

TRADITION & TRADITIONS



THE SIGN OF THE TEMPLE: A Meditation

~: Jean Cardinal Daniélou, S.J. ~:

On the lowest level, which is not essentially Christian, but is part of the historical heritage of Christianity, though generally separated from it, the Christian mystery is the mystery of creation. I mean by this not only an original dependence of the universe in relation to a personal and transcendent God, but also the actual dependence of all things in his sight, and consequently a divine presence which confers upon the whole cosmos a sacramental value.

At the birth of mankind, the whole creation, issuing from the hands of God, is holy; the earthly Paradise is nature in a state of grace. The house of God is the whole cosmos. Heaven is his tent, his tabernacle; the earth is his “footstool.” There is a whole cosmic liturgy, that of the source of the flowers and birds.

Multiplied blessings made an overflow,
The silence of the soul was a still pond.
The rising sun became a monstrance now,
Filling the heavens with a shining sound.

Smoke was a censer, and the cedar-trees
Composed an ever-mounting barricade.
Days of delight were as a colonnade
Fanned by the calmness of the twilight breeze.¹

The time of the patriarchs still retains something of this paradisaical grace. The Spirit of God still broods upon the waters. God is not yet the hidden God, dwelling apart within the Tabernacle. He talks with Noah on familiar terms. His relationship with Abraham is that of a friend: “And the LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre; and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; and he lifted up his eyes and, lo, three men stood by him; and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, and said, My LORD, if I now have found favor in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from

1 Charles Péguy, “Eve,” in *Oeuvres Poétiques Complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1941), 710.

Thy servant: let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet.”² Abraham has that *parrhesia* with God, that freedom of speech which, in the days of ancient Greece, was the right of a free citizen, and by which St. Paul and the brethren symbolized the liberty of the children of God with their Father. The whole of nature is still a temple consecrated to him. A group of trees, a spring of fresh water, these are fragments of Paradise in which he offers his sacrifices; a rough stone is an altar dedicated to him.

This is the primitive level, common to all men, whose traces are still to be found, twisted, soiled, perverted, in every religion. So in Greek religion we have the sacred wood, the *alsos*, with its fountain; but polytheism has corrupted the primitive gesture. God “in times past has suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness”³. Only the wise men continued to seek for signs in the heavenly Temple, contemplating, explaining, and defining, according to the positions of the stars, the sites of towns and altars. The shepherds and the Magi are, as it were, the flowering in the Gospel of this underlying, primary stratum, which corruption has not altogether spoiled, nor Mosaic revelation destroyed.

For us today, it still constitutes the holy in its rudimentary form, which darkly hints at the divine presence in the silence of night, in the shadows of the forest, in the vastness of the desert, in the lightening-flash of genius, in the purity of love. It is this basic level that was recognized by that Boer farmer to whom Otto refers, who in the solitude of the desert, where the sun poured forth its rays upon the plain, was aware of a voice speaking to him. It is this level that explains the religious awe with which the earth deserves to be surrounded. But this sacramental element has no meaning except in relation to a personal presence. “Awe,” writes Péguy, “stretches forth indeed to encompass the whole universe. We too easily forget that the universe is creation; and awe, like charity, is due to every creature.” It is this personal presence, at once hidden and revealed by signs, that awakens in us this holy dread.

In the Cosmic Temple

In the cosmic Temple, man is not living primarily in his own house, but in the house of God. This is why he knows that he should revere those creatures who do not belong to him, that he can lay hands on nothing without permission. All is holy; the trees are heavy with sacramental mysteries. Primitive sacrifice is simply the recognition of the sovereign realm of God. He takes the first-fruits, and leaves the rest to man. But at the same time, man is part of creation and has his role to play in it. God has in some way left creation unfinished, and man’s mission is to bring it to

fulfillment. Through his work he exploits unknown material resources, and thus work is sacred, being cooperation in the task of creation. Through knowledge and art he removes it from its ephemeral condition to enable it to subsist spiritually.⁴

Indeed, by sacramental use man confers on visible things their supreme dignity, not merely as signs and symbols, but as effective means of grace in the soul. So water effects purification, oil communicates power and unction, salt gives the savor of heavenly things. Man is thus the mediator through whom the visible universe is gathered together and offered up, the priest of that virginal creation over which God lovingly watches. Through man the silent litany of things becomes an explicit act of worship.

Nature without me is vain, it is I who give it a meaning;
All things become in me eternal, are laid on my altar.
Water now washes the soul, not only the travel-worn body;
My bread becomes for me the very substance of God.⁵

Thus the whole of nature, as St. Paul says, expects that man will lead it to its end. The sacred character of love, in particular, is not derived from the shadowy presence of the race using individuals for its own ends, but from the presence of God in the handiwork that love causes men to share. “When I was close to him I nearly always had the sense of God’s actual presence,” wrote Alice Ollé-Laprune of her husband.

Such is the innocence of creation. Creatures are holy, expecting that man will lead them to their goal. But man has the power to violate this order. When he turns away from God, when he profanes himself by ceasing to be a consecrated creature, he also profanes the world on which he imposes sacrilegious uses. The material inventions that are meant to help men to free themselves from matter and bring to realization the community of mankind, we transform into instruments of hatred. The beauty of the body, which is the lovely reflection of the beauty of the soul, its visible “glory” which should awaken in us loving awe, we transform into an instrument of selfish pleasure. The blessings of culture, intended to help men to become more truly human by developing the powers of their minds, we transform into an instrument of perverted specialization and highbrow aestheticism.

But creation itself is free from all these faults, wherever she may “suffer violence.” She, too, rebels in her holiness and purity against such profanation by sacrilegious rites; and she expresses her rebellion by the resistance that she makes

⁴ This is well expressed by Paul-Jean Toulet (1867–1920): “Whispering woods, if I should die, / Perish without my artistry.”

⁵ Paul Claudel, *Cinq Grandes Odes, Suivies d’un Processional pour Saluer le Siècle Nouveau* [Five Great Odes: Followed by a Processional to Greet the New Century], 4th ed. (Paris: Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Française, 1913), 174. Eng. trans.: *Five Great Odes; [Poetry]*, trans. Edward Lucie-Smith (Chester Springs, PA: Dufour Editions, 1970).

² Gen. 18:1–4.

³ Acts 14:16–17.

when we turn her aside from her goal. Between her and us there is a battle waged, which is the result of sin.

You know nothing in the vast universe
That may not be a means of unhappiness.⁶

This is the hostile world that we know so well, where everything is threatening; and the more sensitive we are, the more it is so. No one has felt this more acutely than Rainer Maria Rilke:

The terrible in every breath of air,
You breathe it all too clearly.

The rebellion of creatures is the cause of our suffering, which is the resistance of matter to our will. It was unknown in Paradise, it will be unknown in Paradise regained, and Jesus already restores this Paradise, mastering the winds and waves, healing the sick. It is the cloudiness of the world that, far from showing us God, hides him from us and confines us to earth. So we become slaves, we that are called to be kings. What are the fires of hell but the rebellion of the creature, defined all too clearly?

How are we to rediscover the lost harmony, how are we to be reconciled with things? Here is the nostalgia that lies perhaps at the center of poetry, which is a quest for the cosmic privileges of Paradise lost, a glorification of the body without using the conversion of the heart as intermediary. But everything depends on this conversion. Things themselves have never changed. They remain what they always were; they await us in brotherly innocence. It is we that are “underlings.” If I seek to rediscover the joys of Paradise, to move at ease amid created things, I must give them back their proper meaning, I must restore their honorable mission as servants of humanity. Then they will cease to burden me with silent reproaches, they will begin once again to chant before me:

None but the pure heart knows
The perfume of the rose.⁷

I must recover the purity of my glance. Then only will creatures once more become bearers of light from heaven.

It is this paradisaic reconciliation that we find in St. Francis of Assisi, in St. John of the Cross: “Yes, the heavens are mine and the earth is mine and the peoples are mine. ... What more can you desire? What do you seek, my soul?” Nothing remains of our prostration before the powers of the cosmos and history, those swords of Damocles hanging over mankind. Cosmic fear is vanquished, the

universe has become once more a Temple where we are at home with God in the cool of the evening, where man comes forward, silent and composed, absorbed in his task as in a perpetual liturgy, attentive to that presence which fills him with awe and tenderness.

In the Tabernacle of Moses

The establishment of the Tabernacle, whose ultimate form is the Temple, is the fundamental mission entrusted by God to Moses. The Temple is his concern, as the covenant is Abraham’s. This mission is described in the Book of Exodus. Its object is the building of a sanctuary that will be the dwelling of God alone. This sanctuary is to consist of a threefold enclosure; first of all, an outer court, the *temenos*, the *templum*; then a tent, the tabernacle proper; and finally, within the tent, the sanctuary, divided off by a veil, in which are to be found the Ark, the Mercy Seat, the cherubim. It is here that God was to be present.

The completed forms of this ideal pattern, revealed to Moses on Sinai, passed through many vicissitudes. At first it was to be a portable sanctuary, borne by the Hebrews through the wilderness, consisting of a tent of cloth covered by a tent of leather. It is a long way from this to the Temple of Herod which was known to Jesus, and which was an elaborate stone structure. In this interval the sanctuary had been at Shiloh, and not greatly honored there. Then David had solemnly brought the Ark to Jerusalem, and left a plan of the Temple which Solomon carried out. This Temple, destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, was roughly rebuilt by Nehemiah and the Jews who returned from exile.

