

Transfiguration

The feast of the Lord's Transfiguration (August 6) is one of the major feasts celebrated among Eastern Christians. Usually on that day the faithful bring to the church fruit to be blessed and to be offered to God. This is the first fruit before the full harvest. Thus Christians manifest their thanksgiving to God for His protective love during the growing period of spring and summer and beg Him for a full harvest.

But there is a deeper faith-vision that penetrates this simple ritual. In this celebration Eastern Christians profess their faith in the total life-process as they experientially act out the mystery of the seed falling into the earth, later to bring forth fruit a hundredfold. Each Christian in Baptism becomes a seed implanted into the Church. There he is to grow to full maturity as a child of God. A *transfiguring* process is taking place over the spring, summer and autumn years of the Christian's life.

The Christian, endowed with the power of the Trinitarian life embedded into his being in Baptism, is being driven by God's inner activity and man's cooperation towards the fullness destined for him in Christ Jesus. The Christian's growth is a movement in assimilating love that divinizes as it both unites and distinguishes man in his

uniqueness because of his consciousness that God loves him uniquely.

The feast of the Transfiguration celebrates the glorification of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. The Christians gather in faith to profess their belief that what was sown in ignominy was harvested in glory. Jesus Christ possessed a

. . . .state (that) was divine,
 yet He did not cling
 to His equality with God
 but emptied Himself
 to assume the condition of a slave,
 and became as men are;
 and being as all men are,
 He was humbler yet,
 even to accepting death,
 death on a cross.
 But God raised Him high
 and gave Him the name
 which is above all other names
 so that all beings
 in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld,
 should bend the knee at the name of Jesus
 and that every tongue should acclaim
 Jesus Christ as Lord,
 to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:6–11).

The Jews had killed Jesus the Nazarene, as Peter preached on the Pentecost, "but God raised Him to life" (Act 2, 24). "God raised this man Jesus to life and all of us are witnesses to that. Now raised to the heights by God's right hand, He has received from the Father the Holy Spirit. . ." (Acts 2:32–33).

Thus radiant joy transfuses this feast as Christians, looking at the beautifully colored fruits blessed on the table before the iconostasis, profess that "for us, our

homeland is in Heaven and from Heaven comes the Savior we are waiting for, the Lord Jesus Christ and He will *transfigure* these wretched bodies of ours into copies of His glorious body. He will do that by the same power with which He can subdue the whole universe" (Phil. 3:20–21).

There is also a profession of faith on a cosmic dimension. The Transfiguration recalls St. Paul's vision of a world that is sown in corruption, that groans in travail, but that will rise and be transfigured into incorruptibility. Paul sees the risen Lord inserted as leaven in a batch of dough. He is drawing the whole universe into the fullness destined for it by His Father's eternal plan. Christ is already the absolute, universal head of the whole universe. He is recapitulating, bringing to completion, not only human beings made to His image and likeness, but the whole sub-human cosmos, which is to be brought into His person as He adores His Heavenly Father by returning the universe that was sown as a seed and is now fulfilled, ". . .that He would bring everything together under Christ as head, everything in the heavens and everything on earth" (Ephes. 1, 10).

God, the Source of all existence, "has put all things under His feet and made Him as the ruler of everything, the head of the Church which is His Body, the fullness of Him who fills the whole creation" (Eph. 1:22–23).

GOD'S BREATH IN MAN

What the Eastern Christian professes on the feast of the Transfiguration, the Christian mystic experiences over a long, gradual process of transfiguration into Christ. As he integrates the name of Jesus with his breathing, the physical breath is experienced no longer as separated from the very breath of God. The mystic begins to experience

God's dynamic presence within him as uncreated energies.

The story of Genesis becomes a living reality. "Then He breathed into his nostrils a breath of life and thus man became a living being" (Gen. 2, 7). God breathes His own very life into man. The contemplative, after years of deepening faith and continued purification, breaks through the dichotomy between God outside and man separated from Him. God's very life-giving breath is one with his breathing.

The "two hands of God," Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit, to use St. Irenaeus' apt analogy, are continuously touching the soul, releasing new energies that are one with God's uncreated energies. These energies were there before, but now a *transfiguring* process has taken place. "There lives the dearest freshness deep down thing," as expressed so aptly in G. M. Hopkins' words from his *God's Grandeur*.

God touches the soul deeply, making His presence felt as a loving presence. The soul feels this searing presence penetrating its whole being, pulling it into a wholeness, a uniqueness that stretches forth as a prisoner out of steel-ribbed windows towards clear light in a hunger to be free. The mystic seeks only to surrender himself totally to the loving presence of God within. He suffers joyfully this action of God, creating, redeeming, transforming him into a greater oneness with Jesus Christ.

