecy " is not to be taken simply in the sense of astonishing predictions that surprise us by their unexpected fulfilment. The prophets are not soothsayers. The mark of prophecy, God's seal of authenticity on the Church's message, is much rather a supernatural lucidity. It discloses to us unplumbed depths in our own experience and at the same time leads us into the ways of God which would otherwise be beyond our reach. And it is just these unexpected, unforeseeable revelations that impress us by the light which they throw on the old problems against which we were banging our heads like blind men. Thus we discern in the fulfilment of sacred history a truly supernatural continuity which is the mark of the invasion of human time by eternity. That is the key to the meaning of our own history.

When we trace, down the centuries, the changing forms of the Word which makes itself heard to Israel and then to God's new people, the Church, we are struck by the unity of purpose revealed in them. This unity is clearly not that of a simple natural development. Behind it there gradually takes shape the figure of someone, of a personality who is too big for any historical frame and

eventually shatters them all: the personality of the God who becomes man.

Just when the great Mediterranean civilizations were taking shape, a man in Mesopotamia, so we are told, felt called to leave everything—his country, his family and his property—and to plunge into the desert. To make up for what he had abandoned a mysterious promise was made to him: he, the voluntary exile, the perpetual nomad, who was smitten into the bargain with a sterility that looked like a curse, was to be the father of an unexpected posterity. He was to be blessed in it, it was to inherit a new land, better than the one he had left, and, finally, all the families of the earth were to be blessed in the progeny of him who at first looks like the very model of the Man Apart.

That is the story of Abraham, the first believer. It was to be reproduced—transposed and transfigured—in the history of the people which did in fact issue from him.

In due course Israel was to leave Egypt, but as slaves leaving the scene of their slavery, not as travellers leaving their homeland. In the desert of Sinai, the people met someone whom Moses had already met before them: the God of loneliness, the God in the sky, who is also, nevertheless, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham. This God was to guide them to the promised land, the land of liberty and peace, the land of life. But he led them to it through the desert.

Settled in Canaan, the promised country, Israel forgot him who had bestowed this gift, worshipping in his place the powers of the earth and the sky who, so it thought, gave it its corn and the fruits of olive tree and vine. Then

came the test. Punishment the prophets called it, but also evidence of a mercy which knows what man is made of and how to save him from himself by renewing his heart through suffering.

The exile in Babylon, the destruction of Jerusalem fulfilled one by one the warnings of the prophets. But the deepening, the renewal, in the " remnant " that had been foretold, of the whole understanding of the relations between God and his people corresponded to the hopes of these same prophets no less than the providential events which made possible the return, like a new exodus, and the recasting of the people and its holy city, like a resurrection. All through these experiences, the message of the successive prophets impresses us no less by its many creative leaps than by its adaptation to a history which it makes almost as much as it follows.

Confronted with the popular expectation of " God's Day ", when he would intervene again to save his people and confound its enemies, as he had at the time of the Exodus, Amos proclaimed that this day would be one of " darkness, not light ". What does this mean, if not that at the day of judgement God will judge first " his own ", those who knew him as the rest do not, but will find them just as unworthy of him as these others? For he is not satisfied with mere ritualism; he requires " justice " in life as a whole, justice between man and his brother as well as between man and God. And there is no more trace of this in the " chosen " people than in the remainder!

Must one despair then? No; for at this moment Osee appears to proclaim God's infinite mercy. God knows perfectly well that man is sinful. He does not

wait for him to be just before he loves him. He loves him already in all his injustice.

But this does not mean that the demand for justice uttered so vigorously by Amos is to be waived. On the contrary, what God expects of man and man seems incapable of giving him is precisely an infinite love of God, who will create it in him.

Again, Jeremias was to say: " Sooner may Ethiop turn white, leopard's hide unmarked, than Juda unlearn the lesson of ill-doing and amend ". And yet he encourages hopes of a new alliance in which God's law would no longer be engraved on tables of stone, but on every heart. Finally, Ezechiel promises that God himself will change the old, sinning humanity's heart of stone and create in its place a real heart of flesh.

Through all this there runs the thread of a continuous development which, however, follows none of the laws of human logic. On the contrary, it gives it the lie at every step, but by a creative logic whose every advance assumes all that has gone before in order to make another leap forward. The time was to come when Christ, after saying to his followers, " Love one another . . . love one another as I have loved you . . . This is the greatest love a man can shew, that he should lay down his life for his friends ", concluded by saying, " Take, eat, this is my body, given for you . . . Drink, all of you, of this; for this is my blood, of the new testament ".

All these developments possessed a continuity which was first of all that of God's plan to form a people, a people according to his own heart. Had he not indicated the outcome at the beginning in the sacrifice of Isaac? Putting Abraham, the first believer, to the test, God had

asked him if he would be ready to offer him his son, his only son, " thy beloved son Isaac ". But he himself had arrested the gesture when it was half made. What man could not think of doing for God, God finally performed for man, but as a man: " God so loved the world that he gave up his only-begotten Son, so that those who believe in him may not perish, but have eternal life ". These two extremes show at the same time the profound unity and the supernatural creativeness of the plan gradually revealed to and by the prophets and finally accomplished in Christ.

But the same characteristics, in paradoxical and luminous contrast to each other, are surely still more strikingly present in the revelation of the divine Envoy, behind whom is revealed the Father who sends him.

He is a " son of David ", that is, the Messias, the anointed *par excellence* of the divine power, a king who, like David but more perfect, is to let God reign in the humility of his faith and in the reality of grace received from on high.

But he is also the supernatural " son of man ", the man whom the prophet Daniel had seen, coming not from the earth but from heaven, from the side of God, to carry out in his name the final judgement.

Yet he is also the " servant ", humiliated, despised, a " man of sorrows ", " by whose bruises ", however, " we are healed ", for " it has pleased God to lay on his shoulders the sins of us all ".

But when he arrives, he surpasses this sublime and mysterious vision in the book of Isaias as well as all the other images which so curiously meet and unite in him alone. He is in fact the great mystery of God's Wisdom,

he is his Word by whom he created the world, he is his very Presence with his people: he is Jesus, the Saviour-God who had already disclosed his name to Moses on Horeb but now reveals himself in a new and definitive way as the living God who gives life. For he is the Emmanuel (God with us) in him who said to Philip: " Philip, he who has seen me has seen the Father ". In a word, he is the *Son*, and he has been made man, he, the one and only Son, only to become " the First-born among many brothers ": so that we may be made sons in him, " receiving in us the Spirit of the Son, through whom we cry (to God) Abba, that is, Father ".

This sacred history, illuminated by the divine Word, illuminates in return the whole of human history.

The more clearly conscious man becomes, by his own investigations, of himself and the universe around him, the more impressed he becomes by the mystery of his position. In this material world, in which he is continually discovering further complications and yet also a profound unity, he sees the various forms of life growing richer and more perfect and finally ending in humanity. Yet even at this stage this evolution poses a serious problem. Life in all its glorious multiplicity is always dogged by death. Or, rather, life and death are inextricably entangled. Life and death feed on each other. For the mind led by its own reflections to the idea of a creative God, it is extremely disturbing to note, not only the enormous amount of energy wasted by nature, but also the ferocity of its creations, which only develop by killing each other.

When we reach the human stage, the same problem arises again, this time with intolerable urgency. The

slow, patient emergence of the higher civilizations is no more striking than the mixture of vices which flourishes in them. What are regarded as the great civilizations of antiquity, those of Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean basin, were built up on the most savage oppression. The miracle of Greek civilization itself rested on a slavery that reduced man to the level of a mere inanimate object, to be used or misused as occasion demanded.

In the midst of all this, the history of little Israel, undistinguished by any particular gift in the realm of philosophic or scientific thought, much less in that of art, and never endowed with anything but an insignificant amount of territory and resources, stands out as an illuminating paradox. It surely provides the key to this vast but vague and groping effort of apparently the whole world to produce man, and of humanity to rise even higher. Surely the solution to the problem lies in this appeal of God to man, an appeal to be re-united to him, to know him with a knowledge that is comprehension of a reciprocal love, an appeal that therefore requires detachment, separation, purification.

At the same time, the great mysteries of suffering, of apparent failure, of death itself, far from being explained away by ingenious but false solutions, are gradually accepted for what they are in all their tragic breadth, together with the still deeper mystery of sin, of the intelligent creation's revolt against its creator, all ending in the climax and dénouement of the Cross. The prophetic revelation does not reply to the problems of the creation and of evil with the deceptively easy solution of a theory, it replies with a fact: God himself coming to take the place of man, who suffers, dies, does not under-

stand, revolts and makes accusations. God dies as a man and for man on the Cross, and, at the same time as he discloses to him depths of human responsibility which man in his tragic situation had never plumbed, saves him from them. The fact of the Cross blossoms out into the fact of the Resurrection. Man's failure, shouldered by God, becomes the starting-point of an unexpected victory, a new creation: the creation of a new man, a heavenly man, true child of God, in whom the powers of evil are overcome and who will overcome them throughout the world.

We have passed almost imperceptibly from prophecy to miracle. Just as the divine sign of prophecy cannot be reduced to a riddle, or series of riddles, solved by magic, so the divine sign of a miracle cannot be reduced to a few phenomena which are extraordinary but devoid of any significance. The Christian miracle is above all Christ's resurrection, which is inseparable from the appearance of a new humanity, by whom and for whom the whole world is to be transfigured.

The resurrection of Jesus is a fact of human history which baffles normal historical methods. They cannot explain it away and they do not know how to deal with it, like compasses which go wild in certain regions. No facile explanation can account for the experience claimed with one voice by the first Christians: Jesus is risen again. Once again we meet the same difficulty as in the case of the mystics: scientific knowledge would like to confine itself to solutions in which mystery has no place. Deceit or delusion are *a priori* suggestions for which there is no basis in the ancient documents of Christianity. No more conclusive argument can be drawn from them than that

their affirmations cannot be accepted—if one does not want to accept them. But as soon as we have disposed in this way of the riddle of the resurrection, the whole fact of Christianity, the fact of the Church, God's new people, becomes a still more inexplicable riddle, and an unavoidable one, since it exists before our very eyes.

No doubt the Church, in its historical reality, is empirical, like all God's works, especially those in which he has given free play to free wills. It disconcerts us and refuses to be easily classified. If it excites our respect by the marks of a more than human presence in it, it also shocks us by retaining many only too human attributes. But the Church must be judged by what it claims itself to do, by what it asserts to be the purpose and meaning of its activities. That is to say that the primary testimony which the Church provides to its fundamental nature consists of the saints and the new humanity to which they invite us in what is in fact called " the communion of saints ". Everything else, everything in apparent contradiction with this " holiness ", simply proves that the Church is made of common humanity, just as common humanity was drawn from animality, animality from the lower forms of life, the latter from matter and matter itself from nothingness. It must be obvious that at each stage we shall not understand what is new if we keep our eyes fixed on the remnants of the old and refuse to see something else, and that it is just this " something else " which is the interesting thing.

The " saints " are there, and the " communion of saints " in and by which they live, in the Church, and that is the permanent proof of Christ's resurrection and

its power. For all the saints could summarize their experience, which is also the collective experience of the Church, regarded in its newest and deepest reality, in the words of St Paul: " It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me ".

We have already spoken of the mystics in general, as they are found not only in Christianity, but even in religions or religious philosophies remote from us, like ancient neo-Platonism, Indian Brahminism or certain Mohammedan sects. The experience of the Christian saints always includes, although sometimes in such simple forms that it is not immediately apparent, something of the loftiest mystical experience. But this experience is much vaster; it has a fullness that is both human and divine.

What characterizes the saint is charity, in the true sense of the word, that is, a love which fills the whole of life, a love characterized by something absolutely new in humanity, something which not only bears the mark of the divine, but sheds fresh light on it, a light peculiar to Christianity.

The best way of appreciating this is to compare that other love which itself forms the heart of the loftiest religious philosophy known to antiquity, the Platonic school, with the divine love of Christianity, the love which the saints not only preach but practise.

With Plato, and the neo-Platonic mystics who followed him, the love which is to invade the whole soul is contrasted with our low affections for more or less crudely material pleasures. But the love described as celestial, as opposed to these earthly loves, remains none the less itself compounded of desire. The only difference is

that the goods which it desires are not material goods, but Beauty and Goodness in their most spiritualized forms. Nevertheless such a love remains explicitly the admission of a deficiency, of a gap that needs filling. The proof of this is that we are told categorically that the Greek gods, who themselves have everything one could wish for, do not and cannot love. Love moves all other creatures, whether they know it or not, towards the divine. But God does not love; he moves the universe, not by loving, but by being loved.

In contrast to the celestial Eros, Agape, the love described in the New Testament and practised by the saints, is presented as having been an attribute of God long before it became even a practical possibility for man. The Christian God always says, " It was not you who loved me first, it was I who loved you ". And the highest praise his disciples could find for him was, " God is love ".

This love is in no way the perception, and desire for possession, of a God that one lacks. It is spontaneous, gratuitous and unselfish. It loves not only what is worthy of being loved, but also what is unworthy. As St Paul was to say: " It is in this that God has revealed his love for us: he gave up his Son to death for us when we were sinners . . . and wicked ". As the apostle points out: " A just man might conceivably be found who would agree to die for another just man. . . ". But a God who dies for men, and particularly for the wicked, is certainly something that " never occurred to the heart of man ". It is a revelation about God's nature which goes far beyond the best that man had been able to declare or imagine.

It is even more amazing to find this love, a creative and redemptive love, now diffused in our hearts—as St Paul says again—by the Holy Spirit. Yet that is the great miracle perpetually visible in the saints.

The saints realize the ideal of true superhumanity. But their superhumanity, though a clear indication of the supernatural, is by no means inhuman. " The saints ", said the Curé d'Ars, " had warm hearts ". Like God, they know what man is made of with a knowledge as merciful as it is clear, a father's knowledge. All that is rightly dear to us in humanity in all its multifarious aspects is to be found in them, too, but purified of sin and illumined by the love of God—the love with which he loves us as well as the love with which we should love him.

The saints are the dazzling testimony, then, the great permanent miracle which is the Church's clearest indication of God's presence in her. All the individual miracles form only the accompaniment, a sort of fringe, as it were, to this one. The ability to see into hearts, the power of healing, and the transfiguration of the material world sometimes glimpsed in the neighbourhood of the saints as in that of Christ are all unmistakable indications of a creative presence which has regained possession of everything through the heart of man, a realm from which it had been banished by sin. They are also harbingers of that resurrection of humanity, that universal transfiguration of a world rid of sin which is to form the final fruits of Christ's resurrection, a resurrection proclaimed by the Church above all in the sacrifice of lives which have accepted his Cross in order to share his Love.

But we have not properly understood the saints so long

as we see them as isolated wonders and forget the communion of saints, with its roots in that historical, empirical life of the Church which arouses so much incomprehension in outsiders.

The saints themselves proclaim that their holiness is really only the grace of God, and that this grace has not been given to them separately or individually. They assert that they have all received it from the Christ who lives on in the Church, today as always, from the Christ who still speaks to us in the Church's proclamation of his Word and acts on us through the sacraments, especially the eucharist. The testimony of the saints is really testimony to the continuous living presence of the Word of God in God's people, the Church. What they testify is that Christ himself speaks to us when the Church speaks to us in his words, that Christ himself is there to ensure that his Word, the Word that he himself is, remains, in the sacraments, the living creative Word of God the creator and the saviour.

That is what the *communio sanctorum* really is, communion in the sacred realities which form the communion between the saints. We can now see that the communion of saints is not a sort of mystical Athenaeum, an exclusive spiritual club, to be respectfully bowed to from a distance, but a brotherhood open to all, which all are invited to join.

