

Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann

Theology and Eucharist

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1.

The actual state of Orthodox theology must be characterized by two words: confusion and awakening. By confusion, I mean an obvious lack of unity among Orthodox theologians: unity of theological language, unity of method, consensus as to the nature of questions and the mode of their solution. Our theology develops in a plurality of theological “keys” and within several mutually exclusive intellectual frameworks. This confusion, however, is also the sign of an awakening, of a new search for a genuinely Orthodox theological perspective.

This situation is by no means accidental, for the fate of Orthodox theology has been a tragic one. On the one hand, since the collapse of Byzantium and the interruption of the creative patristic tradition, our theology endured a long “Western captivity” which deeply obscured and even deformed the Orthodox theological mind, while, on the other hand, the same post-patristic period was that of a radical transformation of the status and function of theology in the life of the Church. From being the concern— and the function— of the whole Church, it became that of the “school” alone and was thus deprived of the living interest and attention without which no creative effort is possible. Today the situation is changing. Conflicts and divisions within the Church, the new “ecumenical” encounter with the Christian West, and, above all, the pressing challenge of the modern world, have placed theology in a new focus, restored to it an importance it has not had for many centuries. Hence both the confusion and the awakening, the unavoidable clash between ideas, the pluralism of approaches, the acuteness of the methodological problem, the new questioning of sources and authorities. Freed from official “conformity” which was imposed on it by extra-theological factors, Orthodox theology has not yet found a real unity. But it must find it. However understandable and even useful, the actual theological pluralism cannot last forever. It is a *synthesis*, i.e., an integration of all the more or less “private” theologies into one consistent whole that we must seek. For Orthodox theology is by its very nature a Catholic expression of the Church’s faith and the Church neither knows nor needs any other theology.

2.

But *synthesis* here means something different from a purely formal agreement on the sources to be cited or the formulas to be used as safely Orthodox. As long as there exist theologians (and not only compilers and commentators of ancient texts) theology will remain a symphony, not a unison. What is meant here is an inner transformation of the theological mind itself, a transformation based on a new— or maybe on a very old— relationship between theology and the Church. It is indeed our first duty to acknowledge that for centuries theology was *alienated* from the Church and that this alienation had tragic consequences for both theology and the Church. It made theology a mere intellectual activity, split into scores of “disciplines” with no correlation among themselves and no application to the real needs of the Church. Theology ceased to be the answer the Church gives to her questions and having ceased to be such an answer, it also ceased to be the question addressed to the Church. It today constitutes within the Church a self-centered world, virtually isolated from the Church’s life. It lives in itself and by itself in tranquil academic quarters, well defended against profane intrusions and curiosities by a highly technical language. Theologians avoid discussing the trivial reality of the Church’s life, and do not even dream about influencing it in any way. In turn the Church, i.e., the bishops, priests and laity, are supremely indifferent to the writings of the theologians, even when they do not regard them with open suspicion. No wonder, therefore, that deprived of interest on the part of the Church, squeezed into the narrow limits of a professional clerical school, theology is guided in its inner life not by the experience, needs or problems of the Church but by individual interests of individual theologians. Liberal or conservative, neo-patristic or neo-mystical, historical or anti-historical, “ecumenical” or anti-Western (and we have at present all these brands), theology simply fails to reach anybody but professionals, to provoke anything but esoteric controversies in academic periodicals.

And yet this isolation and alienation of theology is a tragedy for the Church as well. For although the ecclesiastical leaders and the people may not realize it, and think (as they too often do) that all problems and difficulties can be solved by better administration and simple references to the past, the Church *needs* theology. Its vital and essential function is to constantly refer the empirical life of the Church to the very sources of her faith and life, to the living and life-giving Truth, and to evaluate and judge the “empirical” in the light of that Truth. Ideally theology is the conscience of the Church, her purifying self-criticism, her permanent reference to the ultimate goals of her existence. Deprived of theology, of its testimony and judgement, the Church is always in danger of forgetting and misinterpreting her own Tradition, confusing the essential with the secondary, absolutising the contingent, losing the perspective of her life. She becomes a prisoner of

her “empirical” needs and the pragmatic spirit of “this world” which poisons and obscures the absolute demands of the Truth.