The overwhelming, unifying sentiment is, "My God, He loves me!" The soul feels loved, wanted, accepted, and this by Perfection itself! The communication of God to the soul and the soul's surrender of self to God admits of great degrees of intimacy and assimilation. Always the process brings one to a confusion of blurred lines. Where do I end and where does God begin? One really does not

wait for the answer, because such knowledge has been superceded by a superior knowledge of experience that is content with the experience and fears that thoughts and words would destroy the sacredness of the adoring moment.

In such contemplation, the mystic of all true divine experiences "sees" and "feels" and "hears" and "touches" and "smells" and "tastes" the presence of God. The actions of sensations seem the only suitable analogy that renders the experience undergone by the mystic: God is directly and immediately being "sensed." He gives Himself in the most personalized act of self-giving. The contempletive can only compare the experience as "light from light."

The Byzantine mystics called it a participation in the Taboric *Light*. The light that transfused Jesus Christ along with Moses and Elias on Mount Tabor is experienced again within the human soul as a transfiguring power. Man experiences the fullness of his Baptism as he moves literally out of his existential darkness of self-centeredness into the light of God's Allness.

Nil Sorsky (+1508) who brought Byzantine hesychasm from Mt. Athos to Russia, writes in his *Ustav* or Rule:

When the soul undergoes such spiritual activity and subjects itself to God and through direct union approaches the Divinity, it is enlightened in its movements by an intense light and the mind experiences a feeling of joy of the happiness that awaits us in the life to come. Then an indescribable sweetness warms the heart, the whole body feels its repercussions and man forgets not only any given passion, but even life itself and thinks that the Kingdom of Heaven consists of nothing other than this ecstatic state. Here he experiences that the love of God is sweeter than life and the knowledge of God sweeter than honey. . .¹

But the classical description of the Taboric light has been given by Simeon the New Theologian:

I see a light which is not of this world. Sitting in my cell, I see within me the Maker of the world; I converse with Him and love Him and I feed on this one Divine Image. Uniting with Him I am raised to the Heavens. Where is the body? I do not know, for God loves me and has received me into His very Being and hides me in His embrace and being in Heaven and at the same time in my heart. He becomes visible to me. The Ruler of all appears to me in a way equal to the angels, yet in a way more advantageous, for to them God is invisible and unapproachable while by me He is seen and He unites Himself with my being. It is this state that St. Paul described when he said that 'eye had not seen nor ear heard.' Being in this state, I do not have any desire to leave my cell, but I long to hide myself in a deep hole in the ground and there, removed from the upper world, I would gaze on my immortal Lord and Creator.²

ALL IS LOVED IN GOD

The touchstone that what a mystic is authentically experiencing is from God and not from his own imagination is found in the movement from within outwardly. We breathe inwardly and to that same degree we can breathe outwardly. The transfiguring power of God bathing the contemplative in His divinizing energy is also experienced by him in the world around him.

As the soul is immersed in God as the totally Other and finds its uniqueness in Him, so the soul opens itself to God in all creatures. The same powerful God that radiates His uncreated energies within us is found as the Source of being for all other creatures. The world around us takes on a new meaning. A transfiguring process is also taking place in our vision of the world and of ourself. We realize now

that the world has not changed. Our vision has changed. God's presence was always there, but we were blinded to His light. Now it seems as though the blind have been given full sight. What lay in darkness before now is suffused with light. As we each see our uniqueness in God's love for us, so now we begin to experience the uniqueness of each creature in God's love for it. Yet what binds us even more now to God as our *allness* is the experience of Him as gift to us in His dynamic action in others.

G. M. Hopkins, S.J., called it "contuition," a simultaneous awareness of the individual concrete nature and of the dynamic presence of God there as the ground of its being. The contemplative simultaneously is aware of the created thing and intuitively sees its relationship to the creative eternal energies of God.

The Greek Fathers called this contemplation of material creatures *theoria physica*, the contemplation of the Logos in the created world. After purification we should move to a contemplation of the world around us. This world brings us to the inner world beyond the sensible, beyond the phenomenon. It is here that we really encounter the mind of God. Thus we move out of the realm of man's self-activity into the realm of God's influence. God gives us, by infusion, the gift to see, in all His creatures, the *logoi*. The *logos* of each creature is its principle of harmony that shows us the relationship of this creature to God's total providence, or to God's total order of salvation. Thus the whole world is interlocked and interrelated. Only he who has this gift of *theoria physica*, the contemplation of nature, can unlock that world and see the harmony existing among all these creatures, because he can see the purpose, the *raison d'être* behind every created being. Seeing that, naturally, he will act

accordingly. He will never then misuse these creatures for his own purpose, but he must always use them and be used by them in the direct proportion that God intended them. So, this is the contemplation of the *logos* in each creature, and it is a wisdom given us by God that we could never deserve on our own. It comes to us purely from God, but in a way dependent upon our own purification. The purification of our souls prepares our whole being for this gratuitous infusion from God.