In fact, it is not the saints who adorn the Church, like a piece of borrowed finery, but the Church that produces the saints. They are the flowers of a tree whose sap is only revealed—in dazzling colours—in them; nevertheless that sap flows everywhere beneath the bark.

We touch here on the mystery of the Church, which

is the mystery of its apostolic character. In other words, the Church has no merit in itself, in all the human material of which it is made, and which is taken from our world of common humanity. Nor, properly speaking, has it even any merit in those who are its justification, before which the world bows. They are only a product, and the Church itself only an instrument. The Church's merit lies in him who never ceases to manipulate this instrument, who wished to identify himself with it: Christ, and, in Christ, God himself, God with us. That is what we call the Church's apostolic character.

" Apostle " means " messenger ". But in the Jewish circles in which Christianity arose the word had come to mean more particularly a messenger who was regarded not merely as a plenipotentiary but also as an *alter ego*, a second self of the person who had sent him. " A man's apostle " (in Hebrew, *schaliah*), the rabbi are always saying, " is a second self ".

So it has always been, and still is, the Church's conviction that when Christ said to his apostles, " As the Father sent me, I send you . . . whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me ", he was giving to the terms hitherto employed as a legal fiction the value of an unprecedented mystical realism. The truth about the Incarnation is that God is really present in Christ, his great " apostle ". The truth about the Church is that Christ is really present in his " apostles ", who, in their own persons or in the persons of those whom they in their turn have sent out to perpetuate themselves, the bishops, constitute the Church. The miracle and miracles of the saints testify first and foremost to the permanent truth of this " aposto-

licity ": Christ himself speaks in his Church today, as he did yesterday and will tomorrow, Christ acts in the Church, so that it is God who always speaks to us and saves us, and who always remains for us Emmanuel, God with us.

IV

THE DISCOVERY OF THE LIVING CHURCH

FOR the person who has reached the conviction that God speaks and acts in the Church through Christ, the way towards the full religious truth can less than ever be reduced to an intellectual process. Adhesion to the Christian faith, as we see it now, involves the whole personality. And it is not simply the acceptance of convictions which must bind our whole life. It is entry into a community, into the *communio sanctorum*, the " communion of saints ", through participation in the holy realities of the Word proclaimed by the apostolic ministry and of the sacraments in which that proclamation becomes, or rather remains, the perpetually contemporary fact which must invade our life.

Adhesion to the Christian faith is only possible through entry into the Church. And we enter the Church by being admitted to the celebration of its liturgy, with all the meaning and reality implied in it. This was made clear by Christian initiation in the victorious ages of the Church's life, as it is preserved, at any rate in principle and in essentials, in the liturgy of Lent and in that of the baptism of adults.

At the beginning of Lent, those who had reached the certainty that God comes to us and calls us to him through Christ, in the Church, asked to be enrolled among the candidates for baptism. The whole of Lent formed the completion of their initiation, which led up to the cere-

monies of baptism and confirmation, regarded in their turn as the final initiation into the celebration of the eucharist. The Christian is thus seen to be the man who believes in the Word of God heard in the Church assembled for the eucharist, and surrenders himself to it and its re-creating activity in the eucharist itself. The Church is at the same time revealed to the Christian as the assembly of those whom the Word of God has reached and who are ceaselessly created and re-created into a new people by the holy sacrifice.

Three initial rites in the inscription of the candidate for baptism demand attention first of all.

The first is his adoption by godparents. The second is the sign of the cross which the godparents, together with the priest, make over him. The third is the exorcism which follows immediately.

This co-operation of the godparents in the principle of Christian initiation proper shows clearly what the Church is not. It is not in any way an assembly of passive spectators before whom the priests perform the holy rites. It is an assembly consisting, in a sense, entirely of priests: the real chosen race, a holy people, a royal priesthood. What is performed in it—in a hierarchical order, it is true, in which the hierarchy is only the consequence of the apostolicity on which the whole Church is based—none the less concerns all the members. They all have their share and their responsibility in it. In particular, they are all interested in that expansion of the Church which is the very end and purpose of its apostolicity. They must all contribute by their testimony, a testimony to the Church before the world which ends in testimony before the Church to a son of the world asking

to be admitted to it. It is the duty of every Christian, by his life in this world, a life springing ultimately from the Church, to testify to unbelievers what the life of the Church is and whence it comes. It becomes every Christian's task, when this testimony has had its effect, to testify to the priests that the catechumen has really adopted, not only the faith of the Church, but its manner of life; in other words, that he is ready in his turn to give living testimony to the living truth.

All these kinds of testimony are marked, as it were, with one and the same seal, the seal of the Cross. The final initiation, which Lent leads up to, is in fact the initiation into the mystery of the Cross. In the Cross truth and life meet, and the truth of the divine Word is shown forth as the truth of a mysterious renewal of man's life in death.

That is why, at this first step towards committal, priest and godparents to some extent take possession of the catechumen by outlining over him the sign of the Cross. Not only will he be enfolded in it, but each of his senses will receive the imprint of it, as it were.

I sign your forehead in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, so that you may be a Christian.

I sign your eyes, so that you may see the glory of God.

I sign your ears, so that you may hear the voice of the Lord.

I sign your nostrils, so that you may breathe the fragrance of Christ.

I sign your lips, so that you may speak the words of life.

I sign your heart, so that you may believe in the Holy Trinity.

I sign your shoulders, so that you may bear the yoke of Christ's servitude.

I sign your whole body, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, so that you may obtain eternal life and live for ever.

There can be no question at this stage of entering upon the whole mystery of the Cross, since that is to be the peak of the whole process of initiation into Christianity. But formulas seem to occur right from the beginning which are designed to avoid any possible misunderstanding. To imprint the sign of the Cross on a man's whole life, they seem to say, does not mean in the slightest degree to cast a shadow over it. On the contrary, it means giving it back to true life and to the joy which does not fade.

Why it should be necessary to take this narrow path in order to reach such an expansion of the whole soul is immediately disclosed by the first act the Church performs for him who has come to entrust himself to her. This act, continually repeated on the catechumen throughout Lent, is exorcism: the summons of the Church to the powers of evil to withdraw from this man.

At first sight it seems as though there could scarcely be a ceremony more disconcerting to modern man. He will surely find strange survivals in it which are bound to form a stumbling block.

Yet if we take the trouble to think a little more deeply, we shall realize that exorcism still has an effective meaning, today more than ever before.

As we have already pointed out, far from seeking to diminish or minimize the problem of evil raised by our own experience of the world—all the more urgently since

we believe in a good and omnipotent God—the Gospel accepts it without evasion or any attempt to tone down its heart-rending, scandalous urgency. We must now go further and assert unhesitatingly that only the Gospel can enable us to confront and plumb the problem of evil, because only the Gospel provides any real possibility of overcoming it.

Here we touch on what St Paul calls " the mystery of iniquity ", as the sombre prelude to the saving mystery of the Cross. But, once again, the mystery revealed in the divine Word throws a remarkable light on the most obstinate riddles in our life.

To assert, as the divine Word does, that the origin of evil does not lie in any kind of reality—matter, for example—which must be considered as intrinsically bad, to assert on the contrary that everything that exists was created by God and is therefore fundamentally good, is to prepare us for the further assertion that the origin of evil is spiritual, that it lies in a failure, or, more precisely, in the disobedience of created spirit. However, it would be a distortion of this liberating assertion to interpret every individual evil as the immediate consequence of an obviously circumscribed disobedience. Such an interpretation is the typical product of a falsely religious narrowness of which Job's friends are the unforgettable examples and which is the permanent temptation of " right-thinking people ". It is also a mistaken restriction and simplification of the problem to reduce sin to human sin, even all the sins as a whole that have followed original sin, as if man were the only spiritual creature in the universe.

Surely it is clear that evil is something bigger than us,

that it did not have to wait for man to invade the creation, and that it has left its mark on it beyond the reach of man. Above all, surely the evil itself in our sin is clearly something beyond us. Our own sins are fearsome because they seem to open a sort of crack in the world that lets in evil, powers which we can no longer control. What modern man has evoked in the titanic intoxication of his material civilization, in the childish pride which has launched him into it without a second thought, is surely enough to make us realize that by removing the hand of God, by flattering ourselves on building, unaided, our own Babel, we have in fact entered, unarmed, a wilderness, which, apparently uninhabited, was in fact haunted by presences which evade our grasp and will not allow us to escape. The real nature of man's sin has not been completely revealed to him so long as the divine Word has not disclosed to him that it is a captivity.

Can we really be surprised at this? It would surely be naïve to imagine that we are the only spirits ever created. We are only just beginning to discover and measure the immensity of the material world, which we had long thought as limited as ourselves; the spiritual world is unlikely to be bounded by these narrow limits either.

Satan and demoniacal forces are not simply the last traces of a primitive and outdated conception of the universe. They are the necessarily obscure designation of those preludes to, and prolongations of, purely human spirituality which alone can explain the mysterious and incomprehensible complexity of sin, suffering and death. The modern man who refuses to entertain these possibilities is like a child afraid of the dark. The Church is

man's real educator; she forces him to look at reality, the *whole* of reality, in the face. But she only dares to do so because she possesses the ability to rob this Gorgon of its power. Exorcism, the essential preliminary for the catechumen to any progress along the path to God, is the Church's concrete affirmation that she has no illusions about the fearsome size of the invisible forces which she must fight in order to free man. However, she can fearlessly measure them and reveal them to their victim, for she has on her side the " stronger one " mentioned by the Gospel, who has conquered the "strong" and deprived it of all its weapons.

It is extremely important that initiation into Christianity should start from these premises, disturbing and disconcerting as they may look at first sight. For the supernatural is not just an addition to the natural, a sort of second storey added as an afterthought. The supernatural is part of all human experience. It does not beckon us into an escapist paradise, as though to turn our attention away from the reality in which we awake to life and thought. On the contrary, it casts its light into all those deep gulfs which human experience itself forced us to lean over without being able to give us guidance or to lead us away from them.

The divine Word shows us what we are involved in, whether we know it or not and whether we like it or not. In the face of Christianity there can be no question of wondering whether or not we should add one more storey to the elegant building which we could just as well finish on our own, as long as we modestly stop on our own level. We are the prisoners of nefarious powers which transcend us. They have gained possession of us

through the cowardice and compromises which sin involves and whose significance we had not suspected. Or rather before we had begun to suspect it, we are already the stake in a struggle begun by the creator himself to rescue us from this slavery and to lead us into the glorious freedom of his children. Now our true position has been revealed to us for the first time in its full scope, and the crucial question that arises is whether or not, now that we know we are the stake in this battle fought by Christ on our behalf and continued by the Church down to our own day, we are going to make it our own.

That is why adopting the Christian faith means taking the Cross, in the sense which the crusaders gave to the expression. It means not only being ready to stand up for one's beliefs but actually enlisting, equipped with the appropriate arms, in this struggle in which the prize is our true freedom and, with it, the liberation of this whole universe. We can hear the Church, like the apostle, showing us this prize as she groans with ineffable sighs and suffers the pangs, as it were, of a last accouchement: that of the new creature who is no longer the slave of evil but the living Body of Christ and hence the temple of the Spirit.

Prayer, Christian prayer, is the supreme weapon in the struggle in which we are called upon to take part. So the last instructions given by the Church to the catechumen before his baptism are fundamentally a course in prayer. The scrutinies scattered through Lent, like so many tests of the progress made by the candidates for initiation, amount to examinations of their aptitude for praying as the Church prays.

It is also true to say that all the instruction of which

the Lenten liturgy is composed is aimed at that, and that the prayer it excites tends to prepare spirits and hearts to receive it.

This instruction is indeed an introduction to the Word of God. But this word is only addressed to us in order to excite a response in us. And we shall not have properly assimilated the truth it contains so long as we have not made the response which it expects.

To grasp the precise significance of all this, we must examine the original structure of the daily liturgy of lessons and prayers to which the Church summoned the catechumens all through Lent, before admitting them through baptism to the eucharistic liturgy proper.

In its primitive form the " Mass of the catechumens " was based on an elementary scheme repeated several times in the course of one meeting. The scheme comprised three (or, if you like, four) elements arranged in an order which is very revealing. The starting-point, the basis of all that was to follow, was the reading of a page of Scripture. There could be no clearer demonstration of a fact which we have already emphasized: in Christianity, as in Judaism before it, we no longer find man looking for God, but God taking the initiative and making himself known to man. In the ensuing dialogue between God and man, God speaks first, not man.

We may say, too, that it is the Word of God itself which excites man's response. It does not merely provoke it, like a rebound; it even inspires it. God furnishes the subject of the conversation and gives our response its direction. For, as St Paul says, we do not know ourselves what it is fitting to ask of God. His Spirit must come to the help of our weakness.

That is why Scripture includes numerous prayers. One of its books, the Psalter, consists entirely of prayers: prayers which are themselves words of God.

So, time and again, after letting us hear the divine Word in a lesson, the Church primes our response by immediately following the lesson with a meditative chant: a response, gradual, tract or verse of praise. Whichever of these forms it takes, the chant is always an extract from a psalm or some other sacred text which makes us pray in God's own words and respond to his inspired word in words that are themselves inspired.

The connection of the chant with the text read just before is in itself an indication of the way in which the Word of God, kept alive in the Church, has been received and meditated in it. The mere fact that the response is a chant is most revealing. The exercise of the intelligence alone cannot assimilate the truths which God puts within our grasp. What is needed is an opening, a blossoming, as it were, of the soul; the lyricism of the psalms expresses better than any other formula what it should be.

At the same time, the way in which the text chosen for the prayer draws out of the text read, or perhaps calls up like an echo, not so much an idea with definite outlines as a theme with clear but unlimited implications shows what the role of the intelligence in our response should be, namely, to assimilate and develop in us the instruction received as vital instruction, which asks us to embrace happily both the demands and the promises of the Word. For in all that God says to us, as in his first word to Abraham, the father of all believers, we find, closely bound together, both promise and demand. It is a demand for detachment, renunciation, abandonment, and

a promise of grace, a transforming gift, a gift which enables us to give of our own accord what is demanded of us, but in such a way that in abandoning ourselves to God we overflow with joy, the joy that he knows, that is his own: the joy of giving, which is so much greater than the joy of receiving.

A meditation, a prayer of that sort needs to be guided and formed by God himself. But it also needs, none the less, to be spontaneous, to be our own. It is like a child's response to its father, a response that the latter must know how to prepare, encourage and help along. But all this care would be pointless if the personal response did not finally burst out freely in a fervour which, brief or abundant in expression as the case may be, can never be satisfied with ready-made formulas.

That is why, in the traditional order of the liturgy of the catechumens, the lesson, or rather the chant which prolongs it and begins the response, is followed by the deacon's invitation, " Let us kneel ", which emphasizes the priest's " Let us pray ". Then comes a moment of silent, personal meditation, which forms the invisible heart, as it were, of the whole prayer. The believer, or the catechumen who is beginning to learn what it is to be a " believer ", is not simply going to be absorbed in himself. Rather will he absorb into himself and make his own all that the Word of God has brought to his most private life. The chant from the Psalms has only unleashed or inspired this assimilation of the whole text by our whole personality, prevented us from losing ourselves in hollow ratiocination or empty fantasy, and freed the spirit from what has been said in order to awaken in us the spirit which must respond to it.

Afterwards, but only afterwards, the priest presiding over the congregation intervenes. In the prayer known as the " collect " he gathers together all these silent aspirations. Briefly recalling the Church's central motive in listening to the Word, he defines as far as possible how we should apply it to ourselves. The concise, often lapidary, phrases which the tradition of the Roman liturgy has gathered for its collects cannot unfold all their riches if we have not personally meditated, under the impulse of the inspired prayer, on the Word of the Spirit to which they correspond.

