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Liturgy and Mysticism: The Experience of God in Eastern Orthodox Christianity

Let me begin this essay with a simple warning. I will be looking at the experience of God from within the tradition of the Orthodox Church, which is to say, that form of Christianity which obtains in much of the Near East, Greece and the Balkans, Russia, and most of Ukraine. That I am myself an Orthodox priest will shape my account. This is my bias. I make no apology for it, but it will, I think, help the reader to understand the following presuppositions: first, that there is an experience of God one may obtain; second, that the God so experienced was revealed once for all in Jesus of Nazareth; and, third, that the same continues to make himself known in and through the life of his Church.

This brings me to the definition of the first two nouns in my essay's title. "Liturgy" is relatively simple. It comes from the vocabulary that Christianity took over from the civic lexicon of Greek antiquity and, in its original sense, signified the "public work" that the citizens of a city of the later Roman Empire might be expected to perform, such as the road or wall construction that the emperors demanded of provincial towns. Christianity borrowed the term for its public worship. Thus "liturgy", in the Orthodox Church today, denotes in general all the rites and offices celebrated by clergy and people. Specifically, and with the added qualifier "divine", it signifies the preeminent Christian act of worship, the Eucharist or mass. This word, therefore, declares in effect that the experience of God in an Orthodox Christian context has a definite, "institutional" aspect. It is necessarily social, ordered, and objective.

The second word is more problematical. "Mysticism" is of relatively recent coinage, dating from no earlier than seventeenth century France. When not used today in a perjorative sense, it serves to indicate the individual or "subjective" experience of divine or at least "spiritual" realities. As such, and under the influence of the Enlightenment, and especially of Romantic exaltation of the individual, it normally stands in contradistinction to the "institutional". Perhaps this is especially the case here in America where our cult of the individual (together with our distrust of authority and traditional structures) runs very deep. "Institutional religion" is a phrase that still carries a considerable freight of disdain. Yet the roots of our modern word do not favor this popular dichotomy. "Mysticism" derives from the Greek term, mysterion, itself stemming perhaps (the origins are debated) from the verb, myo, meaning to close one's eyes. The adjective, "mystical" (mystikos), in the ancient world meant simply "hidden", "secret". It could, as "mystery" does in modern English, serve equally to denote the deeper reaches of religious experience, or something unknown but without any numinous significance - from the things of God to Agatha Christie, so to speak. For ancient religion, however, the "mysteries" referred quite specifically to the rites of initiation practiced by the different cults of - primarily - vegetation gods, for example the cult of Demeter at Eleusis, or of Osiris and Isis in Egypt, or the various Ba'als of the Near East. These were in turn not so very different from the initiation or puberty rites familiar to students of non-literate cultures - such as the Australian aboriginal practices so dear, for instance, to those works of Mircea Eliade which featured in my required reading at seminary (1), or the analysis of the Nuer in Sudan that I was obliged to study as an undergraduate. In an atmosphere of great solemnity and secrecy, a boy or girl is given the experience of the central myths of his or her people. The cults of late Roman antiquity were not, to be sure, so essential for the fabric of that society as for tribal life, but the initiates of an Eleusis or of an Isis or Cybele were often profoundly moved by the experiences they had received from the cult (2), and it would remain with them the rest of their lives. In any case, the elements contributing to the roots of our word, mysticism, were clearly both individual and collective, private and social.

Orthodox Christianity is fundamentally no different, which is no more than to say that its understanding of the experience of God is in accord with a universal, human pattern. The Church's central ceremonies, in particular the celebration of the Eucharist, are often both the locus and the touchstone for the individual believer's experience of God. Since I shall turn shortly to the illustration of this point, let me sum up these introductory remarks with an anecdote and a quotation.

Some twenty years ago I had the privilege of spending an academic year at the monastery of Simonos Petras on Mount Athos in northeastern Greece. Twenty monasteries occupy the peninsula, together with dozens of smaller groups

of monks and even, clustered mainly on the sheer, rocky slopes of the southern tip, beneath the peak that gives the peninsula its name, Christian hermits. The latter live in shacks that cling to the cliffs, or else inhabit the caves that dot the limestone crags. These men possess as a rule little other than the rags covering their bodies, perhaps a rickety chair and table, their prayer ropes (like the rosary beads of Roman Catholic piety), and an icon or two. They subsist on the occasional loaf of hard bread that the neighboring monasteries may remember to give them, or else on rusks and the few greens that they can find on the hillsides around them or raise in a carefully tended patch of earth cleared from among the stones. Their poverty and simplicity are absolute. Yet these men will still present themselves at the elaborate temples of the monasteries on the occasion of the Church's great feasts, or even every Sunday. Moreover, they will do so without experiencing any discontinuity. I can remember being struck the first time I witnessed the appearance of one of these old fellows at a vigil service celebrated by the monastery where I was staying. I could not help juxtaposing the poverty of his stony cave with the wealth of the monastery church, crowded with icons and gleaming with gold and silver; the simplicity of his life with the complexity of ceremonies that owe much to the etiquette of the Byzantine court; his rags with the rich vestments of the clergy; his silence with the thunder and harmonies of the monastery choirs; his stress on imageless prayer (3) with the sacred images crowding every available inch of the church's walls; his solitude with the crowds of monks and pilgrims filling the stalls lining the church and spilling into the aisles. What, I wondered at the time, could possibly bind these polarities together? The answer to that question will take us through the material to follow. For now, I would simply say that my hermit felt no discontinuity because he believed that both the ceremonies and the church building itself were an illustration - or better, icon, in the strict, theological sense of that term - of what was or should be going on within himself.

The promised quotation is from Bernard McGinn's recent book, The Foundations of Christian Mysticism, and it sums up my program in the pages to follow: "These distinguishing elements, ecclesiological setting, scriptural matrix, and sacramental practice, constitute the core of early Christianity and are integral to Christian mysticism." (4) How, in other words, my hermit arrived at his perception is the product of a long evolution, with its roots in the scriptures of Israel and the New Testament experience of Christ, that was brought to explicit expression in the unfolding of the Christian tradition.

I. THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES

A. The Mystery of Israel

In the book of Genesis, the patriarch Jacob wrestles with the angel of God and receives as reward for his labors a new name, Israel (Gn 32:28-30). The point I would like to underline is the double character of this name. It denotes both the man, Jacob, from whose loins are begotten the twelve tribes, and the nation of God's election. Israel is therefore a mysterious entity, at once summed up in the person of the patriarch, and thus a single being, and an aggregate of individuals bound to the common observance of the covenant with the "God of Jacob", a relationship given and sealed, according to the book of Exodus, at Mount Sinai. While the belief that all Israel was so related, that is, that all Jews were descended from a common ancestor, was doubtless a pious fiction, there can be no doubt that it was an article of faith rooted in the consciousness of the people of the covenant.

The covenant at Sinai is the nation Israel's core experience, the heart of the literature that Christians refer to as the Old Testament and foundational as well for the writings of the New. In Exodus 19 the people are gathered at the foot of the Mountain and warned, through Moses, to prepare themselves for God's descent upon the peak "on the third day". The divine appearance comes accompanied by lightening, "dense cloud", and a "trumpet blast". Moses ascends into the cloud and, in chapter twenty, receives the conditions of the covenant: the ten commandments. In chapter twenty-four, the covenant is sealed with a sacrifice, the sprinkling of the people with "the blood of the covenant", and by a communion meal with the "God of Israel" that takes place halfway up the mountain and includes Moses, Aaron, and the chosen elders. Finally, Moses goes up again into the cloud to confront the glory of the divine presence and receive instructions (chapters twenty-five and following) for the building of the tabernacle.

This is a sketch of the events. I would like to examine them under a few, selected headings that I think relevant to this essay.