If theology, then, needs the Church as its natural “term of reference,” as both the source and the aim of its very existence, and if the Church needs theology as her conscience, how can they be reunited again, overcome their mutual alienation and recover the organic correlation of which the Patristic age remains forever the ideal pattern? This is the question Orthodox theology must answer if it is to overcome its inner chaos and weakness, its parasitic existence in the Church which pays no attention to it.

How and where? My answer is— by and in the Eucharist, understood and lived as the Sacrament of the Church, as the act, which ever makes the Church to be what she is—the People of God, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Body of Christ, the gift and manifestation of the new life of the new age. It is here and only here, in the unique center of all Christian life and experience that theology can find again its fountain of youth, be regenerated as a living testimony to the living Church, her faith, love and hope. This affirmation, I understand it only too well, can be easily misunderstood. It will appear to some as an unjustified reduction of theology to “liturgics,” as an unnecessary narrowing of the proper field of theology, where the Eucharist is listed as just one of the sacraments, as an “object” among many. To others it will sound like a pious invitation to theologians to become more liturgical, more “eucharistic” . . . In the present state of theology, such misinterpretations would be almost natural. What is meant here, however, is not a reduction of theology to piety, be it theological piety or a piety of theologians, and although it will take more than a short article to elaborate the answer given above in all its implications, the following remarks may possibly prepare the ground for a more constructive discussion.

3.

In the official, post-patristic and “Westernizing” theology, the Eucharist is treated merely as one of the sacraments. Its place in ecclesiology is that of a “means of grace”— one among many. However central and essential in the life of the Church, the Eucharist is *institutionally* distinct from the Church. It is the power, the grace given to the Church that makes the Eucharist possible, valid, efficient, but this power of grace “precedes” the Eucharist and is virtually independent from it. Thus the Church is understood and described here as an institution endowed with divine power: power to teach, to guide, to sanctify; as a structure for the communication of grace; a “power,” however, which is not derived from the Eucharist. The latter is a fruit, a result of the Church, not her source. And, likewise, being the cause of her sacraments, the Church is not considered in any way as their aim or goal. For official theology it is always the satisfaction of the

individual, not the fulfillment or edification of the Church, that constitutes the end and the purpose of a sacrament.

This type of theology, although it subordinates the Eucharist and the sacraments to the Church and makes the latter an institution distinct and independent from the sacraments, easily coexists with, if indeed it is not responsible for, a piety in which the Church is virtually identified with cult or worship. In the popular approach— and “popular” by no means excludes the great majority of the clergy— the Church is, above all, a “cultic” or liturgical institution, and all her activities are, implicitly or explicitly, directed at her liturgical needs: erection of temples, material support of clergy and choirs, acquisition of various liturgical supplies, etc. Even the teaching given to the faithful, if one abstracts from it a very vague and general ethical code, identical with the humanistic ethics of the secular society at large, consists mainly in liturgical prescriptions and obligations of all kinds. The institutional priority of the Church over her sacraments is not questioned here, but the Church is essentially an institution existing for the fulfillment of the “religious needs” of her members, and since worship in all its forms constitutes the most obvious and immediate of such needs, the understanding and experience of the Church as existing primarily *for* liturgy seems quite natural.

While “institution” for theology and “worship” for piety, the Church is nowhere a “society.” And indeed, although the classical catechetical definition of the Church as society has never been openly revised or rejected, the Church-society simply does not manifest herself outside the common attendance of worship. Yet the experience of worship has long ago ceased to be that of a corporate liturgical act. It is an aggregation of individuals coming to church, attending worship in order to satisfy individually their individual religious needs, not in order to *constitute* and to *fulfill* the Church. The best proof of this is the complete disintegration of communion as a corporate act. Where the early Church saw her real fulfillment as a communion into one body (“...and unite all of us who partake of the one Bread and the one Cup, one to another...” *Liturgy of St. Basil*), we today consider Communion as the most individual and private of all religious acts, depending entirely on one’s personal desire, piety and preparation. Likewise the sermon, although addressed to the congregation, is, in fact, a personal teaching, aimed not at the “edification” of the Church, but at individuals at their private needs and duties. Its theme is the individual Christian, not the Church.

4.