But the external form matters little. The essential religious fact is that of the presence of God in the Temple, which endured from the time of Moses till the death of Christ. The destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. only gave sanction to its discontinuance. The Temple is the dwelling, the *Shekinah*, in which the glory of God abides. “A cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.”⁸ It is here that God meets his representatives.

Thus Ezekiel: “So the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house.”⁹ It is here that on the threshold of the New Testament Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, is to receive the news of the birth of his son. “And there appeared unto him an angel of the LORD standing on the right side of the altar of incense.”¹⁰ Here is the center of the religious life of Israel. In the wilderness the Tabernacle is the center of the nomads’ camp; after the return from exile, the little “remnant” of those who had

⁸ Exod. 40:34–35.

⁹ Ezek. 43:5.

¹⁰ Luke 1:11.

⁶ Péguy, “Eve.”

⁷ Paul Claudel, *Figures et Paraboles* [Figures and Parables] (Paris: Gallimard, 1936), 28.

escaped forms a veritable monastic community in the restored Temple; and the “dispersed” come to worship there from every quarter of the *oecumene*.

This love of the Temple finds an echo in the psalms. Nowadays we chant the verses—and rightly—in praise of the Church. And indeed it is ultimately to her that they refer in prophetic terms, but it was in relation to the Temple that they were first uttered:

LORD, I have loved the habitation of your house:
and the place where your honor dwells. ...

O how amiable are your dwellings: O LORD of hosts!
My soul has a desire and longing
to enter into the courts of the LORD. ...
One day in your courts is better than a thousand. ...

One thing I have desired of the LORD, which I will require:
even that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to behold the fair beauty of the LORD,
and to visit his Temple.¹¹

What difference is there between the Mosaic Temple and the cosmic Temple? What stage does the revelation on Sinai mark in the economy of the presence of God? At first sight it seems that a step back has been made. Up to the time of Moses, sacrifices could be offered anywhere. Henceforward, none are pleasing to God but those that are offered in the Tabernacle. There are no longer many sanctuaries, but only one: “You shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which you shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree.”¹²

This seemed so harsh a decree that for centuries the priesthood had to resist the determination of the Hebrews to raise altars, even when it was not a question of idolatry. The cult is concentrated in a single place. In the divine plan this was in reality a necessary stage, for the great danger was polytheism; the singleness of the sanctuary was, as it were, the sign of the oneness of God. It was this that Josephus understood when he wrote: “There is only one Temple for one God, for like always attracts like, and the Temple is common to all, as God is common to all.”¹³ And indeed it was for this reason that Judaism, alone in the ancient world, remained monotheistic.

The second feature which seems to have been characteristic of the religion of Sinai is the gulf that it fixes between God and man. Happy were the days, it might be said, when God talked on easy terms with the patriarchs. Henceforth he dwells in the secrecy of the Holy of Holies, guarded by the threefold enclosure. Only the Jews can enter the first of these enclosures—and only after purifying themselves; the second enclosure is confined to the priesthood; and as for the Holy of Holies, only the High Priest can enter it, once a year, with feelings of sacred awe and reverence. Let no profane person dare to cross the forbidden threshold, lest, as Heliodorus¹⁴ says, he be struck down by the angels. Formerly the whole of nature was the house of God, filled with the divine presence. Now there is a barrier between the sacred and the profane—that which is *pro fanum*, outside the Temple. The priests, we read in Ezekiel, “shall teach my people the difference between the holy and the profane.”¹⁵

This may inspire us with regret, with nostalgia for primeval Eden. Nevertheless the revelation on Sinai marks an advance, for by thus separating man from God, it draws attention to two things. First, it demonstrates the greatness, the holiness of God; he is indeed the altogether other. We know how the easy-going anthropomorphism of the Greeks brought them to the worship of idols; by contrast with this, the God of Israel is a transcendent God, hidden in the darkness of the Tabernacle which symbolizes his essential mystery, his incomprehensibility. This is a great advance in the knowledge of God.

As Gregory of Nyssa says, “The true understanding of that which Moses was seeking consists in realizing that the object of the quest transcends all knowledge and remains entirely separated by his incomprehensibility, as by darkness. This is why John the mystic, who explored that shining darkness, said that no man has seen God, making it clear by this denial that the knowledge of the divine essence is inaccessible not only to man, but to the whole world of the intellect.”¹⁶

This separation between God and man draws attention, therefore, to a second reality—the sinfulness of man. It unfolds the meaning of that basic impurity which is called original sin. On account of this, as St. Paul well showed, the Law, which does not save but rather condemns, emphasizes the necessity of the Redeemer, prevents man from becoming sufficient to himself, compels him to recognize his fundamental lack, and thus, as Blaise Pascal says, makes him “hold out his arms to his deliverer.” To pass from the ignorance of the child to the holiness of the saint, there is no short cut; the way lies through the humility of the sinner. The path from Eden to the Promised Land must needs pass through Sinai—that is, through the region of humility and purification.

¹¹ Pss. 26:8; 84:1, 2, 10; 27:4.

¹² Deut. 12:2.

¹³ Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. 3, Chap. 6. Eng. trans. in: *The Works of Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994).

¹⁴ See the account in 2 Macc. 3.

¹⁵ Ezek. 44:23.

¹⁶ Gregory of Nyssa (d. 386), *Life of Moses*. Eng. trans.: *The Life of Moses*, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist, 1978).

However, if the Mosaic Temple marks an advance upon the cosmic Temple, it does not destroy it, but rather carries it forward. It is the property of these successive economies that each at the same time surpasses and preserves its predecessor. So Jesus says in his turn: "I am not come to destroy [the Temple of Moses], but to fulfill." So the Temple retains a clearly defined cosmic meaning. The cosmic Temple comprised three realms—heaven, earth, and the water. The Mosaic Temple continues them. The Holy of Holies, the abode of God, represents heaven, where God dwells in darkness; the Tabernacle signifies earth, and it is there that the symbols of the permanent cultus are to be found, the elements of the liturgy—the altar of incense, which carries forward the sweetness of flowers; the table of the show-bread, which represents the offering of the first-fruits; the candlestick, where holy oil continually burns; and finally the *atrium* which contains the "sea of brass," which was used for burnt offerings, and corresponds to the waters. Thus the whole cosmos is, as it were, mirrored in the Temple, which is its microcosm, like the cathedral which sums up all the fauna and flora carved in its various chapels.

The Glory of the Angels

The Temple of Moses was only a passing stage. A new order appears with Christ, who is the reality of which the Temple was only a symbol. Henceforth the abode of God, the *Shekinah*, is no longer the Temple, but the manhood of Jesus. "In this place is one greater than the Temple."¹⁷

The Temple must soon disappear, its veil must be rent after the "*Consummatum est.*" It has ceased to correspond to anything whatever. It represents a world that no longer exists. The glory of the Lord, the *doxa*, has deserted it. This glory, which indicates the presence of God, is the visible radiance that surrounded the Tabernacle, but it was a radiance which was only a debased form of that radiance in the intellectual realm, in the angelic creation, which everywhere surrounds the three divine persons, creating around them a sacred region. The angelic creation was symbolized in the cosmic Tabernacle by the armies of heaven, in the Mosaic Tabernacle by the cherubim. Their mission is to hide from profane eyes the glory of the LORD. Such also are the seraphim of Isaiah:

"Above [the Temple] stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried to another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory."¹⁸

The glory of the Lord dwelt in the Temple until the coming of the incarnation. But from that day it began to dwell in Jesus. The very word that St. John

uses to describe the incarnation—"dwelt among us"—is that which indicates the dwelling of God in the Temple. And the presence of God which overshadows the Virgin is the same cloud whose presence showed that God dwelt in the Tabernacle. Here we see that, with the divine indwelling and the visible glory, henceforth also the invisible glory is to surround the manhood of him in whom God dwells in corporeal form.

Here we witness the appearance of the archangels who, with Gabriel, are henceforth to surround the manhood of Jesus, to hover in the background, but always to be present, and not so much to praise as to be themselves that glory in the highest heavens which already surrounds the child conceived in the virgin's womb. Here is the very mystery of the man-God, whom the angels worship, and who annihilates himself in the flesh; here, side by side with the earthly appearances, is the celestial, hypercosmic event of the incarnation.

Henceforth we shall find Jesus everywhere surrounded by this twofold presence. There is the procession of angels that everywhere accompanies the Word, of which they are the radiance, the fringe of the intellectual realm; there is also the nakedness of the cradle. We shall find the same contrast in the agony, where twelve legions of angels are present at the very moment of the kiss of Judas and the smiting of Malchus—the utmost human nakedness and the utmost heavenly radiance, Bethlehem and the Mount of Olives on the one hand, and on the other the chorus of "*Gloria in excelsis*"¹⁹ and the warring angels of Michael. "*Salutarem saeculorum, ipsum regem angelorum, sola Virgo lactabat.*"²⁰

This magical verse from one of the responses for the liturgical vigil of the Epiphany throws the whole contrast into dramatic relief. The humble virgin gives her breast to the child, and in the background, suggested by these angels, the aeons manifest themselves,²¹ the heavens with their cosmic dimensions, a vast shadow losing itself in the Milky Way; the virgin with her diadem of stars feeds with celestial milk the Savior of the aeons. This is the virgin of the "*ab initio et ante saecula creata sum*"—"from the beginning and before all ages, I was created"—who hovers behind Mary of Nazareth. It is true of her, as of the Son of Man, of heavenly Man, that her cosmic image represents a state of pre-existence in the thought of God. She is present in the primeval garden, as she was present on the first morning of

¹⁹ "Glory to God in the highest."