For the Eastern Fathers, to live fully according to nature is equivalent to living according to the *logos* within that given nature. The objects of true *physica theoria* or contemplation of creatures are not conceived in any philosophical sense. For Maximus the Confessor, the matter and form constituting a being's nature still make up the surface, the *superficies*, the *phenomenon*, the sensible. We can rightfully ask how one is to arrive at this understanding of the *logos* within creatures. Maximus the Confessor divides all created beings into three divisions: things, Sacred Scripture and man himself. In all of these three categories we find the *superficies*, the *epiphaneia*, that which presents itself to our senses. Then there is the inner knowledge of the *logos* or the principle of harmony giving the relationship of this or that created being to God's providence. This *logos*, as has been described above, is the reason of the creature's act of existence in the mind of God which corresponds to the wisdom of God in things. Persons without this infused gift from God of *physica theoria* or contemplation judge all things, Sacred Scripture and man himself by sense knowledge. But the person possessing this inner knowledge penetrates beyond sense knowledge of created natures, beyond the letter of Holy Scripture to the spirit or *pneuma*; he thus can see the real mind of God behind the written letter or beyond the

exterior presentation of man to his inner mind or *nous* that gives us his real personality, his *logos*. The ordinary person reads Holy Scripture and sees nothing but the letter; he does not penetrate behind the type to the anti-type. Symbols in the Old Testament fail to reveal God's true mind, but the person with the gift of contemplation sees beyond the surface images. Every word, every picture tells him something deeper about God. The same applies to man in his relation with other men; a normal man views other men only as they present themselves to him externally. The man of interior vision can see beyond to the inner *logos*; he can pierce through the phenomenal, the physical appearance of the sensible order and enter into an interior vision that allows him to see that man in God's light.

The presence of God "must be instressed, stressed" in G. M. Hopkins' words. The contemplative sees in God's creative light through all of nature how each creature tumbles forth continually from God's loving involvement. He desires not to master and overpower nature, but rather, in an attitude of ever-increasing receptivity, he seeks not only to discover all things in God and God in all things, but he wishes to serve the Creator to render Him more adored and glorified by the entire universe.

Teilhard de Chardin said in his *Divine Milieu* that Jesus Christ was shining diaphanously throughout the whole world—for those who had eyes to see. As the contemplative advances in ever-deepening faith, he sees God everywhere as present and acting.

GOD—THE CENTER OF ALL BEING

God becomes the center of all other beings. This gives us a connatural affinity, a oneness with the world that

before, through our sinfulness, was threatened by our aggressive power. St. Dorotheus, one of the early Fathers of the desert, used the example of a wheel. The closer the spokes move toward the center, the closer each spoke is to each other. Evagrius insisted that he left men in order to find them. The experience of all mystics is a new knowledge and relationship to the world, a union in love that begets in the mystic a burning desire to serve the world.

As the contemplative intuits the created order as a continued outpouring of the Trinity's love, God's gift to him, he wishes to become, with St. Paul, a reconciler of the whole universe through Christ back to the Father.

And for anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old creation has gone, and now the new one is here. It is all God's work. It was God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the work of handing on this reconciliation. In other words, God in Christ was reconciling the world to Himself, not holding men's faults against them, and He has entrusted to us the news that they are reconciled. So we are ambassadors for Christ; it is as though God were appealing through us, and the appeal that we make in Christ's name is: be reconciled to God (II Cor. 5:17-21).

A new creation is seen coming forth by the power of Jesus Christ and His Spirit of love through man's adoring cooperation. In Christ, God is incarnated and inserted into the groaning universe. He sustains each creature in its uniqueness and seeks to move each creature together with the whole created universe into its *pleroma* or fullness.