B. Sinai as Theophany

Sinai is the Old Testament manifestation of God par excellence. The portrait in chapters nineteen and twenty-four, together with that in thirty-four and forty later on in Exodus, of the divine glory, the kabod or fiery stuff of divinity sheathed in cloud, that descends on the mountain top, which later on shines reflected off Moses' face as he descends from the heights (34:29), and which fills the newly constructed tabernacle at the book's end (40:34-35), is the paradigmatic image of Israel's experience of its God. It is of great importance that the account of Yahweh's manifestation I have just sketched has itself been shaped by the liturgical worship of Israel (5). Exodus nineteen's dark cloud of divine presence investing the peak and veiling the glory is likely related to - if not inserted in order to duplicate - the darkness within the windowless Holy of Holies of the temple at Jerusalem. The trumpet blast surely echoes the ritual trumpet summoning the faithful to prayer at the temple, the shofar, just as the forms of the covenant ceremonies of sacrifice and meal in chapter twenty-four must mirror the later forms of Israel's worship on God's other holy mountain, Zion: "For the Lord has chosen Zion, desiring this to be his home. Here I will stay forever; this is the home I have chosen" (Ps.132:13); and as the Psalmist says elsewhere: "I long to gaze on you in the sanctuary, and to see your power and glory" (Ps.63:2) (6).

Yet, if the story of the Sinai theophany has been shaped by the later cultus of the temple, it is still the case that many - if not most - of the later Old Testament accounts of divine manifestation look back to and deliberately recall Sinai. When Solomon dedicates his temple in I Kings 8:10-11, the cloud fills the sanctuary as the glory takes up its place within. In telling of his prophetic call, Isaiah sees the smoke and glory of the Presence filling the temple and all the earth (Is.6:1-4). Ezekiel's famous vision of the glory enthroned on the moving chariot of the cherubim (Ezk.1:26-28), which begins the prophet's ministry, obviously harks back to Sinai and, just as clearly, contributes to the vision of the heavenly court in Revelation 4-5, and later on as well to important currents in both Jewish and Christian thought - for example, the mysticism of the divine chariot, the merkabah, that preoccupies generations of Jewish seers (7), and, in Christian circles, to the mystical writings handed down under the name of Macarius of Scete that I shall take up again below (8). For Ezekiel, the glory of God which first shone on Moses finds its chosen place on Zion and, if the prophet speaks of it departing the temple on the eve of Jerusalem's capture by the Babylonians (Ezk.11), then his vision of Israel's restoration centers on the glory's return to the new and more perfect temple in a renewed Jerusalem (Ezk.40-44). Likewise, Malachi sees the eschatological manifestation of Israel's God occurring in the temple (Mal.3:1), while the rabbis later on will speak of the departure of the presence, the shekinah, on the occasion of the second temple's destruction by the Roman legions under Vespasian and Titus.

The Exodus account thus provided Israel not only with the image of its beginnings as a nation under God, but was as well an anticipation of the eschaton, the final and conclusive coming and revelation of the God of Jacob. The book of Isaiah speaks in chapter eleven of Zion as the "holy mountain" where God's presence will be known and whence the world will be "filled with the knowledge of Yahweh as the waters cover the sea" (11:9), and in chapter forty (a work, to be sure, of a different author) it is Exodus that clearly provides the model for the eschatological unveiling of divine splendor: "Then the glory of Yahweh shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it" (40:5). At the time of Christ, among the sectaries of the Qumran community, it is again Exodus nineteen that serves to inspire the celibate life in preparation for the last confrontation between the God of Israel and the powers of evil (9).

The Sinai theophany had other resonances as well. Divine epiphany in the tradition of Israel also signals - rather insists on - a relationship between the revealed God and his people. Let me then briefly touch on this relationship under the following three headings: covenant, kingdom, and eschaton.

C. Sinai as Covenant

"I am Yahweh your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt" opens Exodus 20 and immediately precedes the listing of the ten commandments. Although the Creator has entered freely into relation with a particular people, Israel, the relationship is at the same time made to depend on the observance of certain stipulations. It is reciprocal. Moreover, the reciprocity involved goes beyond what one might call strictly "religious" observations - such as the first and second commandments' insistence on no "other gods" and prohibition of images. It also forbids certain human behavior: murder, theft, adultery, lying, etc. Fulfillment of the covenant therefore depends on actions which at once involve the whole community, particularly as expressed in acts of worship, and the individual member. The so-called

"holiness code" of Leviticus (10) lays particular emphasis on the former, the rites of the tabernacle, but even in this book the second, ethical (for want of a better word) aspect is far from absent (11). Relationship with Yahweh is always both as society and as person. The tension, however, between the covenant demands and the capacity of Israel as a collective and an aggregate of individuals to respond to them, in short Israel's failure to "be holy as God is holy" (12), will lead the prophets to look for more in the future than simply the restoration of some "perfect" earlier state of affairs. Sinai in this case comes to serve as an image, a type or icon, of the eschaton, thus:

D. Sinai as Image of the Kingdom or Reign of God

In the view of at least some scholars of the Hebrew scriptures, the legal form of the alliance between Yahweh and Israel as it appears in different texts of the Torah, in particular Exodus and Deuteronomy, and in Joshua 24, seems to be based on the official treaties obtaining in the ancient Near East between royal overlords and subject or client states (13). If so, this would rather nicely support a theme that is universally recognized as recurring throughout the canon of Jewish and Christian scriptures: the God of Israel is the nation's one true and abiding king. The rise of a human king under Saul and David would later, at least retrospectively, thus introduce a note of tension - for example, God's remark in response to Samuel's distress at the people's desire for a mortal king: "It is not you, but me whom they have rejected from being king over them (I Sam.8:7)". The books of Samuel and Kings were in good part written as a chronicle of the manifest failure of the kings, whether in Jerusalem or in Samaria, to represent and effect faithfully Yahweh's sole reign over Israel. This in turn led to the elaboration of an idea of a king in whom God's presence in Israel would be perfectly and eternally expressed, thus the portrait of the Messiah in Isaiah 9 and 11 which we cannot read today without hearing the triumphant notes supplied by Handel. In so far as it assumes God's reign, the Sinai theophany thus also points toward the eschatological consummation and fulfillment of Israel's pilgrimage and all human history.

E. Sinai Recalled

It is the purpose of organized acts of worship to "remember", though I use that verb in rather a special way. Whether the worshippers are those Australian and Sudanese tribesmen I mentioned above initiating their teenagers, or Brahmin priests blessing a house in Delhi, or Christians celebrating the Lord's Supper in suburban Detroit, all of them are engaged in acts of remembrance. The Aborigines, the Nuer, and the Hindu are each recalling the "beginnings", the time of origins when the gods fixed the bounds and established the forms that govern human life (14). Christians - and I will return to this below - remember the night of the supper when Jesus inaugurated a new relationship between God and humanity. In every case, however, the remembering involved is not simply a matter of calling to mind certain events in the distant or mythical past in the same way, say, that older people might recall the Depression or World War II, or that anyone might remember a first love, or the birth or death of someone dear. I reach for my memories like someone reaching for an album, and flip through or cling to the fading echoes of times and people now gone. In the special kind of remembering which is worship, however, the past and time itself are understood as functioning differently. The boys and girls initiated into the ways of the tribe are not just told about the originating deeds of the gods, but rather believe -- together with the elders who are doing the telling -- that they have actually become present at those events. The re-telling of traditional worship is a literal re-present-ing of the past. Through the act of communal remembrance, the sacred past becomes a "now" in which the gods walk again among their people.