²⁰ "The virgin alone nursed the very king of angels, the Savior of ages." Compare the hymn by Jean Mouton (d. 1522), "Nesciens Mater Virgo Virum" [The Virgin Mother Gave Birth].

²¹ I have retained the word "aeon," which is a Greek term, in preference to the word "age," because the latter merely evokes a temporal idea, while "aeon" expresses rather the idea not of a time, however long, but of a period qualitatively of a different order, of a definite spiritual world, which may be considered either as a realm of duration (the biosphere is an aeon), or as a personal reality (every angel is a spiritual world).

¹⁷ Matt. 12:6.

¹⁸ Isa. 6:2-3.

creation—“*Necdum fontes aquarum eruperant*”²²—as part of the hidden mystery in God before all aeons.

Thus the archangels are associated with all the mysteries in the life of Jesus. Gabriel presides over the annunciation, over all annunciations, over Mary, over Zechariah, over Joseph, over the shepherds, over the procession of which he is the supreme figure. Raphael presides over divine acts, miracles, healings; he is the angel of Bethesda, who troubles the waters of healing, and he is also the comforter, the protector. It is the angels who minister to Jesus in the wilderness at his temptation and comfort him at his agony. Finally it is Michael whose legions hover in the background at the passion, charged with the wrath of the Almighty, a dazzling radiance that drives back the advancing hosts and casts Saul upon the ground, for no man can see the glory of the Lord and live.

This glory is above all the Word, the ray of eternal light, the Word of silence; but it is also the angels, radiations of the ray, harmonic powers of the Word. They inspire with holy dread all who without due permission approach the Son of God. They keep watch over the gate of the primeval garden; they forbid the threshold of heaven to those who are not clothed with a wedding garment. They establish around the Word a sacred region, the Temple of the intellectual realm.

Everywhere they precede and follow the Word. They prepare the way before him and complete his handiwork. They surround him not only at the throne of glory, but also in his various missions. They go up with him into the presence of the Father, bearing in their hands that incense which is the prayer of the righteous. They pass through the spaces of charity with a swiftness that is denied to our fleshy hearts. They are indeed the heaven of heavens, of which Scripture speaks, for heaven is not visible space, but the invisible depths of the intellectual rays of the Word, the splendor of his imagery reflected in innumerable mirrors.

Rilke glimpsed their splendor when he described them as “lines of height, summits tinged with the purple dawn of all that was created ... passages, stairs, thrones—mirrors of glittering splendor.”²³ But he misunderstood their ministry, making himself equal to the angel, as the angel made himself equal to God and sought to penetrate by effraction into the divine darkness.²⁴ So he arrived in

22 “When there were no springs abounding with water” Prov. 8:24.

23 *Duino Elegies*, 2. Eng. trans.: *Duino Elegies*, trans. J. B. Leishman, and Stephen Spender (New York: W. W. Norton, 1939).

24 “Ah, mighty angel, tell the universe / The wondrous deeds that we ourselves have done.” St. Bernard of Clairvaux (*The Word of Isaiah*, 3) notes that the two wings that forbid the eyes of the wicked to gaze upon the divine mysteries are admiration and veneration. Yet Lucifer knew admiration, but not veneration, which is adoration and submission, and which he replaced with emulation—the despairing attempt to make oneself equal to the angels through one’s own efforts. This, too, was Rilke’s idea, and his attempts—he who had so exalted a sense of the sacred—was to conquer it by his own efforts, by penetrating in solitary pride the realms of death. But charity is the only way that leads to God, and jealousy is rather the wing that sets a barrier, an insurmountable threshold, between our gaze and the light of heaven.

the end at nothing but a desert, a desolate solitude that recalls the landscape of William Blake, in that cosmic silence that terrified Pascal and caused Gérard de Nerval to despair.²⁵

In the New Temple of Christ

Thus the manhood of Jesus became the new Temple and “the place where thine honor dwelleth.” It is this that Christ proclaimed to the Samaritan women when he told her: “The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father ... when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth.”²⁶ That is to say, not that they will not worship in any temple, but that they will worship in the true Temple of the Spirit, as opposed to the figurative Temple of the flesh. This is why Christ was able to reply to the Pharisees who accused him of misunderstanding the Temple: “In this place is one greater than the Temple.” From that time, the Temple of stone might be destroyed; it would be of no importance, since after three days the true Temple was to be finally established. And indeed, three days after the veil of the Temple was rent, the Temple of the new Law, the glorified manhood of Jesus, was raised up forevermore.

But between these two moments, between the appearance of the new Temple at the incarnation and the end of the old Temple at the passion, there was a unique period during which the two temples existed side by side, and the mystery of their connection, of their joint construction, was shown in a marvelous light. This encounter between the reality and the figure, a living and historical encounter, took place for the first time at the presentation.

This was truly a unique moment in the sequence of periods. Up till then, there had been only a figurative Temple, an image of that which was to come, a sign also of the promise to David. But here we see at once the figure and the reality, the promise and the gift. This is the wondering cry of the psalmist: “We have thought of thy loving-kindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple.”²⁷ It is in the very heart of the figure that the reality was manifested, in the heart of the promise that the gift was conveyed.

To carnal eyes, there is a child in the Temple; to the eyes of Simeon, unsealed by the Holy Spirit, this child is more than the Temple. He is the one for whom the Temple has kept ceaseless vigil. The Temple is now rendered useless. The blossom bursts forth, the sealed Ark that held the secret of the king flies open, and the mystery is revealed, the veil is rent, all peoples are bidden to enter. This is what is to shine forth at Pentecost. But it is already virtually accomplished for Simeon: “*Lumen ad revelationem Gentium*”—“a light to lighten the Gentiles.” The

25 “He answered: All is dead. I have surveyed / The worlds, and lost my light in milky ways.”

26 John 4:21, 23.

27 Ps. 48:9.

Temple was only a shadow. Now the light is come; all the candles are lighted in the hands of the faithful. "Soon shall the angel of the covenant come into the Temple." The riddle is suddenly unraveled before Simeon's eyes, he grasps this connection between the figure and the reality which is the whole meaning of Scripture. Israel has lived by Scripture without fully possessing the key—and here today it is given to her. Israel may disappear: "*Nunc dimittis*."²⁸ Simeon holds in the palms of his hands, in the midst of the Temple, the master of the Temple.

This encounter between the old order and the new order is not, absolutely speaking, the first of its kind. For if Jesus is indeed the horizon that divides the two creations, the soul of Mary, because she constitutes a separate order, is already part of the new economy. In the Temple of expectation, she represented already a certain fulfillment. Her presentation in the Temple is the prelude to that of Jesus, and is thus charged with a mysterious meaning. All that was to come to pass was already in her heart. In the Temple she was thus more than a figure and less than the reality; she was the light that comes before day.

Thus the presentations reverberate like a sound which is at first faintly heard, then gradually grows louder—the presentation of Adam in the cosmic Temple and the primeval order; the presentation of Samuel in the Mosaic Temple; the presentation of Mary, who alone constitutes an order apart; the presentation of Jesus, who is the great fulfillment, and who gives himself forth in his turn in the presentation of every Christian in the Temple on the day of his baptism, which is itself only the beginning, in the ritual Temple, of the final presentation in the heavenly Temple, when the Son shall say to the Father: "Father, these are they whom thou hast given me."

The second encounter of Jesus with the Temple is also charged with a mysterious significance. It is that of the temptation. The devil "set him on a pinnacle of the Temple, and said unto him, 'If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence; for it is written, he shall give his angels charge over thee.'"²⁹ Notice that the temptation of Jesus is enacted in the three holy places—the wilderness, the Temple, and the mountain; notice also the connection which is established between the Temple and the angels.

And indeed this is Satan's idea too. He imagines that the presence still dwells in the Temple; his Jerusalem, that Jewish order which is to attack Jesus. He profoundly grasps that here is the crux of the whole matter. He knows that while the presence dwells in the Temple of stone, he need fear nothing for his reign—and that the nations are beneath his sway. So he urges Jesus to manifest himself in the Temple. For he knows that this would be for him an entry into the

order of the Temple. He offers him the repetition of Moses on a larger scale—not only to make bread fall from heaven, but to make it issue from the stones; not only to contemplate the Promised Land from the summit of Nebo, but to see the whole promised earth from the peak of the highest mountain, "*mons excelsus valde*," not only to show forth from the Tabernacle the countenance surrounded by the visible Glory, but to manifest in the Temple, surrounded by the angels, the invisible glory of the Lord.

But precisely because Jesus is not of the order of Moses, he is not a higher kind of Moses. Moses and the Temple are figures, but Jesus is the reality. The divine presence is no longer to be found in an enclosure of stone, it dwells in Jesus himself—and the angels draw near to minister to him. It is no longer a question of the "bread that our fathers ate," which is only a temporal inheritance, or of the Temple built by Solomon, which is only the shadow cast on earth by the heavenly Temple of reality. It is not a question for Jesus of beginning again, or repeating a pattern. It was everything else that was only a repetition, and it is now that the day of reality has dawned. The miracle of Jesus will be to distribute real bread at the Last Supper, to build the real Temple at the resurrection, to lead his people into the real kingdom at the ascension. "The devil leaveth him, and behold, angels came and ministered unto him."³⁰

All the other encounters of Christ with the Temple are charged with similar meanings—the casting out of the money-changers from the Temple; the well of the Temple, of which Ezekiel had spoken and which, on the day of the Feast of Tabernacles, taking his text from the fresh water of ablutions, Jesus places in its true perspective: "if any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink."³¹ The figurative wells, the ritual ablutions, are abrogated. The well that springs forth in the true Temple is the Holy Spirit that springs forth in the manhood of Jesus. So Jesus brings into relation with himself all the properties of the Temple. He fulfils the Law. And it is not until he has finished this task that all is fulfilled, that the foundations of the new order are finally established—that the old Temple, henceforth rendered useless, sees its veil torn asunder.