The contemplative begins to experience the presence of Christ everywhere, especially in other human beings. Christ is laughing in the joyful; He is suffering in the saddened. This oneness with Christ and the human scene is

best described by Caryll Houselander in her own "mystical" experience of Christ in a London subway:

I was in an underground train, a crowded train in which all sorts of people jostled together, sitting and strap-hanging-workers of every description going home at the end of the day. Quite suddenly I saw with my mind, but as vividly as a wonderful picture, Christ in them all. But I saw more than that; not only was Christ in every one of them, living in them, dying in them, rejoicing in them, sorrowing in them—but because He was in them, and because they were here the whole world was here too, here in this underground train; not only the world as it was at that moment, not only all the people in all the countries of the world, but all those people who had lived in the past, and all those yet to come. I came out into the street, and walked for a long time in the crowds. It was the same here, on every side, in every passer-by, everywhere—Christ. . .

The 'vision' lasted with that intensity for several days, and each of them revealed the mystery and its implications for me a little more clearly. Although it did not prevent me from ever sinning again, it showed me what sin is, especially those sins done in the name of 'love,' so often held to be 'harmless' for to sin with one whom you loved was to blaspheme Christ in that person; it was to spit on Him, perhaps to crucify Him. I saw too the reverence that everyone must have for a sinner; instead of condoning his sin, which is in reality his utmost sorrow, one must comfort Christ who is suffering in him. And this reverence must be paid even to those sinners whose souls seem to be dead, because it is Christ who is the life of the soul, who is dead in them; they are his tombs, and Christ in the tomb is potentially the risen Christ. For the same reason, no one of us who has fallen into mortal sin himself must ever lose hope.³

The contemplative has experienced himself growing into a greater, conscious relationship to Christ as image

and likeness. He knows now on a deeper level that each human being has been made according to Christ, the Image of God. The more defaced is that image in man, the more ardently does the contemplative wish to re-create it, so that Jesus Christ again shines forth with all His divine splendor latent in each man. He wishes with great love and responsibility to serve his neighbor with an active love that will smooth away lines of fear and grief and consternation on the face of humanity. He rejoices too when Jesus Christ, the Eternal Youth, conquers man's heart in order to bring forth joy and happiness.

THE NAME OF JESUS POURED FORTH

God has taken a piece of this imperfect world and has transfigured it into His glorious, risen Son. "The end of the ages" has come upon us (1 Corin. 10, 11). It is the power, therefore, of the glorified Jesus, ever-present in this struggling world, that continues to transform creation into a new Jerusalem. Jesus, the high-priest, is still breathing over the groaning world to transfigure raw matter into a spirit-filled cosmos.

Yet Jesus Christ, as in history, needed the contemplative Mary to receive Him into her very being through the power of the Holy Spirit that hovered over her and then to be given as the Life to the world; so He needs other human beings to "beget" Him again, to render him "enfleshed" into a world that lies in darkness.

By our Baptism we are inserted into Him as co-sharers of His role as Prophet and Priest. St. Peter says, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart to sing the praises of God who called you out of the darkness into His wonderful light" (1 Pet. 2, 9).

An ordained priest, celebrating the Divine Mystery according to the mind of Christ, breathes out the words of consecration over bread and wine, and Christians fall down to adore Jesus Christ, Son of God, gloriously reigning with the Father in Heaven and interceding for His children throughout the world. A baptized Christian utters the sacred Name of Jesus over a world that lies in darkness, and a redeeming light spreads over the horizon.

Although Jesus Christ, risen and glorified, is nowhere, since He can be confined in no place, yet He is everywhere because all times and places are under His eternal gaze; but He becomes still more present, in a loving, active way, when a human being, in loving adoration, calls His holy presence into a particular place and a particular time.

The English poet and martyr, Blessed Robert Southwell, S.J., once wrote: "Not where I breathe do I live, but where I love." Though Jesus Christ breathes His divinized breath throughout the whole cosmos, still when a contemplative utters His Name in love, He becomes present and alive in a new and marvelous way.

What a power the man of prayer possesses in the sacred Name of Jesus! He needs no cathedral, no choir, no vestments, no formal liturgies. He needs only faith to believe in the presence and power of Jesus. "The whole creation is eagerly waiting for God to reveal His sons" (Rom. 8, 19). Over the world of rocks and roses, fish and fowl, streams and oceans, valleys and mountains, the adorer calls forth the power of Jesus Lord to fulfill His creation.

Thus man returns to the Garden of Eden. The world of beast and bird is brought into harmony with God's purpose through the mediation of a worshipping, loving human being.

How much more can the contemplative bring human beings under the transfigured power of the risen Savior! A French novel, *Le Dieu a besoin des hommes*, well expresses the humility of God to make His redemptive love hinge upon the love of one man towards another, but then St. John tells us that if we love one another, it is because God lives in us, loving through us:

No one has ever seen God;
 but as long as we love one another
 God will live in us
 and His love will be complete in us.
 We can know that we are living in Him
 and He is living in us
 because He lets us share His spirit.
 . . . God is love
 and anyone who lives in love lives in God,
 and God lives in him (1 Jn. 4, 12–16).