It is true, on the theological level at least, that the theology and the piety described above, are criticized, denounced as obviously one-sided and deficient. If nothing else, the social and socially oriented “ethos” of our time was bound to provoke a reaction

against an ecclesiology in which institutional absolutism is combined with spiritual individualism, the “objectivity” of the Church with an amazingly “subjective” religious life. Hence a new interest in the status and nature of laity, in the corporate aspects of worship, a new search for a more complete definition of the Church, the scrutinizing of the scriptural concepts of Body, People, etc., hence also the emphasis on “participation” in the liturgical movement.

The reaction is, no doubt, a good and promising one. Yet, one extreme can easily lead to another and this is the danger we face today. Paradoxically enough the danger arises from the very source of our ecclesiological revival— the rediscovery of the “social” and the “organic” as essential dimensions of the Church. If, in the past, the Church was identified too exclusively with hierarchy and institution, there is a tendency now to just as exclusively identify her with an “organism.” The Fathers, we are told, have not left with us any precise definition of the Church’s *nature* or *essence*. Consequently, theologians reconstruct what seems to them to be the patristic ecclesiology, not discerning too often that, in fact, this overwhelmingly “organic” ecclesiology reflects some contemporary philosophical and sociological doctrines more than the experience of the early Church. The Church is a society, this society is an organism, this organism is the Body of Christ. Such a sequence of direct identifications, typical of the present ecclesiological trend, gives the idea of “organism” an almost biological connotation. It makes the Church a *substantial Being*, whose “organic unity” and “organic life” overshadow the personal, spiritual and dynamic aspects of unity and life. Unity is no longer understood as, first of all, the union of many, fulfilling itself in unity, *becoming* unity; it is a reality in which one “participates” and the category of participation leaves almost no room for that of becoming and fulfillment. The Church is a given reality, an organism whose life is conveyed and communicated to its members through the sacraments, the latter, and especially the Eucharist, being the means of this communication and participation.

It is very doubtful, however, whether to begin the definition of the Church in terms of “organism” is a good ecclesiological beginning at all. The absence of such a definition in the Fathers may not have been accidental, but rather a revealing experience of the Church, which we have not yet fully grasped. In the patristic perspective, the Church is primarily the gift of new life, but this life is not that *of the Church*, but the life of Christ in us, our life in Him. For the Church is not a “being” in the sense in which God or man may be called “beings” (“hypostatized natures” to use the ancient terminology), she is not a new “nature” added to the existing natures of God and man, she is not a “substance.” The term *new* applied to her— new life, new creation— does not mean an ontological newness, the appearance of a “being” which did not exist before, it means the redeemed, renewed and transfigured relationship between the only “substantial” beings: God and His creation. And just as the Church has no “hypostasis” or “personality” of her

own, other than the hypostasis of Christ and those of the men who constitute her, she has no “nature” of her own, for she is the new life of the “old” nature, redeemed and transfigured by Christ. In Him man, and through man the whole of “nature,” find their true life and become a new creation, a new being, the Body of Christ. Thus, on the one hand, there exists in the iconographical tradition of Orthodoxy no icon of the Church, because an icon implies necessarily a “hypostatized nature,” the reality of a substantial and personal “being” and in this sense the Church is not a “being.” Yet, on the other hand, each icon— that of Christ, of the Theotokos, of any Saint— is always and essentially an icon of the Church, because it manifests and reveals the new life of a being, the reality of its transfiguration, of its passage into the “new eon” of the Holy Spirit, this being precisely the manifestation of the Church. Therefore, the concepts of “organism” or “body” can be utterly misleading if, in a definition of the Church, they precede and give foundation to, that of “life.” It is not because she is an “organism” that the Church gives us the “new life,” but the new life given in her, or rather, the Church as new life, *makes* us an organism, transforms us into the Body of Christ, reveals us as “new being.”