With him it is the Mosaic order that comes to an end. This had two characteristic features—the separation between God and man, and the dwelling in a single place. The veil that shut off the Holy of Holies is rent asunder; we are brought into familiar relations with the divine. We have the "boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh."³² This is not simply a

³⁰ Matt. 4:11.

³¹ John 8:37.

³² Heb. 10:19–20.

²⁸ "Now you may dismiss ..." Compare Luke 2:29–32.

²⁹ Luke 4:9, 10.

return to the cosmic Temple, but after the Mosaic purification, access to a higher presence, entry by humanity into the Holy of Holies, not simply the natural presence of God in his creation. And henceforth this presence is no longer bound to a single place. It is connected with the glorified manhood of Christ, the final and conclusive Temple—that is, with the total Christ in his individual reality and in his Mystical Body, the place of worship “in spirit and in truth.”

In the Temple of the Church

It is the manhood of Jesus that is the Temple of the new Law, but this manhood must be taken as a whole, that is to say, it is the Mystical Body in its entirety; this is the complete and final Temple. The dwelling of God is the Christian community whose head is in heaven, and whose members are still making their earthly pilgrimage; it is the true Temple of which the Temple of stone was the figure.

Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. (1 Pet. 2:5)

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord. (Eph. 2:19–20)

There is a basic difference between the Temple at Jerusalem and the Christian Church. Under the old Law, the presence of God is connected with the building of stone; under the new Law, it is connected with the spiritual community. The church of stone is not in the succession of the Temple, but of the synagogue; it is the assembly, the *ecclesia*, the meeting-place. Or rather, at the same time it continues both of them, since it is the normal place for the sacrifice. But it can be dispensed with; it is not necessary that it should be there for the celebration of the Mass. While the community is necessary, the Mass cannot normally be celebrated without a server.

Here is once more a house for us to say our prayers,
A new house whose lamps Satan shall not put out,
Neither shall he break asunder the adamantine vaults.

I see before me the Catholic Church, which is from all the world.³³

Thus is fulfilled the saying of Jesus: “Where two or more are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”³⁴ It is the essential condition required for the offering of an acceptable host that is presented in the Sermon on the Mount, where it is written: “If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee ... first be reconciled with to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.”³⁵ No offering is accepted save that which is made in charity, in community. For there the Temple is, the one and only place where man is in the presence of God.

This is an extraordinary fact, as extraordinary in its own order as the presence of God in the Temple at Jerusalem. God enters into relationship not with isolated souls, but with the community, and only the souls who are part of the community. Through the baptismal rites, the entry of the catechumen into the church of stone is a figure of his entry into the living Church, into the community which is the place of his meeting with God.

The Sacrament of Love

Of this meeting, the Eucharist is the permanent sign, being at once the sacrament of the Mystical Body and the sign of the real presence, and bringing about at the same time union with God and the strengthening of the bonds of charity. Sin has the effect simultaneously of alienating the sinner from the presence of God, and of separating him from the community. The primitive discipline of the Church made this clear when it excluded the sinner publicly from the community. He still remains excluded from communion; and reconciliation with God is necessarily required by the community as intermediary. This is the meaning of confession, in which the priest represents the people, which itself represents God.³⁶

This is why the Church has the deposit of the living Word of God. It is in her that the Word mysteriously dwells, thus continuing the incarnation of the *Logos*. “We come to faith in Christ not by the study of dead literary documents, but in a preliminary way through the living witness of an organism sustained and animated by Christ, through the teaching of the living apostolic Church; in a full and effec-

33 Claudel, *Cinq Grandes Odes*, 176.

34 Matt 18: 20.

35 Matt. 5:23–24.

36 Henri de Lubac, *Catholicisme, Catholicisme: Les Aspects Sociaux du Dogme* [The True Face of Catholicism] (Paris: Cerf, 1947), 56. Eng. trans.: *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988).

tive way by immediate contact with the living Christ in the Church, through the operation of grace acting in all its fullness in the Sacrament.”³⁷

Connected with the new Temple which is the community, the presence of God is bound up with charity: “If we love one another, God dwelleth in us.”³⁸ For the Christian community is not the biological community, the maternal medium in which the person, as an insufficiently constituted entity, aspires towards his own dissolution. But it is the community of spiritual persons bound together by love, that is, in which every member holds fast of his own free will to the appetite for existence of the others. It is not a return to the beginning, a nostalgia for an earlier, still undifferentiated condition, but it is that continuous creation of charity praised by St. Paul: “[From Christ] the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”³⁹

The proper work of charity is the building of the true Temple. It is present before all creation as ministration, efficacy. Sometimes we confuse it with a certain tenderness and weakness that disarms us before the will and desire of another, making us condescend to him, even to his damnation. Charity knows nothing of this cowardly condescension. It is “strong as death,” according to the phrase in Solomon’s Song.⁴⁰ Pleasing someone is often the opposite of doing him good. True love is pitiless. It does not love weakness; it loves in spite of them and against them, it corrects them. But its strength is that of love, it is trust, help, support. We look for violence in irony or insult, but it is charity that is truly strong—strong to others, but above all strong to itself, hard as a diamond, lucid, transparent, penetrating to the depths; hard, but not inflicting pain. Violence bruises, irony inflicts pin-pricks; charity goes straight to the heart and heals the sufferer.

“Charity suffereth long.” It does nothing hastily. Like the father of the prodigal, it awaits the hour chosen by God. It is a faithful watchdog. It prays in silence. It is altogether disinterested, it seeks for no return, it takes pleasure in the well-being of that which it loves; that is its reward; it is forgetful of self. It matters little to it whether good is done by it or by another, so long as it is done. It loves the good for its own sake. It does not take pleasure in its own activity. Where nothing needs to be done, it comes to a halt. It does not take pleasure in spending itself. It is economical. It does not seek for acclaim. It is only interested in the fruits. It has no time to think of itself. It is a realist. All deceit is repugnant to it. It is precise,

watchful, clear-headed, not to be bluffed. It is not satisfied with words. It is no formalist, no Pharisee.

“Charity never faileth.” It is always active, it never ceases, it is always busy. “Charity hopeth all things.” It knows that nothing is impossible with God, it hopes against all hope. “Charity believeth all things.” It is always deceived, but it is thus that it triumphs over the general distrust, it overcomes evil with good, it demands truth, it works on another level and raises others to it. Souls reveal themselves to it. Its poverty encourages them. Its very nature is a summons. It is no use puffing oneself up before it. One is obliged to confess, to lay bare the most hidden sores, and to know that in spite of this, one is loved with a never-failing love, which plumbs the depths of misery without harm or derision, and which restores the taste of life to the most despairing of souls.

The Temple of the Church that is thus slowly built up by charity is at the same time the fulfillment of the Mosaic Temple and of the cosmic Temple. It is of the Temple of the Church that the Christian may truly affirm what the Jew said of the Temple at Jerusalem: “LORD, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honor dwelleth ... One thing I have desired of the LORD, which I will require, even that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life.”⁴¹ But henceforth the Temple is no longer the far-off mountain towards which the desire of the exiles is directed; it is ever-present, and it suffices that we enter into ourselves to join in the communion of saints.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, after dying for our sins on the cross, and ascending on high, left not the world as he found it, but left a blessing behind him. He left in the world what before was not in it—a secret home, for faith and love to enjoy, wherever they are found, in spite of the world around us. ... This is the Church of God, which is our true home of God’s providing, his own heavenly court, where he dwells with saints and angels. ... Though thou art in a body of flesh, a member of this world, thou has but to kneel down reverently in prayer, and thou art at once in the society of saints and angels.⁴²

This is what Christ declared to the Samaritan woman when he said that “ye shall neither worship in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father,” but that “the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth”—that is, they shall worship in the true Temple, the spiritual Tabernacle.

⁴¹ Pss. 26:8; 27:4.

⁴² John Henry Newman, “The Church a Home for the Lonely,” in *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, vol. 4 (London: Longmans, Green, 1900–1902), 190, 198.

³⁷ Karl Adam, *Le vrai visage du catholicisme* [The True Face of Catholicism] (Paris: B. Grasset, 1931), 273.

³⁸ 1 John 4:12.

³⁹ Eph. 4:16.

⁴⁰ Song 8:6.

This is also the fulfillment of the cosmic Temple, in that the cosmos is affected by the Temple whose every stone is a universe in itself, if it is true that “the Spirit is in some manner all things,”⁴³ and that “one thought of man’s is worth more than all the world.”⁴⁴ Let us not be misled by the word “Temple” into thinking of some towering edifice, static and stationary. It is an overwhelming vision of expanding universes of the spirit that should be our mental picture of the Temple of the Church, of a Temple growing towards infinity in all directions, thrusting out towards the heavenly regions like the baroque cupola of the St. Johann-Nepomuk-Kirche at Munich, that stupendous cathedral which opens up a vision of the celestial realms of the Church, and gives access to endless vistas of contemplation.