Then we can really give our " Amen ", that is, a " yes " coming from the heart as well as the mind, to the priestly " collect ". We have recognized in it the expression of our own response.

It can already be seen how this scheme alone comprises, especially by its continual repetition, the best of practical initiations both into the reception of the Word of God in the Church and into the prayer which should respond to it.

It should be added that all this is not only illuminated, as we should expect, by the content of the lessons traditionally chosen for Lent, but also broadened and deepened by the links between them. The ritual which we have just followed was generally carried out at assemblies in which the Church completed the instruction of the catechumens, not once but several times. The various introductory lessons were carefully graduated so that the meditation on one should lead up to the meditation on the next one. The meditation chant itself often tended in this direction. The collect, which put the final touch to the meditation of the first text, led up to the level of

the second, and sometimes even went so far as to foreshadow something in it.

In the same way, just as the synagogue had followed the reading of the law with that of the prophets, so the Church now followed the latter with the reading of the apostolic epistles, which led up in turn to the final lesson, the Gospel.

After the Gospel, the bishop, or the priest presiding over the assembly in his place, would pronounce the homily. This does not mean that he was so presumptuous as to follow this succession of divine words with purely human ones. He simply made himself the official interpreter of the living tradition of the Church in order to emphasize those aspects of the lessons which apply particularly to us, men of today entrusted to his pastoral care, and thus to lead us to Christ, who is the word of God in all its fullness for every man.

This was demonstrated in concrete form to the catechumens by a particularly important Lenten meeting, that of the Wednesday following mid-Lent. On that day they would see four deacons present to them and solemnly begin to read to them the four gospels, with all the ceremonies which salute, in the reading of the gospel, the real presence of Christ: candles, incense and acclamations. On that day, too, the bishop's homily would culminate in the *Traditio symboli.* That is, the Church would give the catechumens the key, as it were, to the Scriptures: the central and definite meaning of the whole Word of God, ending in Christ, the mystery of the redeeming incarnation, with the outpouring of the Spirit and the formation of the Church, the body of Christ, as the consequence of his resurrection.

The *traditio* of the Creed was followed by the *traditio* of prayer, that is, the initiation into the Lord's prayer, the prayer to Our Father, the definitive kind of prayer taught by Christ, the last response to the definitive revelation consummated in him.

A description of this whole process cannot possibly bring home what personal experience alone could effectively convey. For what was to be disclosed to the catechumen was in fact the living tradition of the Church. The Word of God remains always present in it, because it remains what it was in the beginning: the word addressed to a definite people, a people that it created—the Word received and assimilated in the living experience of this people. Thus the biblical books are no longer simply writings of the past, only comprehensible with the aid of difficult and erudite historical reconstructions. They become once more, or rather remain, the record of the reality of God's relations with his people. The frame of mind necessary to understand them in conformity to the Spirit which dictated them is thus continually maintained. Continually, too, the great truths which are the axes, as it were, of revelation stand out and take possession, not only of our thinking, but of our life.

All this postulates the permanent reality of the presence of the Spirit which inspired the Scriptures in the Body of the Church, bound up with the sacramental presence of Christ as head in the hierarchy which presides over the celebration of the liturgy, maintains its traditional forms and continually gives new life to their meaning by teaching that never becomes petrified or corrupt.

But this sacred task of the hierarchy does not rule out personal initiative, the intimate and irreplaceable

experience of the Spirit enjoyed by each one of us, as the end of Lent was to demonstrate to the catechumens.

After receiving everything from the Church, after being given by her full access to the divine Word and being introduced to inspired prayer, to the extent of taking up again and understanding the very prayer taught us by the Word made flesh, they would finally be called to the "*redditio symboli*", that is, to give in their turn public testimony to their personal faith.

On Holy Saturday, while waiting for the night of the resurrection when they would be granted baptism, the catechumens had in fact to testify before the Church that, what she believes, they now believed too. This ceremony not only bound them to the Church and finally compromised them in the eyes of the world. It was also tangible proof that receiving the tradition of the Church cannot stop at mere passive acceptance. This reception does not dispense us from the effort to make the faith which we accept our own, to integrate it in our thought, our existence, our whole being. On the contrary, it finds its true meaning in this effort. If the Church enjoys a sort of experience of the evangelical truth, we can only join the Church by doing what is required to make this experience as far as possible our own. The Church is not there to dispense us from this effort, but to lead us up to it.

This explains why we find at the end of the initiation an act closely related to the one which marked its beginning. The initiation began with exorcism, that is, the Church's struggle to snatch the catechumen from the powers of evil and to restore him to the freedom of the children of God. The initiation will not be complete

until the catechumen has himself vowed to fight against Satan. It is the renunciation of the devil, with its corollary, adhesion to Christ. The anointing with oil which accompanies it indicates clearly its meaning and significance. From the time that he accepts this personal obligation, the catechumen is anointed with strength from above, with the strength of Christ, because henceforth it is his duty to fight against the enemy. No doubt the whole Church will continue to fight with and for him. But he is now going to belong to the Church because, in this struggle, he will no longer be simply a passive stake, but a clear-headed and conscious fighter.

The formulas and ritual of this renunciation express its whole content.

In the present Roman ritual we still have the triple renunciation of "Satan, his pomps and his works". We have to decide first of all between the prince of this world and Christ. Humanity has gone astray by following the promptings of pride and of pleasure-seeking egoism. The new Christian is first of all someone who wants to break with this error and to follow the Son of Man, who came, not to be served, but to serve and give his life.

The renunciation of the works of Satan, that is, of sin in every form, is only the practical consequence required by the gravity of the original renunciation. The intervening renunciation of the "pomps" of Satan only sets the seal of reality on the obligation. What is in fact the "*pompa diaboli*"? By this term Christian antiquity understood all the public manifestations of the life of a pagan city in which its paganism was more or less explicitly asserted, such as the theatre, the circuses and so on. The modern equivalent is obvious. There is

no need at all for the Christian to lead a life completely separate from that of his contemporaries: except in the case of a definite monastic vocation, that would not even be desirable. But he must be ready to refuse unhesitatingly to take any part in activities or amusements which may in themselves be innocent, as soon as it is clear that they would lead him to infidelity or that his participation would encourage others weaker than himself to this.

In other words, one cannot undertake effectively to struggle against sin if one renounces nothing but sin itself. To *really* renounce sin, we must be ready to renounce freely everything but the one thing necessary: God and his known will. Of course, one cannot always renounce everything. And there is no question of turning such renunciations into condemnations. But generously accepted sacrifice (and it is certain that one never sacrifices anything but a real good to a greater good) is the *sine qua non* of any realistic struggle against the devil and the sin by which he holds us.

It is in this sense that St Paul speaks of " crucifying *the flesh* with its lusts ", and St John of " not loving *the world* or anything in it ". But this does not imply a condemnation of the body or of the creation in general. For St Paul, the " flesh " is not the " body " as opposed to the " soul ", it is the whole human being, body and soul, when it is no longer animated by the Spirit of God. Then the lower (the body), instead of being illuminated and dominated by the higher (the soul), is simply thrown into wild disorder by it and numbs the soul in return. Similarly, the " world ", for St John, is not " the creation " as God made it. It is what the " Prince of this world " and the sinners who follow him have made

of it. It is no longer the dwelling-place of the children of God and his sanctuary, but the wilderness left by his absence, where everything is organized with a view to sin. Nevertheless, it is quite certain that in actual fact we shall not crucify the flesh, as St Paul wishes, unless we " chastise the body and keep it in subjection ", just as we shall not overcome the world, as St John calls upon us to do, unless we free ourselves of all earthly claims in order to aim, through faith, at the Kingdom of God, at the state of affairs in which everything conforms to his will and does homage to his glory alone.

But here again ritual casts an encouraging beam of light on what may at first sight seem austere and sombre in such renunciations. To renounce Satan, his pomps and his works, the catechumen was invited to turn to the West, the region of darkness, cold and death. To swear loyalty to Jesus, he turned round again to the East, as though to await with confidence that " rising sun coming from on high to illumine those who were sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death ".

V

THE DISCOVERY OF THE CROSS AND THE RESURRECTION, THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

THE opposition between light and darkness which envelops in its symbolism the profession of faith preceding the baptismal initiation reappears more strikingly at the beginning of Easter night when this initiation was traditionally due to be completed. Indeed baptism, the association of the believer in the mystery of death and resurrection which is the great Christian fact proclaimed by the Gospel, originally took place in the heart of Easter night. It formed the introduction, as it were, of the new Christians to the eucharistic celebration of the resurrection. But the baptism itself only took place after a long nocturnal vigil which may be described as constituting the final initiation.

This vigil, filling the night with readings from the Bible interspersed with prayer, before the eucharistic celebration, develops the implications of the "conversion", that is, literally, "re-orientation", of the candidate for baptism after his renunciation of Satan. At that point he had turned to the East in order to proclaim his adhesion to Christ; that is, he had greeted Christ as the rising sun that comes to dissipate the darkness of the world. It is this period of waiting that the vigil fills. It assumes that the Christian fact, the great fact of the Cross and the resurrection, is not simply something that happened

in the past. It is also the great fact of the future. The Christian, in the Church, must always await the return of Christ, who died and rose again once for all, bringing with him, as well as death to the present world, the resurrection of believers, the new creation of a regenerate world. But it is also, or should be, for the Christian the great fact of the present: the fact of our sacramental union with the death and resurrection of Christ, which leads up to, and for the eye of faith, already inaugurates the final consummation.

That is why the vigil, after the baptism, leads to the eucharist, in which the Church celebrates the whole mystery of Christ, both his death and his resurrection, anticipating at the same time his glorious return and our final entry into the Kingdom of God.

This profound meaning of the vigil is suggested with extraordinary expressive richness by the ceremony of the paschal *lucernarium*, the blessing of the light of the lamps at nightfall.

In complete darkness the new fire is drawn from the stone, a symbol of the risen Christ emerging from the tomb. From this fire is lit the paschal candle, then, one by one, all the candles held by the clergy and the faithful. Then, after greeting the "Light of Christ" with a triple *Deo gratias!* the deacon, in festal vestments, goes to sing in the newly lit church the *Exsultet*, the "lucernary eucharist", the great benediction of the light of Easter victorious over the darkness of the world.

This canticle to the light of the risen Christ, at the beginning of the final initiation, is an invitation to exultant joy. The catechumens already know that to be called to the faith is to be called to fight, to fight even to the Cross.

But, now that they have agreed to this struggle, the promise of unmixed joy can be made to them: the proclamation of Christ's victory, which belongs to all who have fought to the death with him against the powers of evil.

This joy to which we are invited by the *Exsultet* is really the basis of the Christian faith. We have not really understood it as long as we have not grasped the victorious transfiguration which it brings to our whole view of the world.

It must be emphasized again that far from giving us a false idea of reality Christianity forces us to look it straight in the face and to see right into the terrible reality of evil in the world. But it does not leave us with this spectacle. It discloses to us " the stronger one ", the Creator of the world, by whom the world has been, as it were, invaded, and who has overcome the " strong ", the prince of this world: the despotic power with which the forces of evil were crushing us. Henceforth everything is changed. What was impossible to our weakness has been accomplished by the strength of God, not only *for*, but *in*, our weakness. We are not simply invited to escape the hostile forces: we are called upon to defeat them. The prospect re-opened to us is that of a whole world regenerated in Christ, based on a humanity completely healed in body as well as soul.

For the joy of Easter, the joy of faith, is not just a spiritual joy; it is the joy of the whole man, body and soul, and it is a cosmic joy. Everything flowers again and the Angels join the lower creatures, or rather man and all his universe join the loyal Angels, to glorify God in common rejoicing.

This initial summons, this hymn of victory provides the key to the vigil and what it leads up to. At the same time it contains the theme round which the themes of the night's lessons and prayers all centre. The paschal candle is saluted as a reminder of the column of fire which safely guided the Israelites, at the time of the first Passover, out of Egypt and through the Red Sea. We are thus introduced into the heart of biblical symbols and realities.

The initiatory feast of Christians, which is the feast of Christ's Resurrection, is the feast of the Passover (or Pasch). This simple statement sums up the whole economy of the revelation and development of the Word of God in Scripture and in the preaching of the Church.

What in fact is the Passover? First of all, it is the event that created a people of God, in the old covenant: God's basic intervention, corresponding to the promise made to Abraham. God " passed " mysteriously through Egypt where his people were in bondage and enabled them to " pass " out of this bondage into freedom, out of the darkness of death into the light of life. This double etymological interpretation of the word " Passover ", in connection with the exodus of the Jews from Egypt, sums up all that Jewish, and afterwards Christian, tradition recognized in the ancient Passover.

But according to the interpretation which the Church herself gave from the start to the old covenant its major events are only sketches, intended to prepare us for the major events of the New Testament. God asserted himself as the " Redeemer ", that is, he who delivers by bringing back from slavery, in a deliverance which was at first material, although already rich in all kinds of spiritual implications. Thus we may say that he forecast the

entirely spiritual deliverance to be accomplished in Christ, that he was preparing men's minds and hearts for it in advance.

The real " passage " of God through our midst is the earthly life of Jesus Christ, the Word of God made man. The real exodus is the one by which the Man-God " passed ", in his death and resurrection, from this world to his Father. So the real Passover is the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. He is himself the column of light which is to guide us out of Egypt towards the promised land.

That is why Easter is also our " passage " in his wake from sin to grace, from the darkness of ignorance to the light of faith, from death to life. The visible column of the paschal candle, the symbol of the risen Christ ever present in the Church, leads us, then, not towards the Red Sea, but towards the waters of baptism. In those waters will be engulfed not visible enemies, but the " old man ", that is, that corrupt humanity which consists of everything in us belonging to the demoniac powers of sin. And we ourselves will emerge from them, as though born anew in the Saviour's resurrection, to enter with him the promised land, the kingdom of God.

This transference to Christ of the fundamental facts of the Word of God and the assimilation to ourselves, through him, of these facts is, as we said, the key to all the lessons which the Church reads again on this decisive night. As we explained above, by the chants from the psalms and by the collects she carefully guides our meditation along these lines. In this final vigil, the lessons she has chosen have been selected to make us treasure and ponder in our hearts, like the Virgin, all the

principal facts of the Word of God. They will feed our meditation of the mystery, which is the Mystery of Christ and of his Passover, but also the mystery of ourselves, of our Passover with him and in him.

This is probably the moment to forestall an objection. Our modern minds, used to clear and distinct ideas, may perhaps at first be baffled by the winding paths along which the Church leads us to the supreme initiation. This progress along symbolic paths, these successive revelations through transference and transfiguration of primitive revelations, and, above all, these historical facts which look the same yet different, seeming to breed rather than succeed each other, are all far removed from the types of experience to which we are accustomed and from the purely logical deductions which we like to draw from them. Of course, there is still a poetry in these traditional paths of the Word of God and of the liturgy which is almost bound to affect even the most rationalized modern men. But it is all so far and so different from the modes of apprehension of the truth to which they are accustomed that they are disconcerted by it. How can it also be true, they ask. And if it is true, why must the truth of Christianity be clothed in forms so different from those of the truths to which science, and especially modern technology, has accustomed us? Would it not be possible to envisage a final transposition of Christianity which presented it to modern man like one of those empirical, rational truths which to him are the only real truths?

The reply to this objection is that such a transposition does exist, in a theology of a scientific character, which apprehends the Christian fact, first on the critical plane

of a rigorous historical method, and then systematically expressed in rational categories. That is more or less the standpoint we adopted at the beginning of this book, precisely in order to meet the modern mind on ground familiar to it. But if one finally wishes to reach, not just a science of religion, but a living faith, this approach eventually has to be abandoned. Even the philosopher's " knowledge of God " requires us to " philosophize " with our whole being, not with the critical intelligence alone, all the more so when the latter wants to confine itself to the realm of sense-experience and the strictly material data which it can supply. " Science ", in the modern sense of the word, does not exhaust all the possibilities of our intelligence. Still less does " technology " exhaust the possibilities of our life, of our experience of ourselves and reality. The activity of the religious sense, embracing as it does a sphere of experience affecting the whole man and not just his reasoning faculty, and religious experience, which fastens upon a very different aspect of the world from the one with which technology is concerned, cannot be reduced to expressions of the " scientific " or " technical " type.