We see now that the ecclesiological equation “institution— society—organism— Body of Christ” needs to be qualified. It would be a great error to directly apply the scriptural and traditional term “Body of Christ” to the Church as institution or society. In itself, “institution,” “society”— i.e., the visible, militant, hierarchical Church— is not the new life, the new being and the new age. It belongs to the structure and reality of the history of salvation and, therefore, to “this world.” But just as the Church of the Old Covenant, the old Israel, existed as a *passage* to the New Covenant, was *instituted* in order to prepare the ways of the Lord, the Church as *institution* exists in order to reveal— in “this world”— the “world to come,” the Kingdom of God, fulfilled and manifested in Christ. She is the *passage* of the “old” into the “new”— yet what is being redeemed, renewed and transfigured through her is not the “Church,” but the old life itself, the old Adam and the whole of creation. And she is this “passage” precisely because as institution she is “bone of the bones and flesh of the flesh” of this world, because she stands for the whole creation, truly represents it, assumes all of its life and offers it— in Christ— to God. She is indeed *instituted* for the world and not as a separate “religious” institution existing for the specifically religious needs of men. She represents— “makes present”— the whole of mankind, because mankind and creation were called from the very beginning to be the Temple of the Holy Spirit and the receptacle of Divine life. The Church is thus the restoration by God and the acceptance by man of the original and eternal destiny of creation itself. She is the presence of the Divine Act, which restores and the obedience of men who accept this act. Yet it is only when she performs and fulfills this “passage,” when, in other terms, she transcends herself as “institution” and “society” and becomes indeed the new life of the new creation, that she is the Body of Christ. As institution the

Church is in *this world* the sacrament of the Body of Christ, of the Kingdom of God and the world to come.

We recover thus the *eschatological* dimension of the Church. The body of Christ is not and can never be of this world. "This world" condemned Christ, the bearer of new life, to death and by doing this it has condemned itself to death. The new life, which shone forth from the grave, is the life of the "new eon," of the age, which in terms of this world is still "to come." The descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, by inaugurating a new eon, announced the *end* of this world, for as no one can partake of the "new life" without dying in the baptismal death, no one can have Christ as his *life* unless he has died and is constantly dying to this world: "for ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). But then nothing which is of this world— no institution, no society, no church— can be identified with the new eon, the new being. The most perfect Christian community— be it completely separated from the evils of the world— as a community is still *of* this world, living its life, depending on it. It is only by *passing* into the new eon, by an anticipation— in faith, hope and love— of the world to come, that a community can partake of the Body of Christ, and indeed manifest itself as the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ can never be "part" of this world, for Christ has ascended into heaven and his Kingdom is Heaven...

5.

We can now return to the Eucharist, for it is indeed the very *act of passage* in which the Church fulfills herself as a new creation and, therefore, *the* Sacrament of the Church. In the Eucharist, the Church transcends the dimensions of "institution" and becomes the Body of Christ. It is the "eschaton" of the Church, her manifestation as the world to come.

We have said that if, on the one hand, our "westernizing" theology subordinates the Eucharist (as "effect") to the Church (as "cause"), the common Orthodox piety, on the other hand, experiences the Church as a "liturgical institution," as cult. But if there is any truth in the preceding discussion of ecclesiology, the relationship Church-Liturgy, or more exactly, Church-Eucharist, must be reversed. It is not the Church that exists for, or "generates," the liturgy, it is the Eucharist which, in a very real sense, "generates" the Church, makes her to be what she is. We know that originally the Greek word "leitourgia" had no cultic connotations. It meant a public office, a service performed on behalf of a community and for its benefit. In the Septuagint, the word acquired naturally a religious meaning, yet still not necessarily a "liturgical" one. It implied the same idea of service, applied now to the chosen people of God whose specific "leitourgia" is to fulfill God's design in history, to prepare the "way of the Lord." The early Christian use reflected the

same meaning of “leitourgia.” The fact that the Church adopted it finally for her cult, and especially for the Eucharist, indicates her special understanding of worship, which is indeed a revolutionary one. If Christian worship is “leitourgia” it cannot be simply reduced to, or expressed in, terms of “cult.” The ancient world knew a plethora of cultic religions or “cults”— in which worship or cultic acts were the only real content of religion, an “end in itself.” But the Christian cult is “leitourgia” and this means that it is *functional* in its essence, has a goal to achieve which transcends the categories of cult as such. This goal is precisely the *Church* as the manifestation and presence of the “new eon,” of the Kingdom of God. In a sense the Church is indeed a *liturgical institution*, i.e. an institution whose “leitourgia” is to fulfill itself as the Body of Christ and a new creation. Christian cult is, therefore, a radically new cult, unprecedented in both the Old Testament and paganism, and the deficiency of a certain theology, as well as of a certain liturgical piety, is that they not only overlook the radical newness of Christian “leitourgia” but rather define and experience it again in the old cultic categories.