The Church and the New Creation

The creation of the Church is the creation of a new cosmos, of which the first was only the preparation and image. On Calvary, when the ancient world vanished and the new order began, at the same time that the veil of the Temple was rent, announcing the abolition of the Mosaic order and the entry of mankind into the true Temple, the sun was darkened,⁴⁵ because it is the new creation of the world that comes into force, and a new sun rises whose brightness infinitely surpasses that of the first. This is the new universe which Isaiah proclaimed, when he declared that there should be a new heaven and a new earth. It is of this that St. John the Divine teaches us in the Book of Revelation, when he says that “the city had no need of the sun,” for “the Lamb is the light thereof.”⁴⁶

As the sun is the vital principle of the biosphere, so Christ, the sun of spirits, is the vivifying principle of the spiritual universe. It is he whose rising is hailed by Zechariah and Simeon: “*Visitavit nos oriens ex alto*”—“the dayspring from on high hath visited us.” As the sun rises in the East, so Christ, according to Scripture. It is in the East that the first Paradise was planted; it is towards the East that ever since then mankind has ceaselessly gazed; it is from the East that the Lord appeared.

He is Paradise regained, the first creation restored. It is still towards the East that we continue to look, because it is in the East that he arose on the day of the ascension, and because it is from the East that he must come again like a flash of lightning on the horizon. So it is towards the East that our churches are

oriented; so it is to the East that, drawn by an invisible force of gravitation, longing souls are attracted with all their weight; so it is to the East that, rising before the dawn, watching monks, heirs of the first Christians, await the appearance of the visible sun, as a daily sign and image of that other Light. “*O Oriens, splendor lucis aeternae et sol iustitiae, veni ad illuminandos sedentes in tenebris et umbra mortis.*” Every day the sun represents the coming, the parousia, the rising in glory of the light eternal.

This raising of the cosmic Temple to the level of the Temple of the Church is recorded in the liturgy for the Feast of Christmas, which was the *Natale solis invicti* of the Romans.⁴⁷ So Christ appears to us as the inheritor, not merely of the Jewish order and the Mosaic Temple, but also of the pagan order and the cosmic Temple.

He was to inherit earth and Rome,
The violent sea and bitter Zion.⁴⁸

It is the character of Christmas to reveal this to us; not to be in the line of descent of the Jewish expectation, of the cycle of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles, in the sequence of pastoral cults and the Jewish East, but rather to be in the succession of another expectation, that of the wise men of the pagan world who watched the stars, and who were represented at the manger at Christ’s nativity by the Magi, side by side with the shepherds. For the visible sun was the pagan prefiguration in the cosmic Temple and the expectation of the invisible sun and of another illumination, as the annual entry into the Temple by the High Priest was, under the old Mosaic Law, the prefiguration of the true High Priest into the heavenly Temple; and under the new Law it remains the daily ritual representation, according to the measure of our existence which is subject to the rhythm of sleep and night, of the rising—henceforth irrevocably possessed—of the final sun in all its transcendent glory. Some day, indeed, the visible sun will be extinguished, and the true light will shine alone. Then we shall no longer need images and figures; then our eyes shall see, in the heaven of an eternal day, the sun that knows no setting, a perpetual Orient, the ever-renewed arising of the sun of righteousness.

Liturgy in the New Temple

Thus the new Temple finally replaced the Temples of Jerusalem and the cosmos. It was time for these to disappear. The first Law was destroyed because of its weak-

43 St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas: First Complete American Edition, 3 vols. (New York: Benzinger, 1947–1948).

44 St. John of the Cross, *Maxims*, in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1979).

45 “There was a darkness over all the land” (Matt. 27:45).

46 Rev. 21:23, “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away. and there was no more sea” (Rev. 21:1), “And there shall be no night there; and they shall need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light” (Rev. 22:5).

47 “The Day of the Birth of the Unconquered Sun.” Louis Duchesne, *Origines du Culte Chrétien: Étude sur la Liturgie Latine avant Charlemagne* (Paris: Thorin, 1909), 279. Eng. trans.: *Christian Worship: Its Origin and Evolution: A Study of the Latin Liturgy Up to the Time of Charlemagne* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1903).

48 Péguy, “Eve,” 842.

ness and ineffectiveness, but it saw the introduction of a greater hope, by means of which we have access to the presence of God. The figure has no further part to play, when the fact which it proclaims has come to pass. The new Temple brings with it an infinitely better reality. It is no longer through heavenly signs that man looks for traces of God, but the true sun has finally risen upon a new world. It is no longer in a single place that the living God may be worshipped; it is to the ends of the earth that the new Temple reaches out, and it is enough that two or three are gathered together in the name of Jesus, for him to dwell among them.

But the destruction of the old order is positive; it removes the blemishes of the old order, it preserves all the valuable elements. Nothing is lost, all is retained, organized on a higher level of significance; it is a pure elevation, an absolute progress. Just as the Temple at Jerusalem continued the cosmic Temple while taking over its functions, so the Church continues the Temples of Jerusalem and the cosmos. It offers the new sacrifice according to the ancient ritual patterns.

Thus the Mass contains all the breadth of time and space, cosmos and history. Through it, we have recovered in the depths of our ancestral memory the first religious gesture of mankind, the offering of bread and wine, that of Melchizedek, the high priest of the cosmic Temple—and it is he whose sacrifice becomes a sacrament: “*Sicuti accepta habere dignatus es munera pueri tui justi Abel et sacrificium Patris nostrae Abrahae; et quod tibi obtulit summus sacerdos tuus Melchisedech.*”⁴⁹ On the threshold of the Holy of Holies—“*ad sancta sanctorum puris mentibus mereamur introire*”⁵⁰—the Mass inspires us with Mosaic dread in the highest sense: “*Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth.*”⁵¹ All is brought together here, restored to its true meaning, rendered to God through Christ: “*Per quem haec omnia, Domine, semper bona creas ...*”⁵² The Mass bears witness, at the *epiclesis*, to the descent of the fire which, by consuming the victims, shows that they were pleasing to God; it is no longer material fire descending on fleshly victims presented upon the altar by Elijah, but spiritual fire, the Holy Spirit, which comes down to consume the corruptions of which the Host is the sacrament, “*ut quotquot ex haec altaris participatione sacrosanctum corpus et sanguine, sumpserimus omni benedictione coelis et gratia repleamur!*”⁵³

49 “Look with favor on these offerings as once you accepted the gifts of your servant Abel, the sacrifice of Abraham, our father in faith, and the bread and wine offered by your priest Melchizedech.” Eucharistic Prayer 1.

50 “That being made pure of heart we may be worthy to enter into the Holy of Holies.” Silent prayer said by the priest during the *Confiteor* [Confession] of the Mass.

51 “Holy, holy, holy, LORD God of Hosts.”

52 “By whom, Lord, thou dost ever give unto us every good thing.” From the prayer of the priest after the consecration during the Mass.

53 “That as many of us as shall receive the most sacred Body and Blood of thy Son by partaking

What is true of the Mass, is true of the whole order of the Church. I shall only take one other example, that if the great liturgical feasts; the Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles. In origin these are three seasonal feasts, three liturgies of the cosmic Temple. The Passover is the feast of the first grains of barley, and this is why unleavened bread is offered, loaves made before there was a new leaven of fermented yeast. Pentecost, seven weeks later, is the feast of the harvest. Tabernacles, in September, is the feast of fruit and vintage, when huts of leaves are put up. Under Moses, new meanings come to be connected with these feasts, in harmony with the establishment of the religion of Sinai. The Passover, which now receives its name, is the “passing over” of God, the sparing of the Jewish first-born. Pentecost, seven weeks later, is the revelation on Sinai and the vision of the Tabernacle, the theophany of God in thunder and cloud. Finally, Tabernacles commemorates the forty years’ pilgrimage in the tabernacles, the tents of the wilderness. Thus the ancient rites develop a new meaning.

The Temple of the Church is written into the continuity of the feasts; it gathers together the various elements and gives them their fresh significance, underlining in this way the fact that they were only images of what was to come. The Passover is the day of deliverance not from Egypt, but from sin; it is the day when the true Lamb is slain; it is the day when the firstborn among the dead is spared; it is the day when the true unleavened bread is distributed. What hand, save that of him who said he had come to accomplish all things, has gathered together with such care every crumb of the ancient feast without losing a single grain, and has made of them signs and sacraments into which he has breathed authentic life?

Pentecost is the pouring out of the Spirit, in thunder and cloud as on Sinai, but for the sake of dwelling not in the Temple made with human hands, but in the new Temple which is the hearts of the faithful. Finally, Tabernacles, which is only reflected precisely in the liturgy of the Ember Days (of fast and abstinence) in September, covers in fact the whole period after Pentecost, representing the long journey across the desert to reach the Promised Land, which is to replace the precarious tents of the nomads with the dwelling of God in the Temple of Moses.

Clearly it is no accident, but a definite divine intention, that brought the great mysteries of the revelation of Christ into relation with the Jewish festivals, emphasizing in this way that the latter were figures of what was to come. However, there is no question whatever of reducing the Christian mystery to what preceded it, for it is completely new; and at the same time this fundamental newness is inscribed in a tradition, asserts the continuity and unity of the divine plan. If the word “history” has any content, if it means at once absolute progress and a continu-

thereof from this altar may be filled with every heavenly blessing.” Prayer of the priest after the consecration during the Mass.

ity in that progress which makes it intelligible, it is here that it applies, and here alone. It betrays the presence of God. For there is a divine presence in history, as there is in time. There is a divine presence in duration, as there is in space, and that presence is the dwelling of God in the Temple of duration, which one may call the "prophetic Temple," because it is revealed in that perpetual and absolute development which each period, each aeon manifests, the Mosaic age being an absolute advance upon the cosmic age, and the age of Christ upon that of Moses, and at the same time upon that prefiguration, that characteristic form of each period in the preceding period which is, strictly speaking, *prophecy*.