It is by this very process that the events at Sinai survived to be recorded in writing, and for it is this reason, too, that the sacred texts carry the stamp of Israel's public worship that I noted above. Because Sinai was the event that established the covenant between Yahweh and Israel, and as such was the proper "beginning" of Israel as a nation, a special people, it was necessarily "remembered", regularly and centrally, in Israel's liturgy. "Why is this night special above all nights?", asks the youngest child at the Passover supper celebrated today in Jewish households. "Because", the father replies, "on this day the Lord our God delivered us out of Egypt". In this exchange I would underline a couple of elements. First, it comes almost directly out of the text of Exodus itself (Ex.12:26-27) where it is installed as a kind of rubric, i.e., a special instruction spelling out a detail of liturgical worship. Indeed, virtually all of Exodus 12 and most of 13 constitute a veritable book of rubrics for the celebration of the first act of the exodus events, the Passover. Secondly, there is the apparently innocent phrase, "this night", where a great significance lies hidden in the everyday demonstrative,

"this". What the latter signals is exactly liturgical displacement or transcendence of time. Wherever the reader of the Old Testament comes across the phrases, "this day" or "today", he or she may be fairly certain (I am speaking generally, of course) that the text in question relates to the liturgy of ancient Israel. Virtually the whole of Deuteronomy is set in this liturgical tone. At the beginning of his speech to the people, Moses declares: "Listen, Israel, to the laws and customs that I proclaim in your hearing today" (Dt.5:1); and, near the end of the book; "See, today I set before you life and prosperity, death and disaster" (Dt.31:15). It is not difficult to imagine these very words being declaimed by King Josiah in the solemn assembly of all Israel before the temple in Jerusalem described in 2 Kings 23:14ff (15), and surely something like this "remembering" occurred during the regular, liturgical celebrations of the alliance with Yahweh that are reflected in the hymnal of the Jerusalem temple, the book of Psalms (16). The message of the prophets built on this communal memory (17).

F. The Prophets

That Israel failed to meet its covenant demands, both as a collective entity and an aggregate of individuals, is the first burden of the prophets' message. From Amos through Zechariah, the "memory" of Sinai continues to be vital and contemporary. "It was I", says Yahweh in Amos 3:1, "who brought you out of the land of Egypt", and the commandments given then inform the judgement the prophet declares against the people: "Because they have sold the virtuous man for silver...and push the poor out of their path" (Am.2:6-10). Formal worship is not enough - "I hate and despise your feasts!" - because something else is demanded as well: "Let justice flow like water and integrity like an unfailling stream" (5:21 and 24). Liturgy all by itself is not a true or sufficient "remembering". For an Amos, while the God of Sinai may indeed present himself at communal worship, that presence - in light of Israel's failures - comes not as communion, but as judgement (5:18-20).

Amos' call for the behavior, justice and integrity, that is part and parcel of the covenant is repeated by a succession of prophetic writings. Hosiiah adds the note of God's covenant love. Yahweh is the spouse and parent of Israel (Hos.2, 9, and 11). Isaiah repeats the condemnation of formalism in Amos' terms (eg., Is.1:10ff), and contributes his portrait of the future king in whom Israel will be reconciled with its God, and Eden established on Zion (Is.11:6-9). Jeremiah takes up Hosiiah's note of the covenant as a broken marriage and, the most intensely personal of all the great prophets, despairs finally of human capacity to respond to God's demands: "Can the leopard change his spots?...And you, can you do what is right?" (Jer.13:23). The answer is clearly "No", and the prophet thus looks forward to a future act of God that will write a "new covenant" within the human heart (31:31ff, and Ps.51:10-11). Ezekiel, the priest, recalls all the themes of his predecessors. He adds, together with his famous vision of the chariot, the picture of a new commonwealth centered on a rebuilt and perfect temple that will mark the abiding presence of Israel's God in a city whose name "in the future is to be 'Yahweh is there'" (Ezk.48:35). Deutero-Isaiah returns to the universalism perhaps implicit in Isaiah. His new exodus will affect "all mankind" (Is.40:5), and he adds to the glorious messiah the image of Yahweh's suffering servant - sometimes clearly Israel itself (eg.,44:1-2), but sometimes as well a mysterious individual (eg., 53:4-7) - through whom God's redemption will be achieved. Picturing the accomplishment of that triumph, Daniel sees Israel as a single, glorious figure at the throne of the Almighty, justified before the divine presence in a light in which all the righteous shall shine like stars (Dn.7:27 and 12:3).

G. Parting of the Ways

The book of Daniel belongs to the age of apocalyptic writings and to the period, lasting from roughly 200 B.C. to 200 A.D., that saw the tradition of the Hebrew scriptures eventually being carried on in two separate and all too often tragically hostile communities, Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism. Both Jew and Christian had to deal with the destruction of the temple by Titus' legions in 70 A.D., and it is exactly their respective handlings of the missing center of the cult - and thus place of God's abiding in Israel - that marks their schism. The approach taken by the rabbis is previewed in the twenty-fourth chapter of the Wisdom of Jesus, son of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus. God's eternal Wisdom is first of all presented as coming to dwell in Zion, thus in the temple, but shortly afterwards it is specifically identified with the Law received by Moses, the Torah. God's presence, his glory in Israel, is thus preeminently the holy book itself which becomes a kind of portable temple. The believer may enter into communion with the divine presence through study of the written word. This is the key to the process that would see the formation of the Mishnah and Talmud in the centuries following the temple's destruction. Shorn of a cultic center by the Romans, the rabbis elaborated a tradition

admirably suited to survive the enormities that would be inflicted on the Jews throughout their long exile. Christianity, on the other hand, would go another route.

III. THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITINGS

A. Christ

The person of Jesus of Nazareth, called messiah and son and word of God, is the sum and substance of the Christian tradition(s) represented by St. Paul and the writers of the Gospels. He is the message of the new faith, the heart of the "new Israel", the Church. Here I should like to proceed by using the same headings as in my discussion of Sinai, beginning with:

1. Christ as theophany

This is the burden of so many New Testament texts that a mere sampling will have to suffice. I will begin here, as in what follows, with the earliest Christian writings, the epistles of St. Paul.

In 2 Corinthians 3 and 4, Paul recalls the Sinai theophany quite specifically, in particular Exodus 34's account of Moses descending the mountain with his glowing face covered by a veil. Moses, Paul tells us, saw the "glory of Christ" and veiled his face lest its light, reflected from his countenance, trouble the Israelites (2Cor.3:13ff.). This glory, doxa in Greek, is the same radiance of divine presence, the kabod, that descended on Sinai wrapped about with the cloud, and which is later enthroned above the ark in the tabernacle and afterwards, in the temple, behind the veil cutting off access to the holy of holies. For Paul, that same glory is now revealed in the person of Jesus, save that now, because of Christ, it has become accessible. "All of us [Christians]", he writes in concluding the passage, "with unveiled faces reflect the glory of the Lord, being transfigured in his image from glory to glory" (3:18).

The story of the Transfiguration is arguably the central event in all three Synoptic Gospels, and it is literally central to Mark, the gospel which is today generally held to have been the earliest. After Peter's confession acknowledging Jesus as messiah in Mark 8, the evangelist has Jesus promising that some who are present with him will "see the Kingdom of God come with power" (9:1). "Six days later", Christ leads Peter, John and James up with him to a high mountain (traditionally Mt. Tabor in northern Palestine) where he is "transfigured before them" (9:2-4). His face, says Matthew, became "brighter than the sun" (Mt. 17:2), and Luke adds the specific recollection of the kabod: "they saw his glory" (Lk.9:32). Christ in his splendor is flanked, in all three accounts, by the two greatest of the prophets, Moses and Elijah, who each met God atop a mountain - Moses on Sinai and Elijah on Horeb (I Kings 18). A cloud, again as in Exodus, covers the scene of the encounter. The message of the episode is quite clear. The light coming from Jesus' face is the glory that was revealed to Moses. Put another way: Christ is the "place" of the divine presence and abiding. He is the true temple.

The note of temple brings me to verse fourteen of John 1: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt [literally, "tabernacled", eskenosen] among us, and we beheld his glory..." The verb, "tabernacled", recalls of course the tent of meeting, whose blueprint Moses had received atop the Mountain in Ex.25:9 ff., that was to serve as the shelter of the ark and dwelling place of the kabod during Israel's wandering (Ex.40), and whose place was later taken by Solomon's temple (I Kings 8). Together with this recollection of Sinai, the first chapter of John also picks up on another and related theme from Genesis. At the end of the story of Nathaniel's recruitment which concludes the chapter, Jesus tells his new disciple: "And you shall see the heavens open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the son of man" (Jn 1:51). This is an allusion to Jacob's dream, in Genesis 28, of the ladder that unites heaven and earth. On waking, the patriarch built an altar on the site and called the place Bethel, "house of God". John's Jesus is thus declaring himself the axis mundi, the meeting of heaven and earth. He is the "Bethel", the place of theophany.