This does not imply any inferiority in religion or any condemnation of our technological spirit. It should simply make us recognize that the technician is not the whole man and that, when he pretends to be, he falls a victim to the most dangerous kind of professional deformation, the kind that brings not just peculiarities of behaviour but a hardening of the mental arteries.

Even in ordinary human life there are huge tracts which are beyond the ken of any " science " of a rational sort, and hence *a fortiori* of any technology directed towards the

utilization of the world for material needs. Art, poetry, morality, the deepest human feelings can none of them be reduced to scientific modes of thought or expressed in scientific phraseology.

The same is obviously true of religious truth. To recognize this does not mean that religious truth must be relegated to the realm of fable or fantasy, but that we must recognize the mystery in it; the mystery which man can only avoid confronting by ceasing to be a complete individual and to see the world as a whole, the mystery which must necessarily grow as truths are revealed to us which understand us better than we can understand them.

Modern science itself surely reveals to us that the processes of life are very different from those of the rational intelligence. It is in a groping fashion, with all manner of patient retreats and surprising twists and turns, that life emerges from the purely material world. There is nothing so apparently illogical as the way in which it is elaborated, takes shape and develops in structures whose increasing unity conceals an ever growing complexity.

As for human psychology, nothing about it follows any kind of rational scheme or purely logical process. It should be noted that even mathematical truths can only conform to these requirements when they have once been discovered, at the stage of demonstration. But at the stage of discovery, the history of the sciences shows what much more subtle paths they had to follow in order to make themselves comprehensible.

So there is no reason to be surprised that this is the case with all the discoveries whose value is human in the proper sense. Nothing in which man himself is involved

can be entirely reduced to a logical scheme. There is still less possibility of his grasping by such methods the great truths about himself. To reach them he needs experiences involving his whole being and provoking not just critical or logical reflection but a much deeper and broader kind of meditation. And afterwards these experiences will have to be repeated many times, bathed henceforth in the light of this meditation and for that reason transformed. They will thus gradually become accessible to our consciousness, which in its turn will be transfigured by them.

This is the sort of interplay between ourselves and the world, a continual exchange that always looks but never is quite the same, that supplies our inmost being with its experience and enables it to gradually transform reality by incorporating it in itself.

If that is true in general, how much more so must it be of religious experience, especially of an experience in which God himself personally puts himself within man's range and adjusts himself to man in order to raise and adapt him to himself. Hence these necessary repetitions of sacred history, which are not in fact repetitions but the progress of a widely spiralling movement of approach. God sets in train experiences which will prepare man for his Word. When man has to some extent assimilated it he can repeat these experiences or rather other analogous ones, which, similar yet different, will in return prepare him for greater disclosures of the same Word. Thus God, approaching man and gradually drawing him nearer to himself, will finally be able to become man and assimilate man to himself. The mystery of his grand design, without ceasing to be infinitely greater than man, will

gradually refashion him, so that man enters into it, adapts himself to it and finally abandons himself to it.

In these circumstances it is inevitable that the symbol, or poetic knowledge, should play a more important part than the concept, or completely rationalized knowledge. But this does not mean that the truth of faith falls into the category of the vague. It is the clearest, most definite thing there can be in a sphere where there is so much error and inadequacy of expression. But it carries us into a world much vaster than the one for which our clear, distinct ideas were made; a world, once again, which we can never focus entirely in one narrow sector of vision, for we ourselves form part of it. We are swallowed up in an encounter far outstripping the dimensions of man or indeed of any mere creature.

To introduce us into this world we need analogies, which will take us by the hand on the level of fundamental human experiences and gradually lead us to remould and transpose them, until we can ourselves be assimilated to realities only hinted at by those of our widest experience.

That is why the supreme initiation into belief does not take place in the atmosphere of a study, a laboratory or a lecture-room. Man must meet mystery amid a solemnity by which his whole being is captivated, imagination and heart as well as intelligence. Man will make contact with the object of his faith by being plunged into a world which is vast and complex like the human world and made of the same elements, but purified, concentrated on the essential and illumined by light from on high. This world is the world of the liturgy in general and of the central sanctuary of the liturgy, Easter night. There is nothing richer in precise ideas than this liturgy. But

it organizes and embraces them in a reality both human and divine that no system of concepts can exhaust.

That is also why the progressive stages of the Word of God are not simply outworn phases from which the presentation of the final truth could be dissociated. For humanity in general, there was no other effective means of reaching this full and ultimate truth than by way of these intermediate stages. Every Christian who has to make his own discovery of this same truth must to some extent travel the same path. Besides, even when he has found the truth he can only make it completely his own by repeating the journey many times again. Hence the cycle of the liturgical year, which guides us continually through the revelation of the same mystery, disclosing it to us afresh each time.

For in the spiritual domain, too, the biological truth holds good that ontogenesis reproduces phylogenesis, that is, every individual, in order to reach the full term of development of the species, must relive its whole history in miniature. As a result, the Old Testament will never be so out of date that we can bypass it. It is the only path that can lead every man to the genuine discovery of the New Testament. And we can only assimilate this discovery itself more deeply by ourselves keeping and meditating in our hearts all that prepared the way for it.

In its traditional form, the Easter vigil comprised twelve lessons interspersed with silent prayer and collects, with three canticles to mark its three great phases. These twelve lessons summed up for the catechumens all the preparatory teaching of the Old Testament, before they were led to the proclamation of the " good news ", the Easter " gospel ", having themselves died and risen

again in baptism in order to celebrate, in the eucharist, the death and resurrection of the Saviour.

The first lesson is the first page of the Bible: the account given by Genesis of the creation of the universe. It is an assertion of the basic goodness of the whole creation, material as well as spiritual, body as well as soul. There could be nothing more decidedly opposed to the dualistic pessimism of ancient thought, to which the human mind always inclines again when it becomes conscious of the presence of evil in the world and of its seriousness. But the reason for optimism is the fundamental element in this first reading: everything comes from God and, still more precisely, is the work of his Word.

In other words, the intervention of the Word of God is not just one event among others in the history of man and the world. This whole history is seen to depend on this Word and, in the last analysis, on it alone. Everything that exists only exists because God thought and willed it.

This affirmation of faith is what prepares us for salvation. The God who so admirably created the world in the first place will surely re-create it, in spite of sin, in a still more admirable fashion. The prayer following the first lesson directs our meditation upon this very thought.

The second lesson, also drawn from Genesis, will in fact show us, after the original goodness of the creation, all the malice of sin. Sin will therefore bring down on man a divine punishment which is, as it were, the fruit of his sin. But this punishment will be such as to allow for the salvation of those who have nevertheless believed in the divine word. This is strikingly expressed in the

story of the flood, which buries man and the world under the consequences of his fault, but allows the faithful Noah to escape, thus making possible a fresh start for man and the whole universe. The prayer in fact invites us to see in this story a forecast of what is fulfilled in the Church: like a holy ark floating on the baptismal waters it saves from God's judgements the scions of a new people vowed to a life purified from sin and therefore freed from any kind of curse.

But the price of this salvation is revealed to us in the third passage of Genesis to be read. It is the climax of the story of Abraham, the father of God's people: the account of the sacrifice of Isaac. In other words, the salvation of the creation will be accomplished by the sacrifice of the innocent. This is an extraordinarily early hint, as we have already pointed out, of God's people and of the reverberations in humanity of the saving Word. We can see in it, now that we have reached the end of the story, a presage of what would effectively fulfil the promises made to Abraham's faith: the sacrifice of the Son of God, become the Son of Man, which would enable all men to become children of Abraham, adopted children of God himself.

A hint of this fulfilment is given to us in the passage of Exodus describing the passage of the Hebrews through the Red Sea: the consummation of the first liberating Passover, in which God's people escapes for the first time, by intervention from on high, from the power of the Evil One.

As a natural sequel to this story the first Canticle of the vigil now bursts forth, the one sung by the Israelites on reaching the further shore:

A psalm for the Lord, so great he is and so glorious;
horse and rider hurled into the sea!

It should be recalled that, in the Apocalypse, when the seer of Patmos describes the arrival of the saints in the Kingdom of God in the wake of the crucified Saviour, he tells us that they too are singing the Canticle of Moses.

This implies what the prayer says once again in so many words, that Christ's Passover fulfils in very truth for the whole world what the ancient Passover had only foreshadowed by fulfilling materially for a people of flesh and blood. The real Israelites, the true children of Abraham who can give the canticle of Moses its full meaning, are those who are about to pass through the waters of baptism.

The first nocturn has therefore shown us the connection between the basic themes of the Gospel, starting from the first experiences and revelations which led us to it: the intrinsic goodness of the creation which all sprang from the Word of God alone, the mortal seriousness of sin, the salvation promised by God, the necessity for the sacrifice of the Only Son to achieve this salvation, and the fulfilment of all this in the supreme deliverance, the Passover of the Saviour's resurrection and of our baptism in his death. The second part of the vigil goes more deeply into all this with the prophets. By giving a deeper significance to the great lessons of the Mosaic law, their oracles will prepare us for the Gospel of the Spirit.

First of all we have the invitation in chapter 54 of Isaias to approach the waters, the waters of free salvation, in order to share in the messianic banquet, the great feast of reconciliation which God has prepared not just for one people, but for all peoples united in one new people. Such will be the work, we are expressly told, of the divine

Word, the word which God will send to us and which will not return to him without effect.

The collect has really only a word or two to add to this passage. It defines its final significance as the adoption through baptism, by the work of the Word made flesh, of the multitudes called to share in the paschal feast.

This teaching is developed by the oracle of Baruch which follows. By all the efforts of their intelligence applied to the problems of their life in this world, men seek a Wisdom: a knowledge which will disclose the secret of the world to them and a technology which will enable them to make themselves masters of it. But the only real Wisdom, the only one that opens the way to a genuine knowledge of reality, above all the only one that leads us to the true and complete solution of the problems, *the* problem of our life, is no human Wisdom, which is always proud but short-sighted. The only real Wisdom belongs to God, and God alone communicates it in his Word.

The unimaginable prospects which it opens up to us are indicated by the great oracle in Ezechiel 37. This is the vision of the dry bones over which the prophet is invited to pronounce the Word of God. At the sound of this divine Word on human lips the bones rise up, come together and are covered in flesh. The Spirit of God, the actual breath of God's life, invades them and they come to life again.

What are these bones and what is this resurrection? They refer first of all to the miraculous raising up and reintegration of Israel after the trial of the exile in Babylon and the dispersion. But it is clear that this first

fulfilment of the prophet's hope is surpassed in the resurrection of Christ, leading to the resurrection of all humanity, invaded by the Spirit after the Word has been made flesh in a race which is nevertheless damned.

This theme is developed in the last lesson of the second nocturn and the canticle which it leads up to: the oracle and canticle in Isaias 4 and 5. It is the prophecy of the chosen vine, the plant that God transplanted from Egypt to Canaan. The canticle tells us expressly that this vine is the household of Israel. But we cannot help remembering that on the evening of the Last Supper Jesus recalled this prophecy by declaring that he himself was the true vine, and that its branches were all those who were grafted upon him and dwelt in him.

This meditation of the prophets concludes with the collect, which assures us that the excellence of the original creative work will yet be surpassed by the divine work carried out at the end of time: the paschal sacrifice of the Saviour.

That is the subject of the third and last nocturn.

It opens with the account of the ritual slaughter of the paschal lamb. This sacrifice celebrates the divine judgement on the powers of evil, and is to defend believers against any kind of curse. Nourished by this viaticum, that is, by this meal for travellers starting on their pilgrimage, they can set out with confidence for the promised land. But the account of Jonas' preaching at Nineveh comes immediately to point out that it is no longer a question of a celebration or promises restricted to one people alone. All peoples are now called to the sacrificial banquet. But Moses' last words, in Deuteronomy, and the last canticle, all in praise of the saving

exploits of the Word, remind us that such a great grace can have no effect unless it is always received as a grace: God's gift that we cannot pretend to deserve. Its constancy requires of us a faith continually renewed in acts.

The great vigil of the ancient Church usually ended, before the celebration of the eucharist, with a story whose meaning acquired, on that Easter night of baptism, a special significance. It was the story, in the book of Daniel, of the three young men cast into the fiery furnace for refusing to deny their faith and calling on all creatures, in the midst of their martyrdom, to praise God with them.

This narrative, coming at the end of the vigil, called to mind the catechumens' obligation to become " witnesses " of Christ, " martyrs " (for that is the meaning of the word) ready to follow him " to the death, the death of the Cross ". Thus the prospect of the Cross dominated the initiation from beginning to end. But, now more than ever, this prospect is about to take on its full glory.

Now that they have garnered all the teaching of Scripture on the Mystery of Christ, teaching that they must treasure their whole lives through, the catechumens know to what, and above all to whom, they are binding themselves and can express their wish for baptism with full knowledge of what they are doing. So the Church leads them to the baptismal font, chanting Psalm 41:

> O God, my whole soul longs for thee, as a deer for running water; my whole soul thirsts for God, the living God; shall I never again make my pilgrimage into God's presence?

The desire for baptism is in fact the desire for Christ

and his mystery. In a sense, it is the desire for death accepted without flinching, but the desire for Christ's kind of death, that is, death which will kill death as it has killed sin. So in the end it is the desire for life, superabundant life, the life of the resurrection, life that not only overcomes death but does away with it: life drawn from the living spring of the living God.

The great prayer of blessing uttered by the pontiff on arriving with the catechumens at the edge of the sacred pool develops the interplay of these two themes by referring, through the medium of the Bible, to all the symbolical images of water. Water, indeed—the waters of the flood, the waters of the Red Sea engulfing the persecutors of Israel—can be a symbol of death and damnation. But life also sprang from water in the beginning, and bubbling springs therefore become the natural symbol of the birth of life in ever-renewed wholeness.

By the edge of this water consecrated for the death, with Christ on the Cross, of the old man, and the birth, in the risen Christ, of the new man, the catechumen confesses more solemnly than ever before his faith in the Trinity: in the Father who saves us and adopts us in his Son, crucified, but overcoming death by his own death, thanks to the power of the Spirit. He sheds his clothes, which he will leave by the side of the font and never put on again. He leaves behind with them his old life, his old being, in order to die with Christ. He is then immersed three times, in the name of the three divine persons, in the baptismal waters. The word " baptism " means properly that he is buried in them. The being who then stands up again and climbs out of the other

side of the baptistery is not the one that stepped down into it. He has died and been reborn in Christ. He has been cleansed of his past life of sin. He has been reborn from the divine spring. He has been grafted, as it were, on to Christ, by being plunged in his death. Or to use another image, which comes, like the one before, from St Paul, by being baptized in Christ he has put on Christ.

All this is indicated, first by the new name given to him, a Christian name, the symbol of his new life in Christ, then by the white garments—they are not just spotless but of dazzling whiteness—in which his cleansed body is clad, and last by the lighted candle which he takes in his hand.

Above all, the priest who receives him as he leaves the font begins to anoint his head with the Holy Chrism, the perfumed oil symbolizing the " fragrance of Christ ", mentioned by the apostle, which the neophyte now diffuses around him. This chrism is the vehicle of the Holy Spirit, or in other words the divine unction which made Christ himself the Christ, that is the anointed one, anointed with the Spirit and all the divine power.