After His Ascension, Jesus Christ now lives in those who love Him. In His resurrection appearances, Jesus apparently assumed different forms in order to teach us that He cannot now be confined to one shape, one place, one time, one coming. Mary Magdalene looked at Him and saw a gardener; the disciples on the road to Emmaus saw a tired, hungry co-traveler; Peter and John and the disciples while fishing saw Him as a stranger on the shore preparing breakfast. Now He becomes a revealing and saving Lord in the outcast, the poor, the sick and suffering, the lonely, the imprisoned.

For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me. Then the virtuous will say to Him in reply, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you; or

thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and make you welcome; naked and clothe you; sick or in prison and go to see you?' And the King will answer, 'I tell you solemnly, insofar as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, You did it to me, (Matt.25:35-40).

The true contemplative measures his degree of love for Christ according to his desire to adore Him, surrender himself totally to His Person and service to Him in His creatures.

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

The transfiguring power of the contemplative is seen in the Church's doctrine of the intercession of the Saints and Angels. It is they who have attained the goal of existence: to contemplate God. In this sense we can see the reality of Purgatory as a form of therapy which reconditions the spiritually retarded children of this world, who, through lack of contemplation, were unaware of the inner presence of the Trinity in all things during their earthly-life. Leon Bloy wrote that the only tragedy at the end of our lives is that we are not saints. We might say the same for contemplation. If we have failed to advance in contemplation during this life through God's grace, we shall have to advance in the life to come through the purifications called Purgatory.

But in this life, the Saints and Angels, so full of love of God, immersed in His cosmic presence and desirous only to adore and serve Him in the least of His creatures, so that all things will be in God and God in all, need us poor retarded children of God. Love needs to expand, to continue to grow. Love that is static is death and no true love. Love hungrily seeks to forget self and to give oneself in creative suffering for the other.

This is a good definition of Jesus Christ, God incarnate. He is always surrendering Himself completely as the perfect, visible Image of the invisible God with the same eternally, unchangeable will-act of surrender that He made on the Cross. But we have no other way of experiencing this self-surrendering love of God for us except through the mediation of the sacrificing love others show toward us. The Angels and Saints, according to Catholic doctrine, are continually concerned for us mortal beings, striving to make us experience that for which Paul prayed, "All I want is to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and to share His sufferings by reproducing the pattern of His death" (Phil. 3, 10).

A COSMIC LITURGY

The mystic walks in communion with the Saints as present, and even more so by their purified love, than other earthly humans. He sees "inside" each creature to find God present there. His faith makes him vividly aware of this presence as he celebrates the Divine Liturgy, when, in microcosmic fashion, Jesus the High-Priest breathes over a small segment of the Church, including their gifts of bread and wine, and His Spirit of love transfigures this part of the incomplete world into a sharing in Christ's divine nature. The mystic extends this transfiguring liturgy through his actions. No matter how insignificant, banal, and monotonous his work may be, he is vibrantly aware of Jesus Christ, already glorified, living within him and working through him to bring the whole world to its fullness.

The mystic realizes, with St. Paul, that nothing can separate him from Christ. Christ is everything, and the contemplative finds Him everywhere. He realizes that

everything now can unite him with Christ. "The heart rears wings bolder and bolder. And hurls for him, O Half hurls earth for him off under his feet."⁴

The false dichotomy between action and contemplation, between the profane and the sacred, ceases to exist, as a deeper consciousness of the abiding presence of the Trinity permeates the man of prayer. He seeks to trace the Holy Trinity in all of creature. It is not as though his action is done in a contemplative atmosphere, but rather that contemplation is perfected in an atmosphere of action. Contemplation flows from the fullness of one's activity, because one finds God in the very activity. He discovers the divine richness in the most commonplace action. He finds the Holy Trinity at work for the redemption of the human race and is himself an instrument of the application of divine redemption in the dramatic adventure of life.

The man of prayer does not seek a state of recollection in which, while standing in Grand Central Station absorbed in God, he can be ignorant of the crowd pressing all about him. His is a recollection by which he is absorbed in God and at the same time very much aware of the crowd, because he sees on each one in that crowd a brother and sister in Christ, actually or in potency through grace. He sees on each one the mark of the Sacred Blood of Jesus Christ. He sees in each soul the terrible conflict with the powers of hell that bind each person until Jesus Christ descends into that hell to heal and free him. For such a contemplative in action there is no insignificant event that does not bear the stamp of the Holy Trinity's desire to redeem all creation and restore it through Christ to the original plan as conceived by the Holy Trinity. Whatever such a person does by way of work, he is

contemplating the Trinity, and his action proceeds precisely from this centering upon the Source of his being and that of the world's.