2. Christ as Kingdom

Another and related point that the Transfiguration narrative in Mark wishes to make is that, in Jesus, the

Kingdom of God has come and is present "in power". The same Gospel has Christ's public ministry beginning with the declaration: "The time is fulfilled. Repent, for the Kingdom of God is among you" (Mk.1:15). The events which then come between this announcement and the Transfiguration - in brief, Christ's miracles, from the healing of Peter's mother-in-law to the raising of Jairus' daughter to the walking on water complete with the latter story's echo of Ex.3 and the divine name ("Fear not, I AM"; Mk.6:51), to the feeding of the five thousand in the desert as God fed Israel in the wilderness - all contribute to the evangelist's identification of Jesus with the eschatological event typified, or foreshadowed, in the Exodus accounts of Moses' call, Israel's deliverance at the Passover, the wilderness, and the covenant at Sinai. Here, says Mark, is Israel's king, Immanuel, in whom the reign of God is being inaugurated. The echoes of exodus, kingdom, and theophany are again particularly clear in John's gospel. One might recall especially the different "I am" sayings that the fourth evangelist ascribes to Jesus. Christ declares himself "the truth", "way", "life", "the true bread from heaven", "shepherd" (i.e., "king"), "door", "light", "vine" (a traditional image of Israel), and "resurrection", as well as the absolute "I AM" of John 18:5.

3. Christ as Covenant

As himself kingdom or reign of God, Jesus appears in New Testament literature as the locus, of humanity's relationship and communion with God. He is in effect the divine reply to Jeremiah's recognition of human incapacity to fulfill the covenant demands placed on Israel, and so as well the realization of that prophet's vision of a new and interior relationship, a law written on the heart. This theme is explicitly picked up by St. Paul's remark that Christ Jesus is our "yes" or "Amen" to God (2 Cor.1:19-20, cf. Rev.3:14). God is revealed and enters into relation with the believer "through Christ in the Spirit". The nature of the new relationship effected by Jesus is signaled in the Synoptic Gospels by the tearing of the temple veil at the instant of his death on the cross (eg., Mk.15:38). Hidden and inaccessible under the old dispensation, the Glory or Shekinah is, as it were, released from its confinement in the new. Once and for all, to use the language of the Epistle to the Hebrews, having entered in the heavenly sanctuary through the veil of his flesh, Jesus becomes the mediator of a new and more perfect covenant (Heb.9:12-15). Tabor and Golgotha, transfiguration and the cross (18), are together the new Sinai. They create the new community.

4. Christ remembered

The Eucharist is the recollection and renewal of the new covenant. St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians is only a generation or so removed from Christ's death on the cross. Yet, in the tenth and eleventh chapters of the epistle, the apostle is already writing about the Eucharist as the central activity of the Church at Corinth. In I Cor.10:16-17, Paul writes:

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not communion in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not communion in the body of Christ? Because the bread is one, we who are many are one body, for all of us partake of the one bread.

There is, then, an organic or "mystical" aspect to the common meal. By sharing in one loaf and cup, the believers are made one with Jesus. In the next chapter, Paul makes it clear that he is not the inventor of this idea. "For I received", he says, using the language of a tradition already well established,

From the Lord what I have also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus Christ on the night in which he was betrayed took bread and, having blessed it, gave it and said, "Take, eat: this is my body which is broken for you. Do this for the remembering [anamnesis] of me." (I Cor.11:23-24).

The last phrase points back to my discussion earlier of liturgy and "remembering". Jesus becomes present in the Christian anamnesis, and, together with him, the "mighty acts" of his death and resurrection that created the new community of the Messiah. Exodus 24, the "blood of the covenant" that Moses sprinkles on the people to seal the alliance with Yahweh, is specifically recalled as Paul continues: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink [of it] for the remembering of me." (verse 25). The Christian Eucharist is the "recalling" of Christ and

so, with his presence, it is also the renewal of the new relationship between God and humanity that Jesus inaugurated. In him, God and humanity are joined. God becomes present with us in Jesus. Through its act of communal "remembrance", the Christian assembly brings Christ into its midst and so becomes itself the "place" of theophany and the holy mountain (19).

It is exactly because of the theophanic nature of the Christian communion service that the apostle can turn in the following verses and recall just that note of judgement that the prophets underlined in relation to Israel's celebration of its alliance with Yahweh:

Whoever then would eat this bread or drink of the cup of the Lord unworthily will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord...Each person should examine himself...for whoever eats and drinks unworthily eats and drinks judgement for himself" (I Cor.11:27-29).

Just as for Amos, Isaiah and the other prophets, the manifestation of divine presence is for Paul a moment of crisis, both grace and a demand.

In the Acts of the Apostles the phrase, "breaking of bread", occurs in contexts that suggest it is already a terminus technicus for the Eucharist (20). Acts' opening chapters portray the Christian community as still in its original, Jewish matrix, still attending worship at the temple and largely unconscious - until Saul's conversion and mission, and Peter's vision (21) - of any break with the old covenant Israel. The "breaking of bread" is the one, uniquely Christian act of worship, a badge of sorts for the people of the Messiah. But it is also more for Luke than a kind of community signature. It is the means through which the risen Lord becomes present to his faithful. This is illustrated with particular force in the story of the two disciples who are sadly leaving Jerusalem after the crucifixion (Lk.24:13-35), and meet a stranger on the road. The new companion proves so fascinating that he wins a dinner invitation, and it is at supper that he reveals his identity: "He took bread and blessed and broke it and gave to them" (v.30). At that moment, Luke writes, the disciples' "eyes were opened and they recognized him" (v.31), knew that they were in the company of the risen Jesus. The episode concludes with them running back to the eleven at Jerusalem in order to tell what had happened "on the road, and how he [Jesus] was made known to them in the breaking of the bread" (v.35). That Luke intended his readers to draw the connection to the Eucharist is further underlined by the four verbs he uses in verse 30, "take, bless, break, give", the very same that appear in his account of the Last Supper (22:19).

The Gospel of Mark puts these verbs to similar work in its version of the feeding of the five thousand (Mk.6:41). In the typically allusive and compressed style of this evangelist, the four verbs, together with the gospel's references earlier to the fact that the action is taking place in a "wilderness area" (vv.31,32, and 35), serve to make a double point. They direct the reader at once back in sacred history to the story of God's feeding of Israel with manna in the wilderness (Ex.16), and forward to the Church's eucharist. This Jesus, Mark is saying, who fed the multitude with the five loaves, is the very same who fed the people of the exodus then, and who feeds his people now in the anamnesis of his last supper, death, and resurrection. These two points are driven home explicitly at much greater length in the sixth chapter of John's gospel. The latter begins with the same story of the miraculous multiplication, this time "on a mountain" (v.3), but then goes on for thirty-three verses (vv.26-59) to explain the meaning of the miracle: "I am the bread that has come down from heaven" (vv.41 and 51); and "who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has life in him, and I shall raise him up on the last day" (v.54); and "this is the bread that has come down from heaven, not like the manna your fathers ate in the wilderness and died. Whoever eats this bread will live forever" (v.58). This is the territory of Exodus and Sinai, even complete with a mountain, but now appearing in the context of the new people of God who are to find their nourishment, the tabernacling of their God both with them and within them, in the meal of the eucharistic assembly.

B. The Church

1. The Mystery

Like Israel in the Hebrew scriptures, the Christian Church is at once a single person and a community of persons. To begin with the latter, the word "church" itself - in Greek ekklesia - is taken, like liturgy, from the language

of Greco-Roman political life. The term originally denoted the voting assembly of the ancient Greek polis. It therefore assumes a society, indeed precisely a city, and was surely taken up by the earliest Christian writers in order to underline the new community's claim to be a nation, the "Israel of God" (Gal.6:19), or a city, the new Jerusalem (cf. Rev.21:2). As the "place" of theophany, the Church is the new Zion. "For you have not," writes the author of Hebrews, contrasting the Israelites at the foot of Sinai with the new people of the Messiah,

drawn near to a tangible mountain and burning fire and thick darkness...but to Mount Zion and the city of the living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem and ten thousands of angels in festal assembly (Heb.12:18-23).