Indeed the bishop, in the confirmation which is a sort of final seal on the whole initiation, lays his hands upon him to call down the Spirit on him; as a token of this, he rubs his forehead (in the East, his whole body) with chrism. Henceforth the person baptized, the neophyte, is in very truth another Christ. His faith can say, like the apostle's, " It is no longer I that live, but Christ in me ". Or again: " The spirit you have now received is not, as of old, a spirit of slavery, to govern you by fear; it is the spirit of adoption, which makes us cry out, Abba, Father. The Spirit himself thus assures our

spirit, that we are children of God; and if we are his children, then we are his heirs too; heirs of God, sharing the inheritance of Christ; only we must share his sufferings, if we are to share his glory " (Rom. 8, 15-17; cf. Galatians).

VI

THE DISCOVERY OF THE EUCHARIST

THE baptismal initiation has brought the catechumen into the Church by introducing him into the sacramental world. It has made him a consecrated member of the chosen race, the holy nation, the royal priesthood formed by the whole Church. That is why the neophyte is immediately invited to take part in the celebration of the eucharist.

After completing his initiation by marking him with the seal of the Spirit, the bishop has given him the kiss of peace, and thus welcomed him into the Christian fraternity. Then the pontiff, who himself has already put on festal vestments for the baptisms and confirmations, returns to the Church to celebrate immediately the Mass of the Resurrection, bringing with him the neophytes clad in white, perfumed with chrism and holding lighted candles in their hands.

While the baptisms were taking place, the congregation had chanted the great litanies, invoking the assistance of all the saints and calling on all the mysteries of Christ that he may ceaselessly grant us deliverance from all evils. The chant now concludes with universal prayers for the whole Church, the hierarchy, the faithful, the world and those who govern it, the Christian Mission, the pagans, the Jews, all men and especially those in distress.

A reading of the epistle to the Colossians reveals to the catechumens the full meaning of what has taken place in

them: " Risen, then, with Christ, you must lift your thoughts above, where Christ now sits at the right hand of God. You must be heavenly-minded, not earthly-minded; you have undergone death, and your life is hidden away now with Christ in God. Christ is your life, and when he is made manifest, you too will be made manifest, you too will be made manifest in glory with him " (Col. 3, 1-4).

Then comes the singing of the Alleluia, not heard during Lent, the chant of unspeakable happiness for the gift of God, itself beyond all emotion.

Last comes the Gospel of the Resurrection. But now those who only yesterday were catechumens are no longer requested to withdraw. Now it is their privilege to take part in the Church's great sacerdotal act through prayer, offertory and communion. Their entry into the sacramental world opens up the celebration of the eucharist to them.

The episcopal homily must have disclosed to them the full meaning of the sacraments of their initiation, and how they have been initiated not into a passive presence but into an active participation in the eucharist.

We may say that the sacrament is the normal sequel to the divine Word, which achieves its effect through the sacrament, especially the Eucharist.

For, as we have pointed out, the Word of God is not the revelation of abstract truths. It communicates a living truth; the life of God himself is revealed in it and passed on to us. It is already, by itself, the act of God communicating himself.

This is all the truer because in God the Word possesses a truth, a reality that it cannot have in any man. All that

God says is true; with him, no interval is possible between thought and expression. And everything that God says comes to pass, by the mere fact that he has said it: when God expresses his will, it is fulfilled. For him, saying and doing what he has decided are the same thing. What is more, nothing comes to be, nothing exists except because God has expressed his wish that it should be so. As the first lesson of the Vigil reminded us, not only is the Word of God creative, but everything has been created by it.

Thus, in God, the Word is not opposed to the Deed; they are the same thing. God's action is entirely spiritual: he has only to express his will, to speak, in order to act. Conversely, everything that he has done has a meaning and is a word that reveals him to us.

The Word of God expressed in history, by human words, was necessary simply because man had made himself deaf to God's first word, the creation of everything. And finally the divine Word, for us, is Jesus Christ, that is, not only what he said, but what he did as well, particularly his Cross, and quite simply what he is: the son of God made man, the Word of God made flesh.

The result of this is that the Word of God which is addressed to us and calls for our belief itself tends towards the deed. Jesus, the Word incarnate, expressed and fulfilled himself in the mystery of the Cross. His living Word, which he wished the Church to carry down to us in his Name, operates in the sacraments, which he himself instituted, by virtue of his presence with the Church every day until the end of the world. Just as what the Church proclaims to us on his behalf is his Mystery, so what the sacraments fulfil, by virtue of the word of Christ who instituted them, repeated in his Name and through his

power by those whom he has sent, is the accomplishment in us of this mystery.

Again, just as the divine Word, the Word of the Gospel, in order to reach us, must employ images borrowed from this world and take our common experience in order to transform it into a progressive discovery of divine things, so the Christian sacraments, in their material form, are simply symbols borrowed from this same experience. Examples are the water in which we are immersed, and from which we emerge as a new person, the oil, with its perfume, which imbues with strength and perfumes with joy, the bread which we break for our friends, and the cup which we share with them.

But these symbols are taken over by a man whom Christ's Word has appointed to act as his " apostle ", as " a second self ". And, as he gives them to us, this man repeats the very words in which Christ expressed his wish that they should be the efficacious signs of his grace. Thus, through them, the mystery of Christ is not only proclaimed among us but accomplished in us. The water flows over us and we are plunged in the blood of the Cross, to be reborn by the power of resurrection. The chrism is rubbed on our heads and we are anointed with the very unction of Christ, the unction which is the spirit of the Father, by which we become sons in the Only Begotten.

And now the bread which we are going to offer will be returned to us to eat, but it is the body of Christ that we shall receive, like the bread of life come down from heaven.

All this is only revealed to faith. For the sight and the other senses, the water remains ordinary water, the chrism is only oil mixed with perfume, and the bread we

receive is the bread we had given as an offering. But the divine Word assures our faith that the Spirit accompanied the water so that we should be reborn not of water only but of the Spirit, that it accompanied the material anointing in order to be itself our spiritual unction, and that the bread broken for us has become communion in the body of Jesus Christ.

In the sacrament, the Word, the divine Word, the creative Word, the Word of the saving mystery, becomes actual. But it is the Word alone, because it is the Word of God in Christ, which assures our faith that there is more here than can be seen, that there is the mystery described by St Paul as " Christ in us, the hope of glory ".

The mystery, the content of the Word of God, which is not only proclaimed but given to us in the sacraments, is Christ and his Cross, in all his power of resurrection, of victory over the forces of evil, of regeneration of man and transfiguration of the world. But the mystery itself is only fully proclaimed and recognized in sacramental action, and more precisely in the celebration of the eucharist. For the mystery of Christ is essentially a communication, a gift of God, a creative gift, the diffusion of his love in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. And finally it is in the sacraments, and especially in the eucharist, that the communication takes place, that the gift of God is handed over, that it re-creates us and gives us the power not only to be but to live as new creatures, as children of God.

The eucharist is not just one sacrament among others. It is the focal point of the whole sacramental system. The other sacraments—baptism, confirmation, penance (which is a renewal of baptism), holy orders (which is a special

appointment not only to participate in the eucharist but to preside over or assist in its administration)—are only an introduction to the eucharist, or else they are a development of it, as is the case with marriage or extreme unction. But the eucharist alone is the hub of all sacramental action, so that, as the apostle says, every time we eat of this blood and drink of this cup we proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.

For the relationship between the mystery of Christ, dead and risen again, and the eucharist is reciprocal. The eucharist has no other content, no other reality than the sacrifice of the Saviour. But in return the sacrifice only acquires its meaning in the eucharist. That is why the eucharist of Christ involves Christ in the mystery of his Cross before the eucharist of the Church, which is still that of Christ, involves us in it in our turn.

What in fact is the eucharist? To be precise, it is the response which the Word of God addressed to man wished to evoke in him, a response with the same reality as that of the divine Word. Prayer of the eucharistic sort is a typically Jewish kind of prayer. We may say that it developed and was defined in proportion as the divine Word addressed to Israel developed and grew more precise. Eucharist means " thanksgiving ", or, in other words, gratitude, with all that the word can imply.

The basis of the eucharist is, in fact, gratitude in faith for what the Word of God proclaims to us. More precisely, it is gratitude for the gift of God which the Word not only reveals but brings to us. It is the recognition of the fact that everything, absolutely everything, is a gift from God, the gift of his Word. Hence the innumerable Jewish " eucharistic " prayers in the *Berakoth* tractates of

the Mishnah and the Tosefta. They give thanks for all things, recognizing that God made all things by his Word and gave them to us. They thus made the pious Israelite's whole life and all his actions, even the most material, not only a perpetual prayer, but a perpetual thanksgiving.

But when he united with his brothers, notably on the eve of a sabbath or festival, to eat the common meal, then the Israelite was taking part in a " eucharist " of special solemnity. The meal was entirely liturgical. It began with common participation in the same bread broken and blessed by the president of the table and ended with common participation in the same cup, blessed in a solemn eucharist, which was not confined to thanksgiving for the creation. From the union of the faithful, from their common participation in a banquet provided by the fruits of the promised land the eucharist of the cup drew " recognition " of the gift of God formed by his historical intervention in favour of his people. It recognized the fulfilment of his promises in the Pasch and the Exodus, in the settlement in the promised land and the enjoyment of its fruits.

On this occasion, the eucharist for the past and the present extended to hope in the future, in the ultimate fulfilment of God's promises. Thus, quite naturally and in accordance with a line of thought made familiar to us by the psalms of the Old Testament, it passed from thanksgiving for benefits already received to confident supplication for still greater ones.

In fact, in this eucharist in particular there was a development of something present in embryo in every eucharistic prayer. That is, there was a direct transition from gratitude, in the sense of an act of faith in the Word

which shows us and gives us the gift of God, to gratitude as a heartfelt emotion, a joyous and confident prayer in which the request itself melts into abandonment to the promises. And as the divine promises of the Word always involve demands, the thanksgiving finally became, at the same time as an act of faith and a supplication, a real consecration.

We may say that the Israelite, as a believer entirely devoted to the Word, revealed himself in this act as a member of the priestly people, destined by the blessing on itself to be a blessing to the whole earth. By consecrating himself to his God by his thanksgiving, he consecrated to him all the creatures he employed, he consecrated all God's people and the whole of sacred history, God's whole renewal, through his Word, of the history of man.

That is why, for the Israelite, " to give thanks " to God for something and to bless it or consecrate it to God were one and the same thing. In the " Berakah ", these two actions were inseparably united.

But the " Berakah ", the eucharist, is never anything but the echo in man's heart, in the believer's heart, of the Word of God. It is the word with which the believer responds, everywhere and in every circumstance, to the Word of God. It is the response of faith, which recognizes that everything is a grace, in the creation as well as in the redemption of the holy people. The eucharist is also, and above all, the response of love, which recognizes God's love in everything and returns love for love. It begs him to manifest all his love, surrenders to it in advance, surrenders the speaker, all God's people and the whole universe with it to the will of God " who spoke to our fathers ".

When Jesus, the Word of God made flesh, came, the Word of God which was in him, which he indeed was, evoked in him the perfect response which it awaited, the perfect eucharist. Jesus, who is the supreme Word of God to man, is also man's supreme response to God, the response devised by God himself.

So at the Last Supper, the last meal that he took with his followers, with those whom he had set apart to form the seed of the new people, the people of the perpetual alliance, he himself pronounces and institutes the total and definitive eucharist. Fulfilling in himself all God's promises, himself determining at this moment the final accomplishment of the designs of God implored by the old eucharist, he can render to the Father, in the name of all humanity, perfect and definitive thanks for all his blessings and all his love. And this thanksgiving, in him who is the Word made flesh, has the same virtue, the same reality as the divine Word itself produces and contains. It is no longer just a pious wish on his part, a mere intention, to abandon himself to God's will. It is an offering effectively made. In the Cross to which, at this moment, he gives himself up, Jesus will simultaneously perfect God's communication to man and man's abandonment to God. In the Cross, God's love for man gives all of itself and man gives all of himself to God. Jesus' Eucharist is the Eucharist of the Cross, and is therefore definitive. And, as Jesus' Eucharist included the Cross and all it means, wherever, by his order and the power of his Word, his eucharist is renewed and continued, it is no longer just bread and wine, the fruits of the old promised land, that will be blessed and consecrated. The very body of Christ crucified and the

blood that he shed will take the place of the bread and wine that we have brought.

But for this fully real eucharist to be made truly ours it is not enough for it to be reproduced in our midst and in our presence by those whom Christ has sent in his name for this purpose. We must ourselves be brought into harmony with it. We must be able to have in ourselves, as St Paul says to the Philippians, " the same mind which Christ Jesus shewed. His nature is, from the first, divine, and yet he did not see, in the rank of Godhead, a prize to be coveted "; (unlike the human race, descended from Adam) "he dispossessed himself, and took the nature of a slave, fashioned in the likeness of men, and presenting himself to us in human form; and then he lowered his own dignity, accepted an obedience which brought him to death, death on a cross " (Phil. 2, 5-8).

That is why we need baptism, which conforms us to Christ, makes us one single plant with him, grafts us upon the resemblance of his death and resurrection, and also the seal of the Spirit, confirmation, which consecrates us sons by the Spirit of the Son.

Reborn in baptism, we can exercise our royal priesthood in the eucharist, first of all by making fully our own, not just with the lips, but with the heart, the eucharistic prayer. But above all we can offer or present in it our bread and our wine, as the symbols of our human life taken, as it were, at its source, the food which supports it, and thus offered, surrendered to God in Christ. Then Christ, after consecrating *our* offering in *his* eucharist, will give it back to us. That is the communion, the finishing touch to the eucharistic sacrifice.

We meet again what we had offered, but it is no longer

our offering; it is the offering of Christ, Christ's own body offered up on the Cross. By receiving it and absorbing it, we ourselves become what we receive: the Body of Christ. The dead and risen Christ comes to live in us, comes to make us his members, animated by his Spirit, glorifying the Father in the perpetual oblation of themselves in him.

Thus the Saviour's Eucharist finally becomes the Church's Eucharist, by gradually consecrating, in him, the whole universe to the Father, " recognized " as his Father and our Father, his God and our God.

After receiving the offerings of bread and wine, and everything that each gives for all, in charity's response to the love shown to us by God, the priest unites himself to God's people with the usual salutation: *the Lord be with you. And with thy spirit,* reply the newly-baptized in the front rank of Christians. But this time the appeal does not simply invite them to join in the prayer called forth by the Divine Word, but in the sacrifice, which means action, and joins God's Word and man's prayer. So the priest adds, " *Let us give thanks to the Lord our God* ", bowing at the same time to the congregation in order to invite them to join in what he is about to say and do, just as the father of the family or the spiritual father did at the Jewish table in these very same words, just as Jesus must have done to the apostles. " *That is right and just* " replies the whole assembled Church.

Then, with his hands raised towards God in the ancient attitude of solemn prayer, the priest begins the eucharist over the bread and the chalice. He recalls how God is worthy of praise at all times and in every place, but especially on the night when Christ our Pasch has been

immolated, for, he says, he is the true lamb who has taken away the sins of the world, and who, by his death, has destroyed our death and has given us back life by rising again. So redeemed humanity can join the choirs of Angels to praise God and glorify him by chanting with them the supreme eucharistic hymn:

> Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts. Thy glory fills all heaven and earth. Hosanna in high heaven! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in high heaven!

All have united with him in chanting the eucharist of the Angels, perpetually returning to God the glory with which he shines on them and recognizing it henceforth in him who is his supreme Apostle among us, Jesus Christ.