Such a transfiguring contemplation is based on the three infused gifts of the Holy Spirit: faith, hope and charity. Faith takes off the veil in creatures that hides the Face of God behind so many distortions. It points out the redemptive plan in every occurrence and in every human action, and gives everything its proper context in Christ. Faith shows God in all creatures and all creatures in God. Such a contemplative does not need to spend long hours in silent contemplation, far removed from human society. He finds God through the faith that tells him and aids him to find Christ Jesus in everything that moves and has being. Faith shows him the burning Heart of Christ, His overflowing love for all men, and precisely through such contemplation and no longer in spite of activity, Christ demands love in return, a service that extends to all men and wants to pour out His love to all.

Hope is a realization of one's nothingness and God's infinite allness and His infinite love for all. It is an opening up of self and a putting on of the potentialities of God, an abandoning of one's weakness to the almighty strength of Christ in order that one's actions, both little and great, may be done in Him and through His strength.

Charity purifies one's selfish desires to possess for oneself and makes oneself desire to give for Another, God. Charity is the receiving of God and the giving of self in union with Him through the action at hand, done with energy as a symbol of one's complete oblation to God, the tremendous Lover.

When stress and strain during action performed for God become so great, so distracting even, that it is

impossible to center any actual attention on God, faith, hope and charity still make it possible to continue this contemplation of God in a virtual manner. There remains always a certain awareness of the present reality of God, a background music that never leaves us. Due to the circumstances of interaction with other creatures, the press of activities, one cannot attend with total consciousness to God's presence. Attention may be fixed on creatures that require our absorbing concentration, but through faith, hope, and charity, our attention is not centered on creatures as upon an ultimate concern, to use Paul Tillich's favorite phrase.

For the contemplative who moves always under the transfiguring light of Christ's presence, the spiritual awareness of God's presence and love is not competing for attention in opposition to distracting creatures but is the "milieu" in which these absorbing activities unfold. But to "see" God continually in every creature, in every action, to have a pure intention of glorifying God in all that we do, to be completely dedicated to loving God without any admixture of self-love ("purity of heart" as St. John Cassian describes it), to move and act out of love for God in the most worldly situations, to reveal the glory of God to all men, without detriment to the intimate union of the interior life or to continual prayer in the midst of unceasing activity, all this will remain an unrealizable ideal until God steps down and grants us, by His merciful intervention, an extraordinary grace.

Unless God grants us an infusion of faith, hope, and charity, permitting us to find Him in all things, there will always exist the dichotomy, a result of man's sinful alienation from God, between contemplation and action.

PAN-EN-THEISM

It was St. Paul who first spoke of all things in God and God in all things. "And when everything is subjected to Him, then the Son Himself will be subjected in His turn to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15, 28).

But God's transparency is to be an illumination, not a destruction of the created world. The creature contemplated is not a means, an instrument to lead us to God alone. God is to be contemplated as the inner reality of His world, as a loving gift.

I remember once having the experience of praying on Mount Tabor and quite humorously being reminded of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's words, "In Christ we are offered the possibility of partaking in the reality of God and in the reality of the world, but not in the one without the other." I had taken the local bus, filled with Arabs from Nazareth to the small Arab town below Mount Tabor. I wanted to accompany on foot Jesus and His Disciples, Peter, James and John, to the top. We had a wonderful conversation up the winding road that after a mile or so brought me to the beautiful Basilica of the Transfiguration. There kneeling in a church almost emptied of tourists, I felt the exhilaration of Peter and the other two before the Transfigured Jesus. "Lord, it is wonderful for us to be here. . ." (Matt. 17,2). The warm light of the Lord seemed to be a physical presence that engulfed me. This was it; real contemplation! Then a buzz that sooned turned into a disturbing whine; then an awful bite! The place was also a convention of mosquitoes!

I wondered whether their ancestors also disturbed Peter, James and John in the midst of their ecstasy. It was easy to get God's message. The transfiguration takes place in a disturbing world, incomplete, sordid, sinful, yet God's world, the place He has wished to become incarnate for love of us and also to become transfigured!

God's presence becomes for the contemplative a light that is seen stretching *upwards*. The Apostles "looked up" and saw Jesus Christ and Moses and Elias transfigured on top of Mount Tabor. The movement of a person of deep prayer is from darkness towards the transcendent light of God's presence.