"Zion" recalls the temple imagery I touched on above. In the New Testament, this imagery is applied to the Church. Let me cite two instances, beginning with I Peter 2:4-9. In the latter passage, the assembly is "the holy priesthood that offers the spiritual sacrifices", and the believers are also and at the same time "living stones making a spiritual house", which is to say, a temple (22). Exactly the same thought occurs in my second text, Ephesians 2:19-22:

You are citizens and part of God's household. You are part of a building that has the apostles and prophets for its foundation and Christ Jesus himself for its main cornerstone. As every structure is aligned on him, all grow into one holy temple in the Lord; and you too, in him, are being built into a house where God lives, in the Spirit. (23).

The cornerstone of the Church, the new temple "in the Spirit", is the person of Jesus. As Israel is both a nation and the man, Jacob, so is the Christian Church indeed the new society, the "holy nation" and consecrated temple of God's indwelling, but it is such because and only because it is understood, in a sense, as the extension of the risen and glorified Christ. Jesus, according to Colossians 1:17-19, is the one "who holds all things together", and all are "reconciled through him and for him". He is the meeting place of creation, or rather, of the creation broken down and remade through his death and resurrection (Eph.1:9-10). He is therefore the secret, mysterion, of God's plan for the universe hidden from before the worlds and "now revealed to his holy ones" (Col.1:26). "The mystery", Colossians continues, "is Christ among you" (v.27). The community and Jesus thus constitute a single, living organism. Different metaphors for this perception appear in the New Testament texts, among them the "one, new man" of Ephesians 2:15-16, the "body of Christ" that St. Paul employs in Romans 12 and I Cor.12, and the single "vine" of John 15:1 ff. To the latter I would add the consistent language of indwelling and unity that suffuses the fourth gospel, for example Jn 17:22-24. These are metaphors, to be sure, but the modern reader would err in not recognizing that the sense the biblical authors wish to convey is of the new reality which has been brought about by the "mighty deeds" of God in Christ.

2. The Mysteries

Ta mysteria, the mysteries, is the original Greek expression for what Latin-speaking Christianity translated later as sacramenta, "sacraments". They pertain first and preeminently to the activity of the Church in solemn assembly, i.e., the rites of worship, and especially to the actions of initiation (Baptism) and the blessing of the bread and wine (Eucharist).

New Testament literature, perhaps especially in the Pauline and Johannine books (including Revelation in the latter), consequently places great emphasis on these two sacraments. Since I have already spent some time on the Eucharist, let me add just a couple of points with respect to it, particularly from Revelation. The famous picture in chapters four and five that this book draws of the heavenly court, which Anatole France and Mark Twain had such fun with, may have been at least partially derived from the eucharistic assembly of the early Church (24). The book begins with a vision "on the Lord's day" (1:10), the day of the Eucharist, and concludes with a portrait of the new Jerusalem descending from heaven (21:2). Its final verses contain what appears to be a deliberate echo of the ancient church's Aramaic formula, "our Lord is coming" (maran atha), that was invoked at the Eucharist (25). The "is coming" is especially significant in view of this book's preoccupation with the eschaton. Quite simply, the last things have already begun. Again, I would point to the present tense of Christ's declaration in Rev.3:20: "I am coming", where the same verse concludes: "and I will sup with you". The verb "sup", deipno, is certainly meant to recall the eucharistic meal (26). In other words, the celestial Jerusalem and heavenly court are, at least in anticipation, already present in the Church gathered for the Lord's meal. Space and time become elastic in accordance with the alchemy of liturgy. They are stretched in order to include both the beginning and the end, the eschatological blessing and judgement, within the

present moment.

If the Eucharist is the epiphany of the Church, that is, of the latter as the eschatological city and world, then Baptism provides the foundation, the beginning and continuity of the Christian's life as member of the new Israel. As St. Paul notes in Rom.6:3-14, it is through the baptismal immersion that the Christian is initiated into Christ's death and resurrection, "dies" to sin and the "old man" (fallen Adam), and is made alive again in the new Adam. This is the "putting on" or "clothing" with the risen Jesus that establishes the believer as part of the "one new man", as all together one in Christ and heirs of Abraham (cf. Gal.3:23-29). The baptismal waters also seem to be in the back of Paul's mind when he compares his Corinthians to the Israelites in the wilderness, drinking from the one rock that is Christ (I Cor.10:1-5). This particular use of Exodus, together with all four Evangelists' deliberate juxtaposition of Christ's passion and resurrection with the Passover, at the very least opens the way toward the later and typically patristic explanation of the Cross and Baptism as fulfillment of the Exodus events. The latter are seen functioning as types, pointers toward God's greater and more perfect intervention in Jesus' death and rising. Christian initiation thus looks back toward Christ's passion and the Exodus, with the waters of the font answering to both Christ's tomb and the Red Sea (27). Luke completes the picture in Acts 2 by presenting the descent of the Holy Spirit as corresponding with the Jewish feast of Pentecost, the fiftieth day after Passover that commemorated (in the first century, at least) the giving of the Law on Sinai (28). The giving of the Spirit is thus linked indissolubly with the act of Baptism (Acts 2:38-41).

References to water and the Spirit are frequent in the fourth gospel. Jesus' own baptism prompts the Forerunner's witness to the descent of the Spirit in John 1:32-34. It is the mystery of rebirth in "water and the Spirit" that Jesus reveals to Nicodemus in chapter three (3:1-21, esp.vv.3-8) and, in chapter four's conversation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, it is Christ's request for a drink that triggers the revelation of the water that "turns into a spring inside" the drinker, "welling up to eternal life" (4:10-14). Likewise, the pool at Bethzatha and healing of the paralytic leads to the statement that the "Father...has made the Son the source of life" (5:26). The sequence continues in chapter seven. Here the action is based on the feast of tabernacles with its climactic blessing of waters, recalling Ex.17:1-7 and the lifegiving stream prophesied in Ezekiel 47:1ff and Zechariah 14:8. In this scene Jesus declares, "on the last and greatest day of the feast", that "if anyone is thirsty, let him come to me. Let the man come and drink who believes who in me". The Evangelist then adds: "He was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive" (7:37-39). The Paraclete passages later in the Gospel (29) find their climax in the mutual abiding, of the Son in the Father and of both in the believer, that is the core of John 17. This abiding or presence within the faithful is nothing less than the glory, *doxa*, shared between Father and Son "from before the foundation of the world" (17:5 and 22-24). This glory is clearly connected with the Spirit whom the risen Christ breathes on his disciples in John 20:22, and whom the believers are called upon to acquire, in their turn, through the mystery of Baptism: the rebirth "through water and the Spirit" (3:5).

C. The Christian

Here my remarks must necessarily be brief. The sacred writings, whether of the Hebrew scriptures or of the New Testament, do not speak much at all about the individual in contradistinction to the community. This is certainly one reason why any discussion of the experience of God in Orthodox Christianity cannot but have an ecclesial dimension. Yet still, every human community is an aggregate of persons, and every human being is unique and unrepeatable. While the context of the experience, of faith itself, is necessarily the "people of God", the movement and stirrings of faith remain hidden in the secret places of the individual, human heart.

Thus it is there, in the heart, that Jeremiah locates the new covenant to come, that Christ finds the source of good and evil (Lk.6:45), and there again that St. Paul sees the theatre of the Spirit's activity in the new dispensation, the "groanings too deep for words" and the cry of "Abba" (Rom.8:14ff.). It does not seem to me to be stretching the texts too far to say that the presence of the new covenant within the believer becomes his or her innermost truth. "Now it is no longer I who live", says Paul, "but Christ who lives in me" (Gal.2:20). This is the "substance of things hoped for, the proof of things unseen" (Heb.11:1). It is Christ in the Spirit who is the Christian's bedrock, the secret - mysterion - who lives and moves in the deeps of the heart. The relationship cannot but be personal and intimate if it is to be true at all.