Through him the priest begs the Father to accept an offering, for the Pope, our bishop, all the apostles' successors, the whole Church (*Te igitur*), all the faithful on earth and all their needs (*Memento*), in communion with the Virgin and all the saints (*Communicantes*). Christ himself is asked to make this offering his (*Hanc igitur* and *Quam oblationem*), Christ who on the night that he was betrayed took bread, blessed it and broke it, saying: Take, all of you, and eat of this, for this is my body. Then he took the cup, saying: Take, all of you, and drink of this, for this is my blood. Whenever you shall do these things, you shall do them in memory of me.

Before the bread and wine now consecrated to the body and blood of Christ, to the glory of the Father, the visible priest now testifies that we are in fact calling to mind the whole mystery of our salvation, from the Passion to the glorious Ascension (*Unde et memores*). He begs

the Father to regard this definitive sacrifice with the same favourable countenance as that with which he regarded Abel's, humanity's first sacrifice after sin; Abraham's, the sacrifice of Isaac that foretold the sacrifice of Jesus; and Melchisedech's, the sacrifice of bread and wine that pointed to the eucharistic oblation itself (*Supra quae*). God is humbly asked to let the Angels unite the eucharist which we are performing on earth and in time to the eternal eucharist accomplished by the Son in heaven, in the celestial presence (*Supplices*). The priest also asks that all the dead who have preceded us into God's presence may be included (2nd *Memento*), and that in return we may be joined by this oblation with the saints in glory, not because of our merits but in the mercy which God has shown us (*Nobis quoque*), through Christ our Lord, through whom all is blessed by God as it was also created, all the blessings of our life in particular, through whom, with whom and in whom all honour and glory are given to the Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever.

The Amen, that is, the assent of the newly-baptized and of all the faithful, attests that the eucharist performed among them by him who occupies the place of Christ in the assembled Church is also their own.

Then, since the Saviour's perfect eucharist leads us in its train into the celestial sanctuary and the presence of the Father, the priest can conclude it in the name of all present with the prayer which does in fact make us call him " Our Father, who art in heaven ".

It only remains to break the bread of the eucharist and to share out the bread which is now the body of Christ, sacrificed on the Cross for our sins and raised for our

justification. In receiving it, all will be made, as the apostle says, one bread, one body, the body of Christ completely offered up to the Father and completely brought to life by the Spirit of the Father. It is the reconciliation of all, among themselves as well as with the Father, brought about in the body of the Only Begotten. It is a recapitulation of the whole of human history, falsified at the start by the refusal to give thanks, the root of all sin. That history, renewed in the obedience of the Cross, is now consummated in the universal eucharist of God's new people.

We may say that this people is built up in the eucharist, like Christ's whole body in which all must meet to gradually form in him one single perfect man, freed from death as well as sin, glorifying the Father in Christ by virtue of the Spirit.

VII

THE DISCOVERY OF THE NEW LIFE

ONE might be tempted to think that the paschal initiation has led the new Christian straight up to such a peak that what follows can only be, in this world at any rate, an anti-climax. Or, to be more precise, this gift of the Spirit, in and through our incorporation in the son of God, for our immediate access to the Father, is surely a first taste of eternal life. What can follow but the full enjoyment of that life? Temporal life, life here on earth, is surely bound to depreciate in value as a result.

That in fact is what every age, especially ours, has reproached Christians with: that the belief in eternal life is liable to weaken their interest in this life. By making them indifferent to earthly success, so it is said, it makes them unfitted for man's real tasks. The prospect of eternal salvation makes humanity not only despair of temporal salvation but completely lose interest in it.

Some Christians nowadays answer this objection with an argument that is too facile to be convincing. Not at all, they reply to the Marxist or simply materialist objector, the prospect of eternal salvation does not impair that of temporal salvation. On the contrary, the complete Christian is the man who aims at both, who only wishes to win his eternal salvation, and that of his fellow-men, by bringing about, or effectively helping to bring about, the temporal salvation of humanity.

Replies of this sort, it must be admitted, satisfy no one. However convincingly uttered, they do not sound really genuine. They obviously avoid the problem by taking refuge in an equivocation. The only people, Christians or non-Christians, who will be satisfied with them are those who are more interested in preserving their intellectual comfort than in taking a firm grasp of reality.

We must certainly grant one first point to our opponents: the salvation of humanity can be pursued either in time or in eternity; in other words, one can believe it completely attainable either in history or else beyond it. Both these attitudes can be justified, but to try to please everyone by agreeing with both sides is ridiculous.

Christianity asserts quite unambiguously that neither the individual nor the collective salvation of humanity is possible either on earth or in any possible prolongation of the present state of affairs. Christianity is, as they say, eschatological. That is, it rests on a belief in the end of time. It asserts that human history must end in a catastrophe, that it will be interrupted by the supremely miraculous event, the return of Christ and the universal judgement and resurrection. After that, but only after that, the salvation of humanity will be possible. After that, and not before, will come that final age of gold dreamt of by every man. An anticipation of this golden age is certainly possible for each individual. But this anticipation itself can only come hereafter: after our individual death, when, *if we have been faithful to the risen Christ on earth*, he will give us a foretaste of the universal resurrection.

Does this mean that we must allow the objection?

Must we admit that the Christian belief in eternal life does indeed rob this life of meaning and discourage efforts to secure the reign of justice or simply a reduction of human suffering?

By no means. The objection would only be valid if the Christian's eternal life were not dependent on the condition we have emphasized. Of course, the Christian who is true to his baptism, and to what every celebration of the eucharist puts him in contact with anew, only lives for the full flowering in eternity of the realities lying beneath the surface of the sacramental world. To seek to deny it is to deceive others or else oneself.

The real question is *how* the Christian is to strive towards that blossoming of the realities of his faith which are only given to him in this life under the veil of the sacraments. In other words, what are the implications here and now of that loyalty to Christ which is, for us, the *sine qua non* of eternal life?

First of all, does it involve even the slightest devaluation of this life, and in particular of the purely human tasks which it imposes upon us? Nothing could be further from the truth. All objections of this sort fail to take into account the fact that eternal life is only promised to the Christian on condition that he makes a right use of this life. He will be judged, not by the faculty he has shown for escaping from his human tasks and responsibilities, but, on the contrary, according to the fresh meaning which he has discovered in them and the renewed devotion with which he has discharged them.

If eternal life were independent of this life, then the latter would become worthless and unimportant. But that is not the case at all; Christianity knows no other

eternal life but the one we prepare for, and even to some extent make, during the course of this life. Such a view of eternal life, far from nullifying this one, gives it infinite value. If this present life were due to stop tomorrow, with no hope of an after-life, it could never have the importance conferred on every minute of it by the Christian prospect, not just of eternity, but of eternal judgement and resurrection.

Without any doubt, for the Christian, everything hinges on the imminence of Christ's return. The whole time, every Christian must, or ought to, live with a lively consciousness that Christ may call him the very next moment to appear before him and be judged for eternity according to what he has done with his life up to then. Every hour of every day the whole Church repeats: "Come, Lord Jesus! Come soon!" And she is always ready to welcome him.

What does this really mean?

It simply emphasizes the extreme urgency of the need for every Christian to practise perfect charity. It means that he must constantly try to live in that love which is the love shown to him by God, the love which is the life of God. That love, charity, the agape of the gospels, is, it should be recalled, the creative love, the love that gives and therefore gives itself. It is the love that extends to all beings and, in them, to the whole being. For once again Christianity does not know, or rather rejects, the false spirituality which neglects or condemns the body to the advantage of the soul. When he loves souls, the Christian loves the whole man, body and soul, and devotes himself in the most realistic fashion to the well-being of the body as well as that of the soul.

That is the sort of life the Christian must lead in this world after participating in the eucharistic banquet. For it should be clearly understood that the sacramental world is not a world in its own right, a world sufficient to itself. The sacramental world is essentially a link between two other worlds, the world of eternity, in which the risen Christ lives, and the world of today, in which we have to live and achieve in ourselves the life of the risen. To be still more precise, the sacramental world is the link between the achievement of the divine life in an ordinary human existence exemplified by the historical life of Jesus, and the achievement of this same life in our own existence. It was his achievement of this life that led Jesus through the Cross to the resurrection, and sharing in *his* achievement through the sacraments will lead us, too, to the life of the resurrection.

So we see how this life can and must become a preparation for eternity: first of all by becoming an anticipation of it, through the effective presence here on earth of the charity which will bloom into life eternal. It is admittedly a paradoxical kind of anticipation: in eternity, life with God, life in God's love, will be nothing but life, and superabundant life; here and now it implies the Cross, and can only be achieved through the Cross. For the Christian, however, the Cross is already illuminated by the resurrection. Even the Cross itself is glorious when seen from inside, as the earthly fulfilment of what Christ brought to it, the love of God. The Christian's cross, like Christ's, is a victory, still hidden, but already visible to the eye of faith.

The programme that lies before the new Christian when he leaves the church, where he heard the proclamation of

the Word and took part in the eucharistic banquet, is the practical application to life of what has just been revealed and granted to him. And each fresh participation in the Mass throughout his life will renew and remould him spiritually for the achievement of this ideal, an ideal made into a permanent reality by Christ's living presence in the Church.

But how will the Christian play his part in the realization of this ideal? It must not be forgotten that what his initiation required of him was not just the gift of his actions, his thoughts or anything at all that he can put at Christ's disposal. It was first and foremost the gift of himself. In this sense it is true to say that well-organized charity begins at home. In other words, all that we could think, say or do for the realization of the Christian ideal will be of no value at all if our efforts are not first directed to achieving this ideal in ourselves.

The Christian's first task in this world is to surrender to Christ in practice the being that he surrendered to him in theory at baptism. But since no one can live by or for himself alone, this surrender of his own being to Christ will involve a revaluation and regeneration of all his earthly relationships, first with the world through his body, and, second, with his fellow men in this world. Life in the Church, of which baptism has made him a member and to which every celebration of the eucharist leads him back, is not a life of escape. The Church is not outside the world, it is at the heart of the world. In fact, in order to save the world it must become *the* heart of the world.

Thus the Christian must work in it to become in fact the new man that he has already become in theory, for

whom and through whom the material world is transfigured and becomes a place of charity, so that the whole society of men is attracted and finally incorporated, as far as such a thing is possible, into the society of the divine love shared.

The Christian is only a Christian through faith working in charity. That means that his first task is to develop a mental attitude disposed to believe the divine truth and a will disposed to love with the love of God.

No doubt only the grace of God can produce this transformation in us: the grace proclaimed by the divine Word and granted in the sacraments. But that does not mean that we must or can be passive. Grace is essentially a regeneration and elevation of our freedom. How could we therefore live with grace, or just have it and keep it, without co-operating in it? Admittedly this co-operation itself will be the fruit of grace, for, as St Paul tells us, it is God who creates both will and action in us. But it is a gross illusion to think that will and action become any less personal, any less our own. Nothing is ours except by the gift of God, and that includes our individuality and our freedom. To recognize this, and to fall back once for all on this gift and it alone is not to abdicate but to enlarge our freedom.

That is why the divine Word itself is only an invitation to know and to love. The whole teaching of the sapiential books in particular is an appeal to develop, exercise and refine our intelligence, whilst leading it to the conclusion that God and his Word alone are the ultimate source of Wisdom. That does not mean that we must, or indeed can, neglect the natural and normal urge to think and to think clearly, but that this urge is, on the contrary,

stimulated and supported by the divine Word and culminates in the recognition that the Word alone has the last say in any genuine kind of knowledge.

The modern mind, jealous of its independence, may at first be tempted to see a contradiction here. If God has spoken to us to tell us the whole truth, what further need is there for effort on our part? And if we are to think for ourselves, how can we do so if the final solutions to our problems are to be given to us from on high?

But this double objection, impressive though it may be at first sight, is only a sophism. It postulates a double misunderstanding, both of the normal processes of the human mind in search of truth and of what the divine Word is.

To think by oneself, to think a rational thought, does not mean that one creates the truth. A truth created by oneself would no longer be the truth. The truth exists and is discovered. But the fact that truth is something outside the human mind does not mean that the latter need take no action to grasp it, nor that it is thereby prevented from exercising its proper activity. With every kind of truth, the important thing is to discover the right way to encounter it, the appropriate kind of activity to master it. There is no sphere in which the mind starts on its search for truth from itself. In everything, it must start from information furnished in one way or another by the senses, information about the world. The mind's own part in all branches of knowledge lies in the effort of interpretation which it must make in order to digest this information. Reasoning, logic, is its instrument. But this instrument only works on the foundation of certain great basic intuitions and

only makes real advances if it leads to new, deeper and more definite intuitions.

Therefore, to invite it to pass from knowledge of the material world to that of the spirit, from knowledge of the spirit to that of God and finally to the encounter with God and the fathoming of all the knowledge he alone can give us about himself, us and our relations with him, is not to impede its normal activity but to stimulate it. In this revelation all our previous knowledge is gathered up, organized and deepened as well as completed. So our mind's whole natural striving for knowledge is welcomed and stimulated by the divine revelation. This revelation adopts it, as it were, and, having adopted it, far from halting it, gives it a new and boundless field of activity. St Augustine saw this clearly when he spoke of the *fides quaerens intellectum* which normally succeeds the *intellectus quaerens fidem.* That is, the human mind is bound to tend of its own accord towards the discovery of God, and more particularly the discovery of God speaking in the Church. When it has reached this point the intelligence recognizes that the impression it had had of advancing alone along the path of truth was an illusion. From the start God was guiding us towards him, by his inner light as well as by his providential conduct of outward events. Now that we have found him, or rather that he has found us, it is hardly likely that he will interrupt the activity that led us to him. On the contrary, he will fertilize it and thus open up new possibilities—a sort of higher plane —for it.

In order to understand this properly we must see more clearly just how the Word of God works. It always takes for granted the world of the senses which, once

again, is the source of all our observations. It also takes for granted the natural mental processes set in motion by experience of this world. But it helps us on the one hand not to immerse ourselves purely and simply in the sensory, and on the other to see beyond: beyond it and beyond us. It reveals a background to our experiences of the sensory world, so that this world and the events which take place in it become not only charged with a symbolic significance but the actual signs of a history in which God himself, not content with letting his presence be felt behind everything, intervenes in very deed to take control of us.

Man can no longer arrive with certainty at any truth of major importance once he becomes a prey to passions, once he is dominated by pride or sensuality. His reasoning powers are bound to be numbed or even warped. The Word of God, by forcing him to put his finger, as it were, on his sin, that is, his innate enslavement to pride and selfish sensuality, puts him on his guard against the principal cause of his gravest errors.

Divine grace brings him the only effective help in eradicating it. But to do this we still have to yield to the exhortations of the Word and the appeals of grace; we still have to resist selfish passions and to aim at that self-control which man can only attain by voluntary submission to the lordship of God in Christ.

This involves us in an asceticism, that is, spiritual training, in which contemplation will hold the first place. By that we mean a conscious and willing effort to turn away from everything that encourages our evil tendencies simply in order to make us slaves. This contemplative attitude, however, will not arise out of a

vacuum. You cannot get rid of evil thoughts simply by rejecting them. They have to be banished by good thoughts. The contemplative attitude will therefore not be just a preparation and framework, so to speak, for meditation; it will be its first product, but a product which, in return, will protect it and make it easier. And meditation will be fed by the constant contrast between the human ideal proposed to us by God in his Word and the reality inside ourselves. Moreover, the two will not just draw nearer each other from outside in a possibly forced way. The divine Word also helps us to discover the weaknesses within ourselves, and the examination of our own heart convinces us more and more of the wonderful adaptation, the sublime suitability of the divine purpose to our most incoherent but also most intimate aspirations. In every sense, God alone knows us, because it was he who made us. He alone enables us to recognize our misery, but he alone, too, can put a name to those vague aspirations which could not be formulated but for his Word, for his anticipatory grace inspired us with them as soon as it created us.