Arise, shine out, for your light has come.
the glory of Yahweh is rising on you,
though night still covers the earth
and darkness the peoples.

Above you Yahweh now rises
and above you His glory appears.
The nations come to your light
and kings to your dawning brightness.

...At this sight you will grow radiant,
your heart throbbing and full
since the riches of the sea will flow to you,
the wealth of the nations come to you;

...No more will the sun give you daylight,
nor moonlight shine on you,
but Yahweh will be your everlasting light,
your God will be your splendour.

Your sun will set no more
nor your moon wane,
but Yahweh will be your everlasting light
and your days of mourning will be ended.

Your people will all be upright,
possessing the land for ever;
a shoot that Yahweh has planted,
my handiwork, designed for beauty. (Is. 60, 1–21).

But the mystic, bathed in God's light, also becomes light. St. Paul writes: "You were darkness once, but now you are light in the Lord; be like children of light, for the effects of the light are seen in complete goodness and right living and truth. . . anything exposed by the light will be illuminated and anything illuminated turns into light. That is why it is said:

Wake up from your sleep,
rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you." (Ephes. 5:8–14).

Christ is the transfiguring light that radiates from within. He is the life that is "the light of men" (Jn. 1,4). This Divine Word is incessantly being spoken by the Heavenly Father within us; this Word is "the true light that enlightens all men" (Jn. 1, 9). Jesus Himself tells us: "I am the light of the world; anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark, he will have the light of life" (Jn. 8, 12). Sharing in His light, we too "are the light of the world. . . In the same way your light must shine in the sight of men, so that, seeing your good works, they may give the praise to your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:14–16).

We look up to see Jesus Christ transfigured on the mountain. We also look downward—downward into our own being and downward into the world. We understand by God's light that the world comes from Him and leads us to His inner presence within His evolving world. God draws the contemplative to an immediacy that cannot ignore the

world and human beings. Rather, focused totally upon God by His strong attraction of love, we are gradually freed from all self-centeredness in order to be able to love human beings with a more universal, more purified love. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" in the whole universe.

The contemplative looks down into God's uncompleted world, the world that He is still creating with man's cooperation. The person of prayer is much like Mary, the Mother of God, as she entered into the cave at Bethlehem. It surely was not the idealized cave of Italian religious art or popular Christmas cards. Mary brought forth Jesus and laid Him in a manger of straw. We know what straw in a cave that had laid there for months, perhaps even years. It had become dank, full of cob-webs and the mute inhabitation of other crawling bugs, spiders and other despised creatures of this world. A dusty cave where the dung of animals who slept there during the long winter nights had accumulated over weeks and months and perhaps years.

This was the real world into which God was entering to begin His transfiguring process. It was His world, real and unfinished. Christ as a newly born child was stripped of everything as a sign of what was to come. He was the mustard seed, so insignificant, yet from it would come the huge tree that would harbor the birds of the air. The process of re-creation was beginning. The evolution of the People of God and the transfiguration of the universe was beginning with this *Proton* of Divine Love. Here we see the utter simplicity, the monad of divinity beginning with a spark of humanity. Nothing else. Mary and Joseph meet "raw" nature. Nothing of the technical world around. From such a simple, ordinary beginning, God would manifest His great love for us.

In contemplation, therefore, God calls us downward to His suffering world. Once we experience in prayer the transfiguring power of God's love for us, we can love His world by surrendering ourselves to His presence in order to serve and to bring Him forth more radiantly and more explicitly, so that the whole world may recognize that He is the source of all being. In discovering God at our center, we discover Him also as the center of His world. Rooted in God, we can go forth and love the world as God loves it. We move at each moment from light to greater light, from God to God in all things.

Heaven has begun even on this earth. We have died to self and have already risen with Christ. We have put on the thoughts of things above, because we have now already begun to glimpse the reality that, as St. Paul says, Jesus Christ is in all things. The Heavenly Jerusalem is now piercing through the suffering shadows of a world that is still groaning before it is brought into the full life already glimpsed as present. For the mystic, looking up to the transfigured Jesus and down to the suffering Lord,

The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in its place in the city.

His servants will worship Him.

They will see Him face to face

and His name will be written on their foreheads.

It will never be night again and they will not need lamplight or sunlight, because the Lord God will be shining on them.

They will reign for ever and ever (Rev. 22:3-5).

FOOTNOTES

Introduction

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- ³Evelyn Underhill: *The School of Charity and the Mystery of Sacrifice* (N.Y. Longmans, Green and Co., 1956), p. 235.
- ⁴Pseudo-Dionysius: *Mystical Theology*, 1.
- ⁵Cf. Allan Lewis: "The Theatre and the Revolt Against Reason," in *Conversations "72"* (Garrison, New York: 1972), pp. 16-19.