The hidden or secret presence in the heart is surely suggested by the images of the leaven, the mustard seed, the

hidden pearl and lost coin found in the Synoptic Gospels. These images of the Kingdom indicate what is at once an objective reality, identified with Jesus himself (present in his Church), and a subjective experience. The same may be said of the divine glory. As was clear in both the Sinai accounts and the story of the Transfiguration, the glory signals the objective manifestation of divinity, God's light, fire, splendor, etc., which it would be abusive to "dematerialize", as it were, so as to turn it into a kind of ideogram for virtue, or for some other "spiritual" quality (30). Yet, this same glory is also to be known experientially, within. St. Paul was talking about something quite specific and real to him when he spoke in 2 Cor.4:6 of the Christian seeing the glory of God in the face of Christ (31). It is that same glory, as in John 17:22-24, which the evangelist understands as having been given to the believer. In potential at least, and through Baptism, the believer becomes himself or herself the "place" of the glory. By implication, therefore, every Christian is called upon to become a "theophany". Put another way, Sinai and Zion are also, and necessarily, interior realities. The idea of the inner "mountain of the knowledge of God" -- to use a phrase coined by Christian writers some centuries later -- is at the very least implicit in the New Testament.

I will add that I do not think my last statement is as bold as it might seem. Sinai and Zion are, after all, connected in the Hebrew scriptures with the language and experience of the temple liturgy. The temple in turn is located atop Zion, the holy mountain, and the holy of holies corresponds to the peak of Sinai, just as the "thick darkness" (cf.Ps.18:11) of the windowless sanctuary answers to the cloud that descends on the mountain of revelation. In the new dispensation, and by virtue of his or her baptism into Christ, the Christian possesses that same presence within. He or she becomes thus, each one, the temple of God, the place of his indwelling. St. Paul sounds this note explicitly, twice, in I Corinthians: "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that the Spirit of God dwells in you...the temple of God is sacred and you are that temple" (I Cor.3:16-19) (32). I would therefore sum up the New Testament's use of temple language by observing that the idea of the temple is understood as applying at one and the same time to Christ, to the Church, and to the Christian: Christ is temple; the Church is temple; the believer is temple. The threefold sense of temple emerges quite specifically in certain fourth century writers, but its origins are discernable in the earliest layers of the Christian tradition. Secondly, the idea of the believer as a temple says something important about the nature of the Christian calling, that is, that it includes the vision or "mystical experience" of God. The experience, or at least its potential, awaits within the believer. The whole aim of the Christian life will thus be described later on as the bringing forth of - even the "giving birth" to - the glory of God in Christ already given, as a kind of seed, to the believer in Baptism (33), and nourished by the Eucharist. The sacraments direct me back, thirdly, to my starting point, public cult and private prayer. Liturgy and mysticism are not clearly separable domains. They are both grounded in the "mysteries" of the Christian faith, most particularly in the single mystery of Jesus of Nazareth which is given at Baptism, revealed in the anamnesis of the eucharistic assembly, and discovered - given prayer and fasting - at the altar of the heart. The assembly (objective institution) and believer (individual and subjective) in a sense mirror each other. Both are "temples" -- the temple, in fact -- of God because they both at once reflect and manifest the one true temple and priest, Jesus Christ.

While this mutual dependence and interrelation -- I might almost say, in deference to a later expression from trinitarian theology, compenetration or circumincessio -- of the "three temples" and one temple takes its start from central themes in the scriptural canon, it also has a continuous history in Eastern Christian literature from the first generations after the New Testament to the present day.

IV. THE EASTERN CHRISTIAN TRADITION: MARTYRS TO HESYCHASTS

A. Martyrs and Gnostics: from A.D. 100 to 313

1. The Martyrs

The word martyr means a witness. In the ancient world, the term came from the legal tradition where it meant, as today, one who offers testimony in a court of law (34). During the two centuries before Christianity, however, it had acquired an additional meaning among the devout Jews whose experience of persecution under the Hellenistic kings of Antioch are recorded in the books of the Maccabees. In their context, to be a martyr in this special sense meant to bear witness at the cost of one's life to the truth of God's law, the Torah. It was not a difficult step for them to understand this sacrifice as also a sacrifice in the proper, cultic sense of the word, a holy offering that aided in the reconciliation of God

with his people (35). The book of Revelation, in particular, picks up this language in order to apply it to Christ (36). Jesus, of course, is also the priest of this sacrifice - thus one of the central themes of the Epistle to the Hebrews (37).

The early Church's language of martyrdom thus embraced from its beginnings those elements of temple, liturgy, and indeed of theophany that I have emphasized throughout this essay. This is most significant, because it was the martyrs who were regarded as the heroes of the Faith, the models of Christian life. To conclude one's sojourn in this world with a martyr's death was the great desideratum of every devout believer. Two examples from the second century will suffice to illustrate these points, Ignatius of Antioch (+ ca. 115) and Polycarp of Smyrna (+ ca. 165).

Ignatius certainly supported the importance of the liturgy and sacraments. The seven letters he wrote on the way to his martyrdom in Rome are characterized by a repeated emphasis on the necessity of unity. This unity Ignatius saw as summed up and made present in the eucharistic assembly presided over by the bishop:

Do nothing without the bishops and the presbyters...but let there be one prayer in common, one supplication, one mind, one hope...Hasten to come together all of you to one temple, even God, as to one altar, even to one Jesus Christ. (38)

Temple and altar are used here for the Father and Christ, respectively. Elsewhere Ignatius use "temple" to indicate the believers as a group, that is, as the assembled church: "You are stones of the temple, which figured beforehand for a building of God the Father" (39), and, again in the same epistle, of the believers severally as the place of the divine indwelling: "Let us therefore do all things as knowing that he dwells in us, to the end that we may be his temples, and he himself may be in us as our God" (40). Here again are the three senses of temple I noted above: God (or Christ), the Church, and the believer. All three meet in what is for Ignatius the center and glue of Christian life, "the medicine of immortality" (41) and "one bread of God" (42): "For there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ and one cup of his blood: there is one altar, as there is one bishop" (43).

But one might object that everything said so far points in the direction of the institution, the objective rites of the Christian community and their ministry. All is liturgical. The answer to Ignatius' seeming lack of the personal and experiential lies in his understanding of his forthcoming martyrdom, for it is there, in the act of martyria itself, that this early Christian writer sees the culmination not only of his faith in Christ, but of that participation in Jesus which is given in the Eucharist. "Grant me nothing more", he writes in his letter to the Roman church, "than that I be poured out a libation to God while there is still an altar ready" (44). Later on he adds: "I am God's wheat, and I am ground by the teeth of wild beasts that I may be found pure bread of Christ" (45). Here the revelation of Jesus' presence in the eucharistic bread is recapitulated in the person of the martyr. And it is not only the Eucharist which finds its recapitulation, but the baptismal waters as well: "There is no fire of material longing in me, but only water living and saying within me: 'Come to the Father'" (46). Ignatius longs for his ordeal because it is there that he sees the fulfillment of his vocation as a Christian, and that vocation is, again, nothing less than to become himself a temple, an epiphany.

That this man's desire was not some pathological aberration, but was instead rooted in the consciousness of the early Church, is evident in the account of another episcopal martyrdom, that of Ignatius' younger contemporary, Polycarp of Smyrna (47). In this document, written shortly after Polycarp's death, there is a systematic effort to assimilate the bishop's trial and execution to the story of Jesus' passion and death. My own particular point comes toward the end of the story. Bound to the stake and about to be set alight, Polycarp offers up a prayer whose resemblance to the consecratory prayer of the Christian Eucharist is unmistakable:

O Lord almighty, Father of thy beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ...I bless thee...that I might receive a portion amongst the number of martyrs in the cup of thy Christ...May I be received among them in thy presence this day as a rich and acceptable sacrifice. (48).