The Christian who lends and applies himself to this knowledge of himself, to this renewal and perfection of himself, beginning with his intelligence, will develop above all his ability to recognize the truth. In proportion as he develops it, he will see more and more clearly how every search for the truth tends, consciously or unconsciously, towards God. As this orientation grows more definite and stronger it will obliterate in us, *a fortiori*, all causes of error. First it will immunize us against the manifold tendencies to deception which our pride and pleasure-seeking selfishness are bound to encourage in

us. It will make us clear-minded, by gradually freeing us from sensual urges and prejudices, that is, preconceived ideas which prevent us reaching the whole truth, but only retain their hold over us by their flattery of our complacency. Then we shall no longer be satisfied to see things in the mass, superficially, and to judge them by somewhat mechanically applied principles. Our contemplation, our meditation, enlightened by the divine Word, will have made us too sensitive to a danger threatening every mind which does not judge itself by an irreproachable standard, the danger of substituting words for realities.

The strict intellectual honesty obligatory for the Christian, while giving us greater clarity of mind, will complement it quite naturally with that true humility without which the human intelligence can never attain profundity. We shall no longer be able to confuse logic with a grasp of the whole truth. We shall be awakened to the sense of mystery, both the mystery inside ourselves and the vaster mystery into which the world plunges us ever deeper the better we come to know it. Then assent to the Christian mystery proper will no longer seem, or be anywhere near seeming, like a voluntary blindness. It will become more and more consciously the acceptance of great truths still more than half obscure to us in our present state, but already harmonizing too well with the half-light into which our investigations plunge us as soon as they acquire any depth for us to doubt that the divine Word is guiding us to the whole truth.

This purification and enrichment of the intelligence, this blossoming in us of a higher faculty of judgement will go hand in hand with the reform and refashioning of

our will. As the intelligence cannot be renewed without an effective effort of the will, so the will is strengthened by the regeneration of the intelligence. The heart, in the biblical sense of the word, that new heart called into being in us by the divine Word, is not just the source of our feelings (the Bible calls this " the bowels "), nor is it the will alone; it is the will regarded as inseparable from the intelligence, the will animated by a renewed intelligence.

Our heart, in this sense, has to have heard the appeal of God's heart, to have been touched by the love that belongs only to God, in order to become itself capable of experiencing it, or rather living it. And no doubt the divine love poured into our hearts by the Spirit of God will not conquer them without many conscious and repeated efforts on our part to escape the compulsion of the instincts, to overcome the obstacles formed by temptations, and to pass beyond the stage of mere whim in the positive patience of an effort which disciplines itself in order to be able to persevere to its goal. But all this, which is the subjective aspect, the aspect which seems purely our own, in the growth of charity in us, will only be set in motion, constantly animated and kept awake, and finally victorious in so far as our faith is enriched by the knowledge of the love with which God loved us in Jesus Christ, loves us today and, so to speak, surrounds us on every side. Through all our efforts, if they are ever to be fully effective, it will only ever be this love that gradually makes its way, and it will progress in exact proportion to our ability to recognize it, in proportion to the extent to which our whole mental attitude, our whole life becomes such a " recognition ", or, in other

words, permeated by the eucharist which must now form its daily bread.

Here we shall obviously meet a fresh objection. Surely this love of God, this love for God, by which our whole life must finally be invaded, a love which is only our participation through grace in the love with which God loves us, will destroy all our natural affections? Surely it will start by opposing them, as so many distractions, and end by leaving them behind in a transcendent indifference to everything created?

Certain themes in Christian spirituality, when clumsily developed or just misunderstood, can give grounds for this misunderstanding. Certain pages, even in the greatest books, like the *Imitation of Christ*, certain lines of thought even in the greatest masters of the spiritual life, when isolated from their whole context, seem to confirm it. But we have only to open the Gospel or to look at the saints at their most natural and revealing moments to see this misunderstanding fade away.

On the contrary, it should be emphasized that it is impossible to love God, the God who has spoken to us, the God whose Word made flesh is Jesus Christ, without loving what he loves. And everything that exists does so only because God has known it, willed it and loves it with a Father's love. But we still have to love what he loves *as he loves it himself*. This is where the necessary renunciations and sacrifices come in. Their purpose is not to attenuate, or even unduly spiritualize, our natural affections. It is to make them truer, richer in content and therefore more lasting. The loves to which the love of God is opposed are never more genuine loves, in spite of appearances. It is only the secretly selfish illusions

in them that charity opposes. It never tears us away from the love of any person except to enable us, not only to love better in general, but, also in the last analysis, to love that very person better. For, with regard to the material world, charity works in a way which may at first disconcert us but is in fact the only realistic one, as we shall see.

The love of God cannot take control of a man's heart without requiring him to forswear the temptations to which he is inclined by purely pleasure-seeking selfishness. Hence the necessity for a discipline of the senses which can take various different forms according to temperaments and circumstances. But it will always contain a basic element of violence towards ourselves, which inevitably looks like violence towards things, the creations of God. The reason for this is that the strength of sin, avowed in open passion, hidden but all the more dangerous in the various subtle forms of our sensuality, is something only fully revealed to him who has fought against it. When one has seen right into it, the exceptional violence of some ascetics no longer seems so extraordinary.

Does this mean that Christian asceticism condemns the senses and the world they reveal to us? You might as well say that the realistic rescuer who is struggling with a drowning man and, in order to be in a position to save him, has to start by giving him a few good punches to make him let go thereby becomes his enemy. In a case like that, the enemy would be the man who gave way and involved in his own death the man he was trying to save. We ought to recall this simile whenever we are disconcerted by whatever necessarily wounds nature in the divine surgery designed only to cure it. Every

cross is hard for man to bear. But can he complain to God if his sin has put him in a position whence he can only be saved by the Cross? If we are upset and irritated by this mystery, surely we should be able to see that this Cross that Christ asks us to bear on our own behalf was first taken freely for us by him who had no need of it.

When we see St Francis of Assisi taking the path of complete poverty, ridding himself of the most elementary comforts and even rejecting the affection of those near to him, it upsets us. But when we see him singing and inviting the whole creation to sing, with such an inexhaustible faculty for wonder and sympathy in joy with all creatures, we cannot help admiring him. We should surely understand that the one is the result of the other. To arrive at such open-heartedness, at such transparent sensitivity, at a love as deep as it is pure, the way of extreme deprivation was the only one that he could follow.

Similarly, if the spiritual journey of St John of the Cross leaves us breathless at the unparalleled demands made by those purifications that he calls the night of the senses, the dark night of the spirit, in which everything connected with the world and our humanity seems to disappear, surely their meaning is made plain in the happiness with which, after finally finding God, he also finds again all that he had abandoned on the way?

In other words, there is a love by which we are ourselves consumed even as we devour what we love. That is the love which is bound up with sin, feeds it and is finally destroyed by it. There is also a love which finally gladdens us by giving full scope to the development of

what we love. This love is only the expansion in our hearts of the love with which God loves everything that he has made, everything that exists. It is hardly surprising that this second love must begin by crucifying the first in our hearts.

However, it should be noted that it does not wish to kill in us the love which is born of the need, the poverty of the created being which turns to others for enrichment. Or rather, it only asks it to die in order to rise again. Since God made us, he knows very well that, unlike him, we are all need and dependence. What he wants of us is that we should discover how mistaken this need is when it tries to convert everything to its own use, how deluded this dependence is when it imagines that it can make everything gravitate towards itself. The lesson he wishes us to learn is that there is more happiness in giving than receiving, that the happiness which we can only receive can only be possessed from the moment we abandon ourselves, in everything and with everything, to him who gives us all. This lesson involves a painful surrender of our primitive inclination to cling to selfishness, immediate enjoyment and a pride which is never anything but naïve. We cannot help feeling that we are losing everything. But that is the necessary condition of our finding ourselves, and everything else as well, in the incomparable, unfading joy of the love which is God's, the love of him who makes, who is the divine life.

So this asceticism, this painful exercise of the Cross, does not destroy, to the advantage of the love of God, any of our natural ability to love, nor does it really make us forget any being really worthy of our love. It simply tends to make us respect what we love, and thus to make

us love it better: no longer as a prey to be seized upon, but as a presence which rejoices for ever in the common consciousness of that other presence in which no presence is obliterated but all are perpetuated.

We only really discover the material world when we stop seeing in it nothing more than a mere source of enjoyment or comfort. When we are sufficiently detached from it to free ourselves of the bondage in which it held our infatuated instincts we can look on it with an appraising eye. Then, seeing everywhere in it the traces of its creator and ours, not only do we love everything better, but we have the impression that we are only just beginning to love it, because only then do we see everything in its true light.

Modern man in particular, absorbed as he is in the development of his technology and intoxicated by the many pleasures it procures for him with so little effort, no longer knows how to see things, how to stop and admire them, and thus to draw from them an enjoyment which passes beyond mere pleasure to become an expansion of the soul in harmony with the world's most secret reality. That is the vision restored to the Christian, who praises God in all things and invites all things to praise God, and sees in everything, through the new purity of his gaze, a beauty which up to then had escaped him.

If that is what happens to our relationship with the material world, Christianity must surely bring a far more radical renewal of our personal relationships. The first problem that arises at this point is that of the significance to be attributed to the sexual life.

There is something paradoxical in non-Christian

criticisms of the Christian attitude to this matter. Sometimes Christianity is reproached with condemning sexuality, with impeding the normal development of human life with all sorts of taboos which hinder the deepest and most natural instincts. At others it is criticized for giving the sexual problem a disproportionate importance, making a religious problem out of something that is only a problem of natural morality, or even for introducing an arbitrary morality into a sphere where there are only biological urges which should be given full scope.

Yet modern psychologies, even those furthest from Christianity at the start of their investigations and apparently most opposed to it in their conclusions, like the Freudian system, bring unexpected confirmation of the Christian assertion that there is much more to sexuality than its purely physical manifestations. They demonstrate to the most incredulous how impossible it is to reduce the sexual life to the pure and simple satisfaction of a sensual desire. They no longer allow us to doubt that the whole balance of the personality and the success or failure of our existence are closely connected with the way in which sexuality has or has not been integrated at the deepest level of personal development.

Besides, anyone who takes the trouble to look fairly closely at Christian doctrine on this subject cannot fail to be struck by the fact that the safeguards which it puts round sex are not meant to condemn it, but in actual fact to safeguard it by inspiring respect for it.

What Christianity condemns is essentially the idea that sex is only a matter of carnal relationships, as if anything to do with man could be physical without being

simultaneously spiritual, and, in particular, as if the physical encounter of two human beings made for each other could take place without being really a personal encounter. What Christianity asserts is that one cannot give one's body to another without giving one's soul as well, that there can be no true love on the physical level which does not involve the soul, and finally that the body cannot exist, cannot live without the soul.

But it also asserts much more than that.

In the love of man and woman, frankly accepted on its physical basis, the Gospel reveals to us an image of the relations which God wished to establish between man and himself, in Christ and the Church. In the sacrament of marriage it does more; it consecrates human love to make it the bond of a genuine realization, in one individual cell of humanity, of that love between Christ and the Church which is to fill the whole of human history and bring it to a successful conclusion. " Husbands ", says St Paul, " love your wives *as Christ loved his Church* and gave himself for it ".

In other words, the bodily meeting of two human beings, their complementing and fulfilment of each other, must become a basic realization of the love which seeks to give, to give itself, before thinking of receiving.

Admittedly this means once again the introduction of asceticism, renunciation and sacrifice into man's life, right into the heart of its supreme mode of expansion and fulfilment. But is it not also clear that it forms a preparation in the present for unparalleled possibilities not only of fulfilment but of transcendence of self, in purely human love? The total consecration of one person to another, each living for the other, surely forms

the condition for a realization denied to human strength alone of a fulfilment of each by the other?

But above all, perhaps, the fruitfulness of such a union between creatures, accepted, sought after together in accordance with a view of faith, allows us to recognize in fatherhood and motherhood the most perfect expressions of the divine life itself and of this life communicated to creatures. Indeed, from what the Gospel says, there is no sublimer image for conveying to us what God is in himself than that of the Fatherhood revealed in God. Nor is there any purer illustration, asserts the Church, of what man can reach through grace, than the Motherhood of Mary. Thus, illumined by faith and in return making faith a living reality, the Christian couple's experience of fatherhood and motherhood finally deepens and transfigures its most exclusive and personal love by opening it up, like God's, to a boundless creative generosity.

Here again the Christian meaning of fatherhood or motherhood will lead to sacrifice, to forgetfulness of self in and for what we love. But this only shows once again the fruitfulness of the Cross, for him who loves as well as for those whom he loves. The common devotion, in the strongest sense of the word, in which the married couple's love reaches its peak through the sacrifices involved in the birth and education of the children is the most natural way to the most complete self-fulfilment available to man on earth.

Through the development of family life and affections, thus illumined and renewed by Christianity, we come to the transfiguration of the sensibility which it seemed at first to treat so harshly.

For, after all, what is our sensibility but that no man's land, so difficult to define, so likely to make us lose our way and yet so important, where spirit and body meet, where the spirit seems to spring from the body but so easily to be submerged in the flesh?

Complete and genuine Christianity both prevents us losing ourselves in it and dissuades us from shutting ourselves up in it. It stops us being engulfed in the emotional by warning us that it is only a bridge to the spiritual. It also destroys the illusion that the spiritual is to be found in the mere negation of the emotional, which would be the negation of our whole condition. It invites us and teaches us how to purify our sensibility, not in order to drain it away but in order to integrate it. It trains us in spiritual delicacy by refining our experience of the senses, by showing us those aspects of them that reach out beyond the senses.

What aesthetic experience and the stirrings of the heart dimly felt, Christianity interprets and makes full use of. By opening the soul to God it frees the whole human being from the vague aspirations in which, left to himself, he would eventually be lost.

Yet, of itself, the life of the human couple, as it is prolonged in the family, extends the individual life to the social relationships in all their complexity. Here again, by the enlightenment it brings, by its demands and by the supernatural energies it liberates in humanity, Christianity leads the way to an inevitable crucifixion and unexpected resurrection of all human relationships.

It is useless to look in the Gospel for a ready-made, definitive solution either of the political problem or of what we have come to call in a particularly definite sense

the social problem. Neither of these problems is susceptible of such a solution, since both are in a continual process of transformation caused by the ceaseless transformation of their premises throughout the history of human society.

But what is Christianity's contribution to the fresh efforts made by every generation to build a habitable city, to organize the world in a way that will satisfy the needs of every individual member of humanity? In the first place, by its ideal of justice, by its assertion that justice itself can only be the fruit of a charity as generous as it is clear-sighted, it always has a disturbing effect on equilibriums that have become oppressive and paralysing. In the second place, it is the most effective force for attracting, grouping and combining all humanity's really constructive energies and opposing, dissipating and inhibiting its purely destructive ones. Admittedly, so long as all men are not fully won over to faith and charity, that is, so long as the Kingdom of God has not arrived on earth in Christ's final reign, there will be no fully satisfactory Christian policy or Christian social order. And, of course, in the Kingdom, politics and the social problem will have been left behind for ever. But this does not mean that the Christian is condemned to play an unreal and ineffective role. On the contrary, in a domain where absolute good cannot exist, because by definition it is the domain in which good and evil wills—especially partially good and partially evil wills—clash, Christianity is the greatest possible factor conducing to peace and justice. It enjoys this position precisely because it always refuses to elevate the relative into an absolute, and therefore to sacrifice living men to an ideology. It

enjoys this position because it respects in man, not only the good already in him, but even, as only the divine love can, the good still possible where for the moment only evil is visible. Because he refuses to support self-styled short cuts to universal happiness tomorrow, the Christian in human society, if he is loyal to Christ, is at any rate never a contributory factor in the existing unhappiness. By his every action, by his living testimony, he tends to maintain and develop, for each and all, the maximum possible number of chances of real fulfilment.