Christ is thus present in the whole of history, at once present and hidden in the Holy of Holies of the prophetic Temple, but revealing himself more and more clearly. The present aeon is to him the figuration of the coming "Day," the week that prepares for the Sabbath. It is this presence of God in time, after that of space, which Rudolph Otto recognizes in his book, *The Idea of the Holy*: "He who devotes himself to contemplation of that great continuity which we call the old covenant up to the time of Christ, will feel, as it were, forcibly awoken in him the intuition that some eternal power presides over it."⁵⁴

This contemplation of the presence of God in history is the reading of Scripture. The cosmos and Scripture are the two great Temples where God hides himself beneath signs, beneath the veil of the Tabernacle. The death of Christ rends the veil, reveals their meaning, shows us his presence hidden beneath signs. This is why meditation on Scripture was the special task of the early Fathers. It is no mere study, but a real contemplation of God as present in his Scripture. Thus, for Origen, Scripture is "the sign, chosen by God, of the presence of the *Logos*, like a word in the world, the precious urn of the spiritual life, the inexhaustible material source of the divine life."⁵⁵ In the Bible, the Jews venerated the presence of God, but he remained obscure to them, their eyes were covered with a veil. With Christ, the veil of the twofold Temple is removed—at once of the Temple at Jerusalem and that of the sealed book. The peoples are permitted to penetrate into each of them, to enter into communion with space and duration.

Thus Christianity confers its mysterious nature on history, by showing it the presence of God. We have said this of space in relation to the cosmic Temple. For the Christian it is not that unreal space of the physicists which consists of nothing but mathematical relationships, nor that universe profaned by man which is reduced to an object of pleasure. It is the place where a presence dwells, the house

of God. It is the same with time. Prophetic intuition confers its mysterious nature on history. It is opposed to the rationalist conception of an entirely quantitative development, in which there is no absolute advance, and thus no real advance at all. It is equally opposed to the irrationalist conception which acknowledges only a sequence of random civilizations, lacking all continuity and supported by no authentic wisdom.⁵⁶ In these two conceptions there is no presence, no mystery, but only pure reason or pure chance, while prophecy discloses at once a power and a wisdom—and thus a presence—and does not merely disclose it, but reveals it clearly. Moreover, we are permitted to worship this presence.

But the advance of history is not achieved without rending. The movement from one order to another, if it is a pure fulfillment and preserves in the highest degree all the valuable elements in its predecessor, also demands that the old order should disappear in its particular existence. This is the dramatic aspect of the mystery of history. "Destroy this Temple and I shall rebuild it." The new Temple must appear, in order that the old Temple may be destroyed. "It was necessary that Christ should die" in so far as he was identified with the old order, that by rising again he might establish the new order. That is the mysterious meaning of the passion. The death of Christ is the destruction of the old order, that of the Law, with which he must identify himself so that it might be destroyed in him, because this destruction was the necessary condition for the establishment of the new order and the coming of the kingdom. The death of Christ marks the break in continuity between the two orders, their incompatibility. This is the mystery that reproduces for every Christian the baptism, death, and resurrection, by which the mystery of history takes place in every destiny. The mystery of Christ is at once the fulfillment of the figure and the destruction of the figure as such; it condemns him who is attached to the figure.

Such, too, is the meaning of hostility of the Jews to Christ; it shows the resistance of the old order to the new order, and thus their discontinuity. This is also the exemplary meaning of the condemnation of Israel. It means that Israel as a figure is abolished—and this is expressed historically by the condemnation of the Jews. This is one of the deepest mysteries of history, on which St. Paul meditates at length in the Epistle to the Romans: "For I would not, brethren, that

⁵⁶ All the interpretations of history apart from the prophetic perspective lead either to the eternal recurrence of Nietzsche, or to the purely quantitative progress of Karl Marx, or to the pure irrationalism of Oswald Spengler. See on this subject the well-justified remarks of Raymond Aron, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History: An Essay on the Limits of Historical Objectivity* (Boston: Beacon, 1961). This would seem to show that the modern idea of history as qualitative progress, of which the ancient world knew nothing, and which is born with Christianity, is an idea of the religious order, which loses its content in any other perspective. Compare Jean Daniélou, *The Lord of History: Reflections on the Inner Meaning of History* (Chicago: Regnery, 1957).

⁵⁴ Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy; An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational* (New York: Oxford University, 1958), 233. Compare Jean Daniélou, *God and Us* (London: Mowbray, 1957), Chapter 1.

⁵⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Le mystère d'Origène" [The Mystery in Origen] in *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, (December 1936): 545.

ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved."⁵⁷ For the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance. Thus the condemnation of Israel appears to be required by the necessity of demonstrating visibly the destruction of the old order. It forms part of the same economy as the destruction of the Temple. It strikes us all the more because it affects a living race. "It was necessary," wrote Origen, "that the elders of the Jerusalem of the lower regions and their scribes—a living incarnation of the figure—should rise up against Jesus, in order that the elders of heaven and the spiritual princes and the scribes concerned with the letter graven in all hearts by the Holy Spirit should render grace to him."⁵⁸

The sign of the Temple appears to us, therefore, under a new aspect. It is the "sign of contradiction" proclaimed by Simeon on the day of the presentation in the Temple, as he grasped the dramatic relationship which was to unite the child whom he held in his hands with the Temple in the midst of which he stood. This prophecy was strangely fulfilled; for it is by declaring his relationship with the Temple, by pronouncing the mysterious words, "Destroy this Temple, and I will build it again in three days," that Christ was condemned to death. This is the very accusation that was made against him. And it is just because the Pharisees had calculated its scope, that they had understood that it meant that the old order was abolished and that the new Temple stood before them. But the mystery is precisely that they refused to acknowledge him, that they refused the death that was the condition of the resurrection, that to maintain at all costs the old Temple which they felt to be threatened, they sought to destroy the new Temple—and that in doing so, they were on the contrary the means of its construction, themselves pronouncing the sentence of death on the old order, destroying with the manhood of Jesus the whole Mosaic order with which he sought completely to identify himself, and by this very means permitting the establishment of the new order in the resurrected Jesus.

This drama is also that of the pagan world, the inheritor of the cosmic order. Although the new creation had appeared, and the old had perished, it too sought desperately to maintain the cosmic Temple, which was henceforth without an object, and to venerate the visible sun, whose brightness had been darkened since the time of Calvary. It remained subject to the cycle of the stars and their fatalism without understanding that the chain of necessity was irrevocably broken,

⁵⁷ Rom. 11:25–26.

⁵⁸ Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*. Text in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris: Garnier and J. P. Migne, 1857–1866), 1027 B, 1029 B. Hereafter, PG.

that man had escaped from the round of births and had entered once for all into eternal life. So, as for Israel, what had been until then a prefiguration became death and corruption. It was no longer the innocence of the cosmic world "and the first sunrise on creation's morn,"⁵⁹ but in the heart of the Temple of the Church the anachronistic presentation of a cult that no longer existed. Thus Julian sinned against history when he abandoned the God who had lightened the day of his baptism, to return to the pagan god of the solstice and force himself to re-establish a paganism now transformed out of all recognition.

The mystery of history continues to develop today. It provides the key to that dramatic relationship which never ceases at once to attract and repel the three worlds—pagan, Jewish, and mankind. At the same time, the pagan world and the Jewish world are secretly attracted by the Christian world, as if towards their fulfillment, and at the same time they oppose it, for that fulfillment could only take place if they renounced their own existence. Sometimes the Christian world sees them as precursors, whose riches it possesses in their integrity—the Bible and the virgin, Rome and Jerusalem—and sometimes as enemies who refuse to receive Christ and, like the Jews of old, take up stones to drive him and his followers from the Temple. The fact is that it is necessary, according to the profound view of Pascal, that there should be manifested at once the continuity and the separation of the figure and the reality—and this preeminently in the case of the Jewish people, on account of their special relationship with Christianity, but in an equally special manner in relation to all races and empires. Thus the tragedy of Jerusalem continues throughout history, which is *crisis* and resolution, at the same time as it is fulfillment and *pleroma*.

Into the Temple of the Mystics

Christ, the Son of God, has built for God, for himself, and for us, an eternal Ark and Tabernacle; and it is none other than he himself or the Church and every man of goodwill whose prince and head he is. ... When a man seeks to obey God with an undivided heart, he is freed and discharged from every sin, by the blood of our LORD. He is bound and united to God, and God with him. And he becomes himself the Ark and Tabernacle where God wishes to dwell, not in a figure but in reality. For the figure is past, and the reality is revealed to those who wish to turn towards it.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Péguy, "Eve," 707.

⁶⁰ John von Ruysbroeck, *Le Tabernacle Spirituel*, [The Spiritual Tabernacle], in *Oeuvres de*

So John of Ruysbroeck writes, at the beginning of his treatise on the spiritual Tabernacle. The true Temple, which is the manhood of the Word, presents a threefold aspect. It is at the same time the manhood of Jesus, the Church, and every soul in particular. Every soul is thus the authentic Temple of God, of which the Mosaic Temple was the figure; and Ruysbroeck, after Gregory of Nyssa, before Teresa of Avila, described the spiritual splendor of this interior Tabernacle.