I would underline: "cup of thy Christ", "this day", and "sacrifice". Finally, the authors of the Letter add a paragraph describing the martyr's death that combines the notes of Eucharist and incense offering:

[The fire built]...a wall around the body of the martyr, and it was there in the midst [of the fire]...like a loaf in the oven...For we perceived such a fragrant smell, as if it were the wafted odor of frankincense

or some other precious spice. (49)

The martyr as he appears in these two instances provides a clear instance of the interweaving of ecclesial and mystical themes. There were, however, other and not entirely unrelated avenues for the believer to make his or her own the experience proclaimed in Christ and celebrated in the liturgy. One of the most important, at least for the subsequent history of the Christian Church East and West, was articulated by the great writers of late second and early third century Alexandria. Their efforts to address both the complex phenomenon of Gnosticism within Christianity, and the philosophical tradition (especially later Platonism) of pagan society, led to the articulation of the ideal which heads the following section.

2. The Christian Gnostic: beginnings of the contemplative tradition

There has been too much attention focused in recent years on the gnostic movement for me to attempt dealing with it here (50). It will have to suffice merely to note that there was, on the one hand, something positive at work in gnostic literature, what I might call its passionate interest in the subject and (to use this word in a very broad sense) personal, together with, on the other hand, the fact that this very concern in the exaggerated - not to say rococo - form it usually took posed the danger of divorcing Christianity from its foundations in the Hebrew scriptures. Two figures from early Christian Alexandria, Clement (+ ca.215) and Origen (+ 253), sought to address the danger while at the same time trying to salvage what they saw as valuable in the gnostics' concerns. What, they asked, do the sacred texts of scripture, in particular the history and acts of Israel and Israel's God, have to do with the believer in Jesus Christ? How does history, in other words, become "history for me" (51)? In forming their reply, the Alexandrian writers had recourse to a technique of exegesis, allegory, already well developed by pagan writers for the classic stories of the gods, as in Homer and Hesiod, and in addition they could and did look to the precedent of allegory's application to scripture set by the first century Jew, and fellow Alexandrian, Philo (52). They also partook of a trend at work in their times, what recent scholarship has described as a widespread tendency toward "interiorization", a general interest in subjectivity that characterized the thought in particular of late antique philosophers, especially the Platonists (53). I choose to sum up this trend under the general heading of microcosm and macrocosm.

The idea was in fact very old in Greek philosophy by the third century A.D. It lay behind Plato's portrayal of the ideal state in the Republic as the rational man writ large, just as later on the Stoics took it over and made it a prime tenet of their cosmology and ethics. It becomes especially prominent, though, in the work of Origen's compatriot and contemporary, and the founder of what is termed Neoplatonism, Plotinus (+ ca.260). The latter's brilliant fusion of Plato's hierarchy of being with Stoicism's biological model of the cosmos, the universe as one living being, would exercise profound influence on the thought of succeeding thinkers down to the present day (54). For my purposes here, it is the correspondence between the inner and outer worlds that is significant. "We are each of us," Plotinus writes in Enneads III.4.3, "a kind of spiritual universe... abiding Yonder...while tied to the lower". In consequence, he also saw the "ascent to the One", to divinity, as an interior process, a flight into the depths of the self where, "suddenly", in the innermost chambers of the intellect, the light of the One would manifest itself (55). Preparation for this encounter entailed a program of exercise (ascesis) that included purification (katharsis) from the passions of the body, training of the intellect in order to prepare for contemplation (theoria) of the intelligible world of the forms, and finally a putting away (aphairesis, apophasis) of everything that is not the One in order to wait for the latter's "dawning, as the eye waits on the rising of the sun" (56). Plotinus on occasion recalls the school of Advaita Hinduism, with his One answering to the Indian sages' Atman, the deep self, the "Thou art that" of the Upanishads (57). Yet, the passive quality of attendance on the rising of the One suggests something other than an unqualified monism. Plotinus' One is transcendent, and that emphasis on divine transcendence - which he shared with other and earlier antique philosophers (58) - would be gladly taken up by Christian writers. They would also find a place for his (and his predecessors') use of the themes of micro- and macrocosm, ascesis, theoria, apophasis and aphairesis, and the language which divided creation into intelligible and sensible.

Clement of Alexandria took up all these elements into his portrait of the Christian gnostic. A predecessor of Plotinus, he of course did not borrow his language of transcendence from the later writer, but took it chiefly from Philo, as well as from the general environs of late antiquity (59). The unknowable God, however, is revealed in his Word, especially in the Word incarnate. Clement makes full use of the terminology of contemplation, incorporating into his

account of Christian life Plato's tripartite division of the soul in the Phaedrus, together with the threefold ascent of the soul: from purification (of the passions) to contemplation of the universe, to the vision of God. For the latter, he borrows the notions of aphairesis and apophasis in order to insist that the encounter with God takes place beyond the frame of created being (60). Earlier on, with respect to purification, he takes over and begins the process of Christianizing the important Stoic idea of dispassion, apatheia, that would feature prominently in Eastern Christian literature ever afterward. Allegorical exegesis is thus put to work in order to arrive at a picture of the "Christian gnostic" as one in whom the incarnate Word's presence in the world is revealed and active (61).

That Christ is revealed in the perfected Christian signals something important. Clement's gnostic is not in pursuit solely of a private and incommunicable experience. He is also a "man for others", someone who grows in love as well as in knowledge, and who thus, as teacher and mystagogue, anticipates the monastic elders and holy men who would play a central role in Eastern Christian life in the following centuries (62). In addition, while liturgy per se is not much to the fore in Clement's works, the idea of the Church is scarcely missing. At one point he observes that the Church is the presence in this world of the age to come (63) and, in another text where he recalls Sinai and Zion as sites of theophany, he asks Christ to "shepherd us to your holy mountain, the Church, which is exalted above the clouds and touches the heavens." (64) Turning to the theme of the Christian as temple, he invokes the theme of macro-microcosm in order to describe the gnostic as the temple of the Holy Spirit and place of the divine glory (65), and elsewhere appeals explicitly to I Cor. 3:16 and 6:19-20:

"Know ye not", says the apostle, "that ye are the temple of God?" The gnostic is consequently divine and already holy, God-bearing and God-borne...Now the temple is great, as the Church, and it is small, as the man who preserves the seed of Abraham. He therefore who has God resting in him will not desire anything else. (66)

If this is clearly in continuity with scriptural themes, it just as obviously points up at least the potential for a gap between the Church's visible hierarchy of ministries headed by the bishop (especially the latter as he appears in Ignatius) and a hidden hierarchy of the grace-filled.

The same tension is evident in Origen, Clement's more famous and influential successor. A contemporary of Plotinus and fellow student with him of the same master of philosophy, Ammonius Sakkas (67), Origen wished to justify the universe of God's creation, together with the scriptures that tell both of it and of the history of Israel. The key to his response to gnostic and pagan challenges to Christianity lies in his understanding of the divine Logos, the second person of the Trinity. It is the Logos who has made the physical world in order both to house the spirits that had fallen from an original, pre-cosmic communion with him, and to provide instruction for them. This instruction is encoded, as it were, first of all in the very structures of the material world, and then, more intensively, in the pedagogy of progressive revelation that is the history of Israel (68), and finally in the Logos' own taking on of flesh in the Incarnation. All things are of the Word, and everything thus is a function of the Incarnation (69).

This was a singularly powerful intellectual accomplishment with enormous and lasting influence. Yet, Origen's spiritualism, in particular his myth of a pre-cosmic fall of originally co-equal spirits, also worked to empty the Incarnation of ultimate significance. His understanding of salvation is finally dis-incarnational, and this thrust of his system also works to dissolve the received and very "somatic" understanding of the Church. These negative features preoccupied generations of later Christian writers who would seek both to use Origen -- since they could not well avoid him -- and to correct him (70).