Chapter 1

- ¹Charles Peguy: *Eve* (Paris, ed. La Pleiade; 1941) pg. 764.
- ²C. S. Lewis: *Letters to Malcolm*; (N.Y. Harcourt, Brace and World, 1964) p. 84.
- ³T. Merton: *Contemplative Prayer* (N.Y. 1970) p. 112.
- ⁴J. Ruysbroeck: *Mirror of Eternal Salvation* (London, 1946) p. 73.
- ⁵*John of the Cross: Complete Works*, Tr. by Peers, E. Allison (Newman, Westminster, Md. 1946), Bk. II, viii, Vol. I, pg. 420.
- ⁶*The Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Jesus*; E. Allison Peers, tr. and ed. (Sheed & Ward, N.Y. 1946); Vol. II, VII *Mansions*, pp. 331-332.
- ⁷*Hymn to Jesus Christ, XIII*; translation my own.

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³*Song of Songs*; PG. 44, 10000D, quoted from *Glory to Glory*, p. 247; ed. by J. Danielou and H. Musurillo (Scribner, N.Y., 1961).

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⁶V. Lossky: *Vision of God* (Faith Press, Clayton, Wisc., 1963), pp. 71, 74.

⁷*Comm. on Song of Songs*; PG. 44, 1001B.

⁸*Life of Moses*, 376C–377A, cited in *From Glory to Glory*, p. 118.

⁹Gregory of Nyssa: *On Perfection*, tr. by Virginia Woods Callahan; in *Ascetical Works of Gregory of Nyssa; Fathers of the Church*; Vol. 58 (Wash., D.C., 1967), p. 122.

¹⁰*Life of Moses*, cited in *From Glory to Glory*, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 148.

¹²*Commentary on Song of Songs*; cited *From Glory to Glory*, p. 270.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴*Life of Moses*, PG. 44, 301C; cited *From Glory to Glory*, p. 83.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 149.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 144.

Chapter 5

¹By Richard Bach (Mac Millan Co., 1970).

²*Ibid.*, pp. 90–91.

³Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt* (London, 1953), pp. 97–98.

⁴A. Festugiere, *Contemplation et vie contemplative chez Platon*, Part II, p. 288.

⁵*De Beatitudine I*, PG. 44, 1196.

⁶Hom. in Ps. 61, PG. 29, 476C, 477A.

⁷Hom. in Ps. 33, 7, PG. 29, 268B.

⁸Letter to the Romans, 5, in: *Fathers of the Church Series*, Vol. 1, (Washington, D.C., 1946), p. 110.

⁹*De perfecta Christiani forma*, PG. 46, 251–256.

¹⁰*De perfecta Christiani forma*, PG. 46, 251–256.

¹¹*De Spiritu Sancto*, 16, PG. 32, 140B.

¹²*Enchiridion Patristicum*, no. 780, 782.

¹³*Comment. in Joan*, IV, I, PG. 74, 316A.

¹⁴Cf. I. Hausherr, S. J., "Dogme et spiritualite orientale," in *Revue d'ascetique et mystique* (1947), pp. 31–33.

¹⁵*Ad. Olypium monachum*, PG. 46, 256B.

¹⁶*Adv. oppugn. vitae monasticae*, III, 15; PG. 47, 372.

¹⁷II *Contra Arianos* 59; PG. XXVI, 273.

¹⁸II Pet. 1, 4.

¹⁹*Ambigua*; PG. XCI, 1076C.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 1308 b.

²¹*Gen.* 1, 26.

²²*Theatetes*, 176 b.

²³*Haer. Lib.* III, t. 1; PG XLII, 341–345.

²⁴*Adv. Haer. Liber V*; PG. VII, 1138.

²⁵*Sermo Asceticus*; PG. LXXIX, 1281 d.

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Chapter 6

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⁸Cf. my treatment of Maximus' contemplation in *The Cosmic Christ* (Sheed & Ward, N.Y. 1968), pp. 167–78.

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¹¹*Mystagogia*; PG. 91, 665–668.

¹²Cf. *Ad Thallasium*, PG. 90, 63; 673C.

¹³*Ambigua* 5, PG. 91, 1060A.

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Chapter 7

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⁴*Life of Antony*, Post-Nicene Fathers, 2nd Ser., 4 (Grand Rapids, 1957), p. 214.

⁵P. Tillich, "The Eternal Now," in *The Modern Vision of Death*, ed. N. A. Scott, Jr. (Richmond, Va., 1967), p. 103.

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