Christ had proclaimed the dwelling of the three divine persons in those who should be incorporated into his manhood. "If a man love Me ... we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."⁶¹ The saints have known the fulfillment of this promise. St. Teresa herself wrote: "This person sees clearly that the three persons are in the interior of her soul, and in the inmost place as in a very deep abyss. This person cannot say what this very deep abyss is. It is there that she feels within herself this divine company."⁶²

Thus every Christian soul is a consecrated Temple, which must not be profaned: "Know ye not that ye are the Temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the Temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the Temple of God is holy, which Temple ye are. ... Know ye not that your body is the Temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? ... Ye are the Temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."⁶³

The interior Temple is the pattern which was prefigured by the Mosaic Tabernacle. Like the latter, it consists of three parts. First of all, there is the outer court, which is exterior man. "The outer court of the Tabernacle is a life conformed to morality according to the exterior man, with all that is connected with it. ... It is surrounded by a curtain of fine twined linen: by this is understood purity of manners and life."⁶⁴ Thus the practice of virtue is the outside of the spiritual tabernacle; it is its most conspicuous feature. In the outer court there was the altar of burnt sacrifice. "This signifies the unity of the senses and the recollection of the powers of the senses, through withdrawal from earthly preoccupations."⁶⁵ Then there is a second, more interior enclosure, which is the holy place. "The life of virtue is not only on this level the practice of the virtues, but also the theological virtues which

are of a more excellent order than the virtues, since they unite us directly with God."⁶⁶

Thus we penetrate more and more into the interior, and in proportion as the soul thus enters into herself, God draws near to her. "For it is in the interior man that truth dwells." The right way to find God is thus to detach oneself from the exterior man, from this foreign life in which we alienate ourselves, in order to recover our real life, the image of God, which is the center of the soul. This progressive entry into oneself is the very movement of the spiritual life; it withdraws from the illusory world of appearances in order to find its reality in its own depths. This movement of return does not withdraw the soul from others. On the contrary, it is when she is most at the center of herself that she is nearest to them; it is through the center of our soul that we communicate with others. In this way above all, the soul once more finds God. For the movement from exterior to interior is at the same time an entrance and an exit. It is an entrance because it withdraws us from the world in order that we may find ourselves, but it is an exit because beyond ourselves, but in the inmost place, we must find God, who is nearer to us than we are to ourselves, "in me, more myself than I." At the deepest level, it enables me to discover the source from which my existence springs.

At the beginning of this abandonment of the world, this return into oneself, prayer appears to the soul as an act of pure will, a struggle against a carnal weight. Little by little the soul grows accustomed to it—and it is this carnal weight that becomes alien. She rediscovers her true nature. But then she encounters other obstacles—pride, vanity—which she must renounce. Then it is images themselves and concepts from which her understanding must be purified—and this is a more excellent purity. Finally it is the very root of her ontological being, the *amor sui*, the love of self, that she must renounce. And this is the most painful effort of all. But beyond it there is rest, the peaceful ocean of the divine beatitude. The soul wanders there eternally, ever abandoning herself in ecstasy. But ecstasy is no longer anguished. It is the renunciation of Love⁶⁷ that would be intolerable to her. Ecstasy is what we move towards. In heaven we shall be totally disappropriated, brought into God. (This should not be represented as possession, since it is a perpetual and beautifying dispossession.) But the difference is that this renunciation is a costly process here below, because it corrects our fallen nature, while in heaven it will no longer be so, since we shall be totally restored to our true being.

This is the Holy of Holies, the *adyton*, the most secret place in the sanctuary. It is the depth of the soul of which John Tauler speaks, its center, the deepest abyss of which St. Teresa tells us. This place cannot be known by the soul. It is a dark-

Ruysbroeck *L'Admirable* (Bruxelles: Vromant, 1928).

61 John 14:23.

62 St. Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, (the seventh mansion). Text in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol. 2, tran. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, DC: Institute for Carmelite Studies, 1980).

63 1 Cor. 3:16–17; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16.

64 Ruysbroeck, *Le Tabernacle spirituel*.

65 Ruysbroeck, *Le Tabernacle spirituel*.

66 Ruysbroeck, *Le Tabernacle spirituel*.

67 1 John 4:16.

ness which her glance cannot penetrate. And it is there, hidden from profane eyes, in the utmost depth of the sanctuary of the soul, that the Trinity dwells. Or rather it is there that the Trinity perpetually communicates itself to the soul that lies before it, leading her to the very heart of her own life, through the communication which the Father makes to her of the Word who by the Spirit draws her into the Father, bearing her within the cycle of the trinitarian life, within the movement of eternal love. Through this, in an ecstasy which carries her beyond the world and beyond herself, the soul truly succeeds in being transformed into God.

The presence of God at the center of the soul is not a static reality. It is an ever-renewed coming, a perpetual generation of the Word. This is the mystery of the nativity of the Word in souls—“*Dum medium silentium teneret omnia.*”⁶⁸ It is in the night of the divine darkness that God engenders the Son, proffers the Word from all eternity; it is in the deepest of silences that he proffers the one *Logos*. It is in the silence of the night of Bethlehem that the Word is born into his historical existence; it is likewise in that darkness of the soul which is unknowable to it, at the center where there are no longer images or acts, in the midmost silence, in the recollection of all the powers of the soul, at its very core, which is a window that opens upon God, the deep root that originates in him—it is in this silence of the night that the Word is engendered in the soul.

The interior man, great and noble, comes from the pure depth of divinity. He is made in the image of God, the noblest, the most spiritual of beings, and he is called to enter into that depth from which he sprang in order that he may there become the sharer in all goodness. If anyone could, deep within himself, find, know, and contemplate God as he is established in himself, hidden mysteriously in the depth of that soul, certainly such a man would be happy. No doubt man turns away the inward gaze of his soul and lets it wander among outward things, he scatters himself and is lost among creatures. Yet he is always brought back, sought out by God, who is present in his own depths, within his inmost soul.⁶⁹

O Mary, bring together all the powers of my soul,
and establish me at the center of my soul.
In the silence beyond all desires, in the night beyond all images,
make my soul flow into itself towards that mysterious center
where the Word is to be born;
make my soul flow entirely into the Word
and enter into the unity of the trinitarian life.

68 “While earth was rapt in silence and night only half through its course, your almighty Word, O LORD, came down from his royal throne.” Compare Wis. 18:14–15.

69 Tauler, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 2 (Paris: Tralin, 1911), 49.

May it be lost entirely, may it lay aside all activity,
may it be transformed into thee, O Word of God.
O Mystery of the Word present from the beginning,
present once more in my heart: “*et Verbum caro factum est*”
—“and the Word was made flesh,”
grant me the power to become a child of God,
bestowing sonship upon me: “*dedit eis potestatem filios Dei fieri*”
—“to them gave he power to become the sons of God.”
Draw me into that center of my soul, make me present at that
birth.
All heaven is assembled there as at Bethlehem;
Mary bows down with the angels, Joseph and all the saints.
Together they worship him who comes down for us, in us,
among us.

The Mass Is Open to Heaven

In the Temple at Jerusalem, the Holy of Holies was divided from the rest of the Temple by a veil, woven of four colors, which none ever passed through, unless it was the high priest once a year. The very repetition of the act indicated that it was only a question here of a symbolic gesture, of an effort which had not reached its goal: “The Holy Ghost thus signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest.”⁷⁰ All was figurative here—Temple, High Priest, entry. And the reality that was thus figuratively given, was the consummation of the work of salvation, the final entry of Christ, the High Priest of mankind, into the heavenly Temple on ascension day. “Christ being come a High Priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect Tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.”⁷¹

All the words here are charged with mystery, and describe the greatest act of history, the unique act, of which the action of the Mass is only the sacramental possession: “*Jube haec preferri per manus sancti Angeli tui in sublime altare tuum.*”⁷² For it is the ascension that is the consummation of the mystery of salvation. Christ is the High Priest, that is to say, he is the representative of total humanity—and with him the whole of “human nature” is finally brought into the heavenly Temple. With him, it is the heavenly Temple that humanity penetrates, that is to say, into

70 Heb. 9:8.

71 Heb. 9:11–12.

72 “Command these offerings to be borne by the hands of thy holy angels to thine altar on high.” Prayer of the priest at the consecration during the Mass.

the *pleroma* of the spiritual creatures which are the Temple, the glory, in the midst of which dwells the Holy Trinity. "The perfect unity of heavenly spirits bound together without any division, constitutes the total and proper dwelling of divinity."⁷³

St. Gregory of Nyssa compares this total, heavenly creation with a symphony, with a chorus mingled with songs and dances, celebrating a perpetual feast around the leader: "There was a time when the chorus of spiritual creatures was one, all looking towards the single leader and putting forth the harmony of their dances, following the measure given by him. But the Fall supervened, marring that inspired harmony. It was a cause of stumbling to the first men who danced amid the angelic powers."⁷⁴ Since then, the latter have kept watch at the heavenly gates, awaiting the return of the hundredth sheep, their sister humanity. The ascension is the return of the lost sheep borne on the shoulders of the shepherd, and the angels joyfully hail Christ, the conqueror of death, who brings man back into the chorus, now once more complete.