At this point it is as well to recall once again that the Christian's action and his influence draw their effectiveness above all from the transformation of his own being which knowledge of Christ has made possible for him. He will never succumb to the illusion of a transfiguration of the world effected by himself, or rather effected with his assistance, independently of this transfiguration of himself. Conversely, of course, he knows that he will only transform himself by transforming his relationships with others. But in all this God never asks him through Christ for the consecration of all the useful energies that he possesses except on the basis of the consecration of himself. It was not our possessions—material, intellectual, emotional or spiritual—that God asked for first at our baptism, and asks for again at every celebration of the eucharist. It is ourselves: the very core of our being, our life at its source. All the other things only interest him on this basis.

That is why in the last analysis the fundamental Christian problem raised for all of us by life in this world is that of our personal vocation. Before attempting any long-range action, whose outcome is always to some extent uncertain,

each of us must resolve a problem that he alone can resolve. This problem is that of his integration in the human community in the place marked out for him by God. It is at once the problem of our trade or profession, of the task which suits us, of the human or spiritual family to which we are to belong, and of the whole direction that our personal development is to take. There is no other problem which combines so urgently the concern for clear thinking and the concern for depth and fullness which should dominate all our judgements, the concern for detachment and generosity which should dominate all our decisions, and the concern for purity and integrity which should dominate our sensibility. Nowhere can we see more clearly the fallaciousness of the autonomy which claims to free itself from the context in which our personal achievement must necessarily be inserted; nowhere is there a more imperious necessity not to confuse loyalty to God with passivity in the face of circumstances.

Now we can see what supreme activity is required of us by the real abandonment to God, to his providence, his plans, his promises, and how effective this abandonment and it alone can make our efforts. And it should be understood that the problem of everyone's vocation is not just the problem of an initial choice. It is also, above all, that of creative loyalty to this choice, ceaselessly continued and renewed by a being that always remains the same and yet must continually change.

Here more than anywhere in our lives we experience how the gift of ourselves to Christ, made once for all in baptism, needs to be continually renewed in the Eucharist. It is the initial choice and persevering pursuit of our own

vocation that determines the precise use made of the graces of baptism and the eucharist by our faith, that living faith, showing itself in charity, on which in the last analysis God will judge us.

VIII

THE DISCOVERY OF ETERNAL LIFE

We have just described the Christian life in its most usual form, which postulates the settled position in the world implied by marriage and the acceptance of one of the manifold tasks presented by this world to all men, whether they are Christians or not. But the fact remains that the Church regards as the highest vocations, the supreme vocations, those which lead to lives involving the renunciation of marriage and the devotion of oneself to tasks quite different from the ordinary human ones. Is there a contradiction here? Or must we conclude that the Church puts forward a kind of double morality; that it tolerates in the case of the mass of men what it cannot permit for an *élite*? Both these suppositions are erroneous.

It is true that the Church puts forward as the highest way of life a way excluding not only marriage but also private property and the free disposal of oneself. Does it then not really accept the goodness of the creation, and relegate creaturely love at the very least to a necessarily lower level?

That is not so at all. Nothing established in the previous chapter need be withdrawn. It is simply a question of emphasizing what we have already said: that the Cross stands at the end of any path which the Christian may take, even if it is true that it is always the resurrection that attracts him.

It is an unavoidable fact that, whatever path the Christian feels called upon to take, sooner or later he cannot escape the necessity of giving up everything: himself, his loves and his possessions, whatever they may be. Sooner or later everyone has to do this. Christianity itself cannot be blamed for this harsh necessity. It falls on all men equally. To reproach Christianity with bringing the Cross into men's lives is to shut one's eyes to the evidence. It had no need to do so; the Cross was there already. Christianity did not put it there. But what Christianity alone could bring was a meaning for the Cross. The Gospel alone adds to the necessity of the Cross the promise of the resurrection. It does more: it teaches us how to make the Cross the way to resurrection. It enables us to look evil in the eye, because it makes us find in evil itself the means to overcome it.

Consequently, what distinguishes the Christian from the non-Christian is not that he is vowed to the Cross but that he has found the means to make the Cross life-giving. And what distinguishes the monk, the member of a religious order or anyone who takes a particularly ascetic path from the ordinary Christian is simply that instead of waiting for the Cross to come to him and force itself on him he goes to it of his own accord.

Even this last distinction must not be pressed too hard. On the one hand, there is no Christian life without many sacrifices freely and spontaneously accepted. On the other, there is no Christian life in which we can really take it upon ourselves to consummate the sacrifice: the immediate and effective surrender of our whole life into the hands of God has no value except when providence itself has led us to it. We can even go further and say

that we are never permitted, on the pretext of sacrifice, to positively destroy anything in us essential to our lives. We can never sacrifice on our own initiative anything but certain means of earthly fulfilment like the free disposal of our goods (religious poverty), our bodies (chastity) or our will (obedience). But unless God himself invites us to do so through unavoidable circumstances we can never renounce all enjoyment of the blessings of this world, we can never renounce bodily life itself and thus finally abdicate our will to his.

On the other hand, not only the monk but every Christian must advance consciously towards the moment when, with Christ, he puts his spirit in the Father's hands and gives up once for all every earthly love, every earthly possession, even that of his own body. In any Christian life this last moment should not seem like a final failure, to which we must simply resign ourselves, with death in the soul, when effective resistance is no longer possible. On the contrary, in every Christian life, this moment of death should seem, as it was for Christ, the moment of final consummation. In other words, in every Christian life everything should lead to it. The great renunciations which some Christians feel called upon to make in advance are nothing more than means of liberation which make us more resigned to the greatest, the final, the real renunciations when God calls and leads us to them.

This does not mean that everything in the life of the ordinary Christian, or even in that of the most austere monk, must tend, either immediately or otherwise, towards the attenuation and annihilation of life. Such has certainly been the goal of some ascetic movements:

the gnostic heretics of antiquity, their successors the Cathari, and the Buddhists even today. But Christian asceticism never aims at annihilating life in us; on the contrary, its purpose is to liberate it. It does not imply any kind of condemnation of the things which it gives up, but simply an absolute preference for " the one thing necessary ".

At this point we must draw attention to the temptation which may assail the Christian ascetic. It is quite obvious that there are not two different ways of giving up the same things. The inevitable resemblance between the Christian's renunciations and those of the heretic therefore gives rise to a risk of confusion about motives. To fall a victim to it is to lose sight of the very purpose of self-mortification. But it is not sensible to conclude that the Christian need not mortify himself. On the contrary, he must do so, but always to gain more life. Even when the moment arrives for him to complete his eucharist, like the martyrs, by offering his own death joined to that of Jesus, he will do it joyfully because he will do it with resurrection in mind.

What all asceticism aims at is the destruction of the obsessional concentration on self caused by sin. It aims at letting us be seized, invaded and carried away by the generosity of God's life, the life which is love.

So it is not a conflict between this love and the nature of material things, which proceeds from it, that involves us in the struggle with them and also, above all, with ourselves. It is the conflict between this love and the tendency in all of us which has caused our own " flesh ", and the " world " with us, to curve inwards, as it were.

It is this tendency, that is, sin, that brought death into

the world and all the pangs leading up to it. But God only allowed his work to be spoilt like this because he knew how to find the remedy in evil itself.

The necessity to die now engraved in our nature by sin becomes, if it is enlightened by faith and dominated by divine love, the providential means of opening all that is closed, freeing all that is imprisoned in itself. The very loss of our sinful life will form salvation from the sin which consisted precisely in the wish to cling to it, instead of consenting to only possessing it by giving it, just as God only lives by giving himself.

Asceticism in all its forms has therefore no other purpose but that of leading us to abandon ourselves in everything through faith to the love of God. That is why it always makes us abjure the evil inclination to cling to our possessions. It only seems to break us in order to raise us up and open our hearts.

It will not dream of denying that God gives us his greatest blessings in the humblest, or that he gives us himself with his gifts. But it will give up the humbler gifts so that they do not become, through our covetous selfishness, the obstacle to higher gifts. And finally it will give up the higher gifts in their turn, so that they do not prevent us from attaining to the supreme Gift.

Thus in everything the Christian life will be marked by a continually expanding rhythm, that moves from ever renewed discoveries to ever deeper renunciations.

In the last analysis the ascetic never gives up the things of this world in themselves; he only gives up ways of possessing them which carry within themselves the seeds of their own decay. When in one sense he no longer has anything, in another he has everything. But as long as

he remains on earth, everything must continually be given up again, only to be found once more. The process must go on until we are ready for the total and definitive abandonment of death, that is, for the fullness of the resurrection.

It is not a question of giving up bad things, but of renouncing things genuinely good in themselves which might hold us back at the stage of limited ownership, that is, ownership which does not yield to the free donation which is the life of God.

That is the only way to explain the apparently paradoxical fact that the Christian, who is under an obligation to love everything in God, can be led to sacrifice human love in its most natural form, the union of the sexes and family life. Surely, the reader may object, this union is an image of the union which God wishes to establish between himself and his creatures, between Christ and the Church? Surely it is supposed to become, in the sacrament of marriage, an individual realization, in one human couple, of the very love which binds Christ to the Church, and to imbue with God's charity the whole reality of human love?

That is absolutely true. However, it is no less true that many people feel called upon to renounce this genuine but necessarily limited realization of charity in order to devote themselves entirely and immediately to its total realization. In them, the image, even an image participating in what it represents, will be transcended by the impulse towards what it represents.

No doubt the day must come for all through death, the death of the husband or wife, when this transcendence cannot be avoided. Some people, probably the great

majority, need first to rest in the halfway house of partial realization, before one day reaching this moment of transcendence. Others feel called upon to do without this break in the journey, to aim immediately at total realization.

Besides, let us make no mistake about it, saints will be produced by marriage as well as by celibacy, and there is no reason to assume that the former will have suffered less than the latter. If God does not at first ask the greatest sacrifice of them, life with another, happy as it can be in certain respects, will demand many others which will form a more than sufficient compensation.

No doubt Christian couples and solitary ascetics are equally necessary to the Church as a whole. The testimony of the ascetics is there to prevent the married from sinking too deep into earthly happiness, even, indeed especially, when it is blessed by God. But the testimony of Christian couples is perhaps no less necessary to the ascetics in order to prevent their asceticism from becoming merely an end in itself and to prevent them from forgetting that they themselves have not renounced love as a whole but simply a limited, imperfectly clarified realization of it in favour of a purer and more immediately boundless one.

It is especially important for the ministers of Christ of whom the Church has required this renunciation to keep in mind the particular meaning which it has for them. They have not been asked to renounce marriage in order to renounce fatherhood, but, by giving up marriage, to renounce physical fatherhood in order to be freer to devote themselves to spiritual fatherhood. The celibacy of a minister of Christ is therefore not an automatic triumph merely because it has achieved a real sacrifice of

natural affections. The sacrifice must also prove its reality by displaying a charity whose universal generosity is really richer and purer than the generosity of a Christian father of a family.

But every ascetic's sacrifices will be measured by their contribution, not to an abstract love of God, which in the Gospel's eyes does not exist, but to a love of God manifested in the love of men. No one can renounce imperfect forms of this love itself except in order to achieve a form of it more closely related to the love shown us by God in Jesus Christ. The ascetic who has no heart left is not a saint; the saints had what the Curé d'Ars describes as "liquid hearts"! That is why, for the ascetics of Christian antiquity, if asceticism pushed to the extreme was bound to end in the hermit's state, complete detachment in complete solitude, the hermit's state itself was bound to lead to spiritual fatherhood in its most charismatic form, that is, most obviously marked by the gifts (charismata) of God for all men.

Conversely, bound as the Christian may be by the most legitimate worldly ties, he must never forget that he is a Christian. He can never shut himself up in his earthly happiness or even in his earthly task. His Christianity demands more than mere pauses in his existence in which he can regain contact with God through prayer, and draw the strength necessary for this existence. In these pauses themselves, and all through his life after them, he must also continually prepare to meet his God.

These two forms of prayer, prayer for our life in this world, for the tasks of this world in which we have to join, for the people we must love in it, and prayer that the

world may pass away, that Christ may appear and with him our true life which is hidden, with him, in God, can only be opposed to each other in the abstract. In practice they are just as inseparable in the natural rhythm of Christian life as the systole and diastole in the beating of the heart.

We cannot fertilize our human activity by prayer if the prayer does not put us completely in God's hands. On the other hand, prayer that claimed to put us in God's hands and made us indifferent to the needs and troubles of men would be very suspect, for how could it make us love God without making us love all that he loves?

But it remains true that the ultimate goal of all prayer is the coming of the kingdom of God, and hence first of all the sanctification of his name, so that, in a word, his will, his whole will and nothing but his will may be accomplished.

In any genuine prayer, the emphasis can never be on intercession or invocation, important as these may be. Admittedly, today and every day until the judgement and resurrection we must cry ceaselessly to God for our daily bread, our brothers' and our own, for pardon, for mutual reconciliation and finally for deliverance from the Devil, from the spirit of evil and all its manifestations. But this prayer has no value, indeed it has no meaning, unless it is always preceded, not only in time but above all in the importance which we attribute to it, by prayer for the sanctification of the divine Name.

In other words, in Christian prayer the emphasis is always on praise. The most urgent intercession or invocation must be incorporated in the eucharist, in the grateful, exultant adoration with which we praise God for

all that he has given us already, but above all "for his great glory".

That is what eternal life will be. And the only way to prepare here and now for eternal life is by anticipating it to some extent.

If God, if the knowledge of God, if, in a word, the love of God should interest us so strongly, it is not only because that is the way of salvation, for ourselves, for our fellow men and for the world. On the contrary, we should say that the salvation of the world and our own are only worthy of interest because God wishes to be known and loved, known and loved *for himself*.

In the last analysis, that is the great Christian revelation. For the Christian, for the Church, God is not just a "Good" to be revealed to men so that they can profit by it. God is Someone: someone who loves each and every one of us, who expects us all to love him, above all who expects each of us, this very day, without waiting any longer, to recognize his love and surrender to it as completely as possible.

Let us recall once again the climax of Christian initiation. The newly-baptized have been welcomed into the assembly of Christians to the sound of the chanting of the litanies, that is, the great universal, Catholic prayer which swells the love of God in our hearts to the ends of the earth, and leaves no human need outside his loving care. But they are welcomed in order to be finally associated in the great eucharist, the great upsurge towards God, towards the Father, in the Son and with him, by virtue of the Spirit diffused in our hearts. That is the theme of every Christian life, not just of every Christian prayer: the upsurge towards the Father, in Christ, by his love,

put in us by the Spirit. The liturgy is our great educator, not only because it makes us forget our own preoccupations and take on ourselves the preoccupations of all men, but above all because it makes us put them all on God's shoulders. For him who begins to know God as he wishes to be known, none of these things loses its importance, but acquires a different kind of importance, for it becomes clear that happiness, his own and others', is something that we only find when we have come to seek something else: the glory of God. It is of the glory of God that the Psalms and Canticles of the Church sing, the glory of God forms the end of every eucharist and the purpose of our lives, and it is the Glory of God that will be the resurrection of the dead.

> He has proved his love for us, by washing us clean from our sins in his own blood, and made us a royal race of priests, to serve God, his Father; glory and power be his through endless ages, Amen (Apoc. 1, 5-6).
>
> He whose power is at work in us is powerful enough, and more than powerful enough, to carry out his purpose beyond all our hopes and dreams; may he be glorified in the Church, and in Christ Jesus, to the last generation of eternity. Amen (Eph. 3, 20-21).
>
> Honour and glory through endless ages to the king of all the ages, the immortal, the invisible, who alone is God. Amen (1 Tim. 1, 17).