Origen is also one of the first Christian writers to use the word, "mystical". For him it denoted the hidden and eternal (or eschatological - the two amount to the same thing for him) meaning of scriptural texts (71). This hidden meaning is finally the Logos himself (72), communion with whom is the reality of the beginning and the end, and it is what the Christian is called upon to discover in the sacred writings. In so doing, the student of scripture recapitulates in his or her own soul the sacred history of Israel, and thus makes his or her own the pedagogy of the Word. Put another way, each Christian is in potential, and called to become in fact, Israel in microcosm, the world and Church writ small. In one famous application of this principle, Origen compares the Passover, Exodus, and entry into the promised land and Zion with the soul's departure from the land of the "spiritual Pharaoh", the devil, passage through the waters of Baptism, struggles in the "desert" of the present life, and final entrance into the heaven and city of the King (73). The process of

interiorization illustrated here is clearly of a piece with what I noted above in Plotinus, save that Origen includes the traditional motifs of Exodus and Zion in his schema of personal appropriation.

There is also much the same tension with regard to the concrete givens of ecclesiastical life that I noted in Clement. Never anything other than a man of the Church, eager to defend its "rule of faith" (74), Origen's career as teacher and then later presbyter, his troubles - often fierce - with the bishop of Alexandria, Demetrius, who had first installed him in the catechetical school and then afterwards excommunicated him for seeking ordination elsewhere (75), may have contributed to the obvious "spiritualization" of the episcopal office that appears in the text which follows. Commenting on Christ's command in Mt.23:8 not to be called "father", Origen observes that in the Church some try first:

...to become deacons, but not as Scripture would have them; next, they seek to take away the best offices of those who are called priests. Not satisfied with this, some arrange to be called bishops by the people...whereas they should understand that a bishop should be irreproachable...so that even if he is not called a bishop by men he nonetheless is a bishop before God. The one who has these qualities mentioned by St. Paul is a bishop before God, even if he is not a bishop in human eyes, even if he did not arrive at the rank through human ordination. (76)

This is clearly the same territory as Clement's gnostic, but if anything the gap between the hidden orders of grace and the manifest hierarchy of the Church has grown wider. Origen almost embraces the modern opposition I began with in this essay, that between mystical and charismatic, on the one side, and sacramental and institutional, on the other. In the following century this tension would harden on occasion into opposition. Overcoming it, or at least finding a way to live with it within the unity of the sacramental body of the Church, would be the task of certain key writers in the monastic movement - which is to say, of men who were moving in the same circles as those for whom this opposition found an occasional welcome.

B. 313-399 A.D.: Christendom and the Monks

From the early fourth century until the First World War, the Christian Church, in particular the Orthodox Church, lived in a world whose essential shape and ruling institutions had surfaced in the decades following the conversion of the Roman Emperor, Constantine. The line from Constantine I to Tsar Nicholas II is, with some obvious qualifications, pretty much a continuum. The paradox, not to say oxymoron, of a Christian empire was countered by the presence of another institution and witness, sometimes in violent opposition to the first: that of monasticism. In the interplay between these two, the Church (and again particularly the Eastern Church) would come to find and elaborate the classic expressions of its experience of God in public cult and private prayer.

1. Byzantine Christendom

The Christian empire founded by Constantine was the matrix of the Orthodox liturgy in its present form, of its church architecture, and of the theology and practice of the sacred art that fills the inside of Orthodox churches with images. By the end of the first millennium A.D. the Byzantine church was a finished product which has, in all essentials, remained the same throughout the following thousand years. The domed church with its elaborate program of images, the altar hidden behind a screen of icons and further concealed by curtains, the elaboration of a corpus of hymnography that drew on the wealth of both Greek and Semitic traditions, and the intricate yet flowing sequence of ritual gesture and chanted word: these were products of a fusion between Christianity, the artistic and intellectual legacy of Greco-Roman antiquity, and the etiquette of the imperial court.

This was and remains an impressive achievement. Moreover, and in spite of the ambiguities attendant upon the Church's status as the faith and prop of empire, this development remained all the while governed by the theological motifs sketched in the preceding pages, especially those of temple and Incarnation. In a way it was quite natural that court ceremonial should find its way into that liturgy which had, after all, been understood from its beginnings as a representation of, and participation in, the kingdom of heaven. Likewise, the great basilicas that begin to be erected for Christian worship borrowed freely from the design of the secular halls of assembly in the pagan cities (77), with the one difference that church buildings were erected as gathering places for the "Israel" and "city" of God. As time passed,

churches also began to take on - quite consciously, one supposes - an increasing resemblance to the temple at Jerusalem, with an outer court or narthex, a nave or sanctuary area, and a space for the eucharistic table (called "altar" as early as Ignatius of Antioch) corresponding to the holy of holies and, in the East, complete with veils (78).

This development was not a betrayal of the original Christian message (79), a kind of fall from evangelical purity into conformity with the practice of religion in pagan antiquity. The error of that thesis lies in the assumption of a form of worship free from universally prevailing human patterns. Early Christianity never escaped these, nor did Israel before. Solomon's temple, for example, shared in the general, ancient Near Eastern sense of a temple as both microcosm and sacred space (80). Similarly, the Church, meaning here the assembly of Christians gathered for the Eucharist, understood itself from the beginning as the presence of the new creation, the cosmos made anew in Christ. Byzantine church buildings were in consequence constructed as deliberate microcosms of the heavenly macrocosm (81). The dome that typically crowns an Eastern church consciously mimics the arc of the heavens. In its center Christ, the all-ruler, looks down on the worshippers, while below him and throughout the church's walls are images of the angels and saints, "all the company of heaven" in short. It is a portrayal of the whole "body of Christ", the "one new man", the universe of the saved, the heavenly temple (82).

But how does one go about the personal appropriation of this glory? and express it? Here the inheritance of Clement and Origen comes into play in the context of that other seminal development of the fourth century, the monastic movement.

2. The Ascetics

Had the fourth century seen nothing except the conversion of empire, then I think it fair to say that the Christian Church would possibly not have survived the empire's disappearance a millenium later. The temptations of wealth, power, and privilege began to work on the clergy - and especially the higher clergy - immediately (83). But the Byzantine ecclesiastical system, in spite of having been saddled by earlier historians with the disparaging label of "caesaropapism" (84), was never so simple in fact. As an "antidote" to the glitter of the imperial court, the Eastern Church possessed armies of monks. By the fourth century's end their establishments were thriving throughout imperial territories. Tensions and outright conflict between the hierarchies of State and Church, on one side, and the monks on the other peppered the history of Byzantine Christianity from its beginnings to its end (85). As often as not, the monks came out on top. True, they displayed the same tendencies toward extremism and spiritual quackery as have bedevilled all charismatic movements (86), but it is also the case that they often championed the popular and catholic conscience of the Christian faith over and against the expediencies of state, and the compliance of overly accommodating bishops. Their very charismaticism, for want of a better word, indicated a prevailing fidelity to the same spirit as had moved Ignatius and others to martyrdom, and it drew on the same sources.

Here I arrive at the correction of a scholarly commonplace. The phenomenon of organized asceticism on a massive scale was certainly a fourth century development. And there is surely something true about the long held view that this movement represented a desire on the part of many believers to see the Church of the martyrs carrying on in the altered circumstances of imperial patronage. As "athletes of God" one thus simply substitutes the monks for the martyrs. The language of martyrdom also appears, without a doubt, in some of the earliest documents of the movement (87). There is therefore a temptation to read the Life of Antony, for example, as in sum the transposition onto an ascetic figure of the themes of temple, sacrifice, and priesthood that, two centuries and more earlier, had been attached to martyrs like Ignatius and Polycarp (88). But this is to oversimplify. In the Egypt that saw the beginning of the monastic movement there already existed a tradition which spoke of the ascetic calling in the language of priesthood and sacrifice. In some respects, St. Athanasius' picture of Antony, the "father of monks", in 356 A.D. is nothing more nor less than Clement's gnostic, together with Origen's inspired teacher, made flesh and given a local habitation and a name (89). Origen, too, had already advocated Christian virginity in exactly the language taken from the priestly and temple lexicon:

Do not think that just as the belly is made for food and food for the belly, that in the same way the body is made for intercourse. If you wish to understand the apostle's train of reasoning...then listen: it [the body] was made that it should be a temple to the Lord; that the soul, being holy and blessed, should act in it as if it were a priest serving before the Holy Spirit that dwells in you. (90)