This entry of mankind into the heavenly Temple is achieved once for all. It is no longer the High Priest alone who is admitted once a year to the figurative Holy of Holies—a fact, as St. Paul profoundly remarks, which showed by its very repetition that it was only a question of a figure and not of an achievement; but it is mankind as a whole that now dwells there permanently. This again is a proclamation of the highest importance. It means that salvation is irreversibly achieved, that henceforth it is no longer exposed to a relapse. And how could it be otherwise, since it is in the very person of the Son of God that humanity is united with divinity? This declaration disperses any mirage of eternal recurrence, with its cycle of salvation and relapse. It gives Christian hope the solidarity of the Word of God who never fails. The divine plan is fulfilled, the world has achieved its end and object, it has found its meaning. We are at the end of all times: "So shall my

Word be that goeth out of my mouth, it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please."⁷⁵

Indeed it is "by his own blood" that Christ enters the heavenly sanctuary. Salvation is achieved for all time, for eternity, through the sacrifice of the Lamb. This is why the sacrifice of the Lamb is coextensive with all periods of history. It fills Holy Week. It is the same way that the Book of Revelation presents to us the same scene of the entry into the heavenly Temple: "And I beheld, and lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain."⁷⁶ Here is a supreme dramatic effect. The angels are expecting the Lion of Judah, the triumphant King—and it is a sacrificial Lamb who appears.

Gregory of Nyssa describes their astonishment: "The angels of earth went in procession and demanded that the celestial gates should be opened to him, so that he might be glorified afresh. But he was not recognized, clothed as he was in the shabby garment of our nature, his tattered clothes bedraggled with human grime."⁷⁷ This is the new element that is introduced into the celestial choir; the red robe of the redeemed mingles with the white robe of the heavenly host. There is something else for which the angels can envy mankind—the fact that it shared in the passion of Christ. In the midst of the angelic choir, here to the eternal Temple come the martyrs bathed in the blood of the Lamb, that blood in which St. Catherine of Siena saw the whole Church steeped.

Henceforth, humanity's place is in heaven; it is there that man dwells already through Christ, the head of the Mystical Body, and through the glorified Church. It is there that henceforth there is a uniquely valuable liturgy, no longer beside the waters, nor in the Temple of stone. It is this liturgy that St. John the Divine describes in the Book of Revelation: "The elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints."⁷⁸ It is in this heavenly liturgy that we share at the Mass, which is the offering of the heavenly sacrifice. It is the real presence of the event commemorated, which is granted by a special privilege—and that is, strictly speaking, a mystery, abstracted from time. But it is also placed sacramentally in space and time; and that is this, on the ritual side, that the sacrifice which we offer differs from the heavenly sacrifice with which it is substantially identical. So it is the same reality which is symbolized by the entry of the High Priest into the Holy of Holies, fulfilled by the entry of Christ into heaven on ascension day, possessed invisibly

75 Isa. 55:11.

76 Rev. 5:6.

77 Gregory of Nyssa, *The Ascension*. Text in PG 46, 693 C.

78 Rev. 5:8.

73 St. Bernard, *The Word of Isaiah*, 3. Compare a passage from St. Ignatius beloved by Newman: "In your unanimity and concordant charity Jesus Christ is sung. And one by one you take your parts in the choir, so as to sing with one voice through Jesus Christ to the Father that he may hear your petitions (from Ignatius' *Epistle to the Ephesians*, 4).

74 Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Psalms*, PG 44, 508 B, 509 A. This image refers to the type of dance known as a singing round. It makes a circle by singing and dancing round the altar of the god. But the center may be occupied by a leader bearing a lyre. The symbol recurs in Plotinus, *Enneads*, Bk. 6, Chap. 9, 38. It is not a question strictly speaking, as in Origen, of an angelic prehistory of mankind, but of a participation in the privileges of the angels, that is to say, "in familiarity with God, in the contemplation of divine realities." Moreover, these privileges are not present as having historically existed, but as representing God's plan for humanity which is only fulfilled historically in and through Jesus Christ.

on earth under the eucharistic species; and it is the entry of human nature into the heavenly Temple. The Mass is open to heaven, and this is why the angels are present. It is filled with the echo of their songs, from the *Gloria* of the nativity to the *Sanctus* of the hidden mystery.

But it remains to be said that this entry of mankind into the heavenly Temple, if it is achieved for all men, if it is already real for every member, must nevertheless be gained by each of them. It is real—and that is the fundamental difference from the Mosaic situation—but it is still veiled: “Christ being come a High Priest of good things to come.”⁷⁹ Every present economy, if it is a reality in relation to the Mosaic figure, is itself a figure in relation to the consummation of all things. It is prophecy, waiting. The real life, the real dwelling, are elsewhere. Here there are only passing tents, which we must always be ready to fold up. “While we are at home in the body, we are absent from the LORD.”⁸⁰ The total presence is like an inward weight that irresistibly attracts the Christian towards the divine presence: “*Pondus meum, amor meus.*”⁸¹ St. John the Divine in the Book of Revelation shows us mankind as a procession advancing towards the heavenly Temple; “A great multitude ... stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.”⁸²

Thus the Christian life is altogether an act of waiting. The Christian knows that he is made for greater things. He feels acutely the misery of his present condition. He aspires to be relieved of the weight of animal life and its servitude. “I desire to depart, and to be with Christ.”⁸³ Whilst carnal man grasps desperately at his pleasures and possessions, the Christian lives already in the order of being, detached, free, making use of time, so long as it is given, to perform works of charity towards all—an activity invisible to the eyes of the world. The Christian life is a hidden life. But when the world is folded up like a tent, the reality that has been hidden until that moment will be clearly revealed.

This does not mean, all the same, that the Christian is not interested in the world, but he sees in it only a beginning, only a crucible where immortal souls are in the making. The only work that interests him is, at every moment, making the life of Christ grow in himself and others. The world is indeed for him “a machine for making gods.” But it is in this world that gods are made; so he takes part eagerly in temporal struggles, not for their own sake, and without believing in the establishment of a perfect human city, for he knows that Christ said, “My

kingdom is not of this world,” but because the salvation of many souls is bound up with the temporal conditions of life.

This is not to say that there is for him, as it were, a devaluing of earthly realities, a weakening of the instinct for life, a desire to escape from the wicked world, a morbid taste for death. This attitude, which inspires the “Hymns to Night” of Novalis, the *Nirvana* of Arthur Schopenhauer, the “Tristan” of Richard Wagner, is foreign to him. It is the return of the individual to the original stream of life, to an undifferentiated primordial state. For the Christian, on the contrary, death is the full reality of all for which he has imperfectly lived on earth, the liberation of the person with regard to the mortal shedding of blood. “Through death, we offer ourselves to that for which we lived on earth.”⁸⁴

This does not mean, either, that the Christian blurs the frontiers of life and death, as a Rilke seems to do. “The living all make the mistake of establishing vast differences. The angels, for their part, do not know if they are passing among the living or the dead.”⁸⁵ Certainly there is for the Christian a continuity between the Christian life that has begun, and its consummation in eternity. But it remains true that the human act by which the free soul ratifies his detachment from mortality and adheres to eternal life is the most serious of all. Not that he could change anything. We know that the faithful soul could not deny what has always been his life. But it is then that he reaps the fruits. It is to prepare himself for this solemn act, which is the entry of every man into the heavenly Temple, through the veil that still conceals it, that man’s whole life must be devoted.

That life consists for the Christian in endowing himself little by little with divine manners. And the education that proceeds till the hour of death—for all life is only an adolescence—consists, as Jean Guitton says, “In that discipline by which we prepare the child for temporal life, the adult for eternal life, so that whatever he sees, he feels he has seen it already.”⁸⁶ We must not be without a country on our arrival in heaven. Our life is an apprenticeship. It is a matter of learning the rudiments of what we shall have one day to do. So let us already try in prayer to stammer what will later be the “conversation in heaven” with God and his angels; so we must try to make less crude this intellect of ours, which is so immersed in the world of time and space, and to acclimatize it gradually to heavenly things through the action of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Thus charity itself is the clumsy beginning of that complete communion which will embrace all the saints. So doing, we

79 Heb. 11:11.

80 2 Cor. 5:6.

81 “My love is my weight.” St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Bk. 13, Chap. 9.

82 Rev. 7:9.

83 Phil. 1:23.

84 Gabriel Marcel, *La Soif* [The Thirst] (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1938), 161.

85 *Duino Elegies*.

86 Jean Guitton, *La Pensée Moderne et le Catholicisme* [Catholicism and Modern Thought] (Paris: Aubier, 1938), 3:57.

begin to do what we have always to do. It is our real life which is being mapped out. Let us begin it.

This apprenticeship is not only that of our life with God, it is also that of our life together. Death will not only be the revelation of our mysterious unity—that is to say, something still hidden. Just as beneath the appearances of our mortal body is hidden our glorified body, so beneath the appearance of the visible Church is hidden the Mystical Body, the unity of man. Both are revealed at the same time. The two great signs of the present decadence of mankind are the corruption of death and the rupture of unity. The restoration of incorruptibility and of unity will mark the return of mankind to its true condition. Of this, the Eucharist is at once the sign and the instrument. It is essentially viatic, the bread of the traveler, which keeps him going till he reaches home. It communicates the principle of the glorified life and maintains it; it symbolizes the unity of the Mystical Body and begins to put it into effect. Finally, for our poor human race, so prone to earthly food, it is already the bread of heaven, of which it gives us the foretaste, besides which earthly things lose their savor, and which slowly awakens in us a longing for the life of reality, and draws our souls towards the Father.