Such is the distortion, however, of our present ecclesiology that to affirm the uniqueness of the Eucharist as *the sacrament of the Church*, raises at once the question of its relation to the other sacraments, which in official theology are considered as separate “means of grace,” practically independent from one another. Nothing reveals more the neglect of the living Tradition than the post-patristic sacramental theology. It begins with a general theory of sacraments, which is then “applied” to each particular sacrament. As to Tradition, it follows exactly the opposite order. It begins with specific liturgical acts which not only are organically related to one another, but necessarily *refer* to the Eucharist as to their fulfillment, as, indeed, to the “sacrament of sacraments.” That ordination, for example, is to be performed within the Eucharist, that each of our three orders are, in ordination, related to a particular moment of the Eucharistic liturgy, is for the dogmatician a secondary liturgical detail with no real impact on the “essence” of the sacrament. In the living tradition, however, this relation is of paramount importance and reveals more about the “nature of the ministry” than any of the countless scholastic treatises written on the subject. There exists between the Eucharist and each of the other sacraments an organic link. For all the sacraments, except the Eucharist, deal with individual members of the Church and their purpose is to *integrate* the individual— his life, his particular “leitourgia” or calling— into the Church. But the Church is fulfilled in the Eucharist, and each sacrament, therefore, finds its natural *end*, its fulfillment in the Eucharist.

The theology of manuals stresses the sacramental power of the Church or, in other words, the Church as the “distributor of grace.” But it overlooks almost completely the Church as the end and fulfillment of the sacraments. For grace is another name for the Church in the state of fulfillment as the manifestation of the age of the Holy Spirit. There

has occurred a very significant shift in the understanding of the sacraments. They have become private services for individual Christians, aimed at their personal sanctification, not at the edification of the Church. The sacrament of penance, for example, which was originally an act of reconciliation *with* the Church is understood today as a mere “power of absolution.” Matrimony, which at first had even no special “liturgy” of its own and was performed through the participation of a newly-wed couple in the Eucharist, is no longer considered as the *passage*— and, therefore, transformation— of a “natural” marriage into the dimensions of the Church (“. . . for this is a great mystery, *but* I speak concerning Christ and the Church,” Eph. 5:32), but is defined as a “blessing” bestowed upon husband and wife, as a simple Christian sanction of marriage. The Eucharistic cup is replaced in it by a cup “symbolizing” common life. Examples like these can be multiplied. But no theological deformation and no piety, based on this deformation, can ultimately obscure and alter the fundamental and organic connection of all sacraments with the Eucharist, as the sacraments of sacraments, and, therefore, truly *the* Sacrament of the Church.

6.

Having forgotten the ecclesiological and the eschatological significance of the Eucharist, having reduced it to one “means of grace” among many, our official theology was bound to limit the theological study of the Eucharist to only two problems: that of the transformation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ and that of communion. As applied to the Eucharist, the term “sacrament” usually means either one of these acts or both, although it is explicitly admitted that they can be treated separately. Within this theological framework the Church remains mainly as a “power”— to perform the transformation, to give communion. The priest is the minister (the “performer”) of the sacrament, the elements of bread and wine— its “matter,” the communicant— its recipient. But communion having long ago ceased to be a self-evident fulfillment of the sacrament— 90% of our eucharistic celebrations are without communicants— there developed an additional and virtually independent theology of the Eucharist as sacrifice, essential *per se*, regardless of the people’s presence or participation. And finally, since theology by focusing its attention on these two moments of the Eucharist imperceptibly relegated all other elements of the eucharistic celebration into the category of “non-essential” rituals, the door was open to their interpretation in terms of *liturgical symbolism*. As understood and explained since Cabasilas, the Eucharist is a symbolical representation of the life of Christ, serving as a framework for the double sacrament of consecration and communion, yet not essential for its “validity” and “efficacy.”

But from the standpoint of Tradition the sacramental character of the Eucharist cannot be artificially narrowed to one act, to one moment of the whole rite. We have an “ordo” in which all parts and all elements are essential, are organically linked together in one sacramental structure. In other words, the Eucharist is a sacrament from the beginning to the end and its fulfillment or consummation is “made possible” by the entire liturgy. Liturgy here is not opposed to sacrament, as “symbolism to realism,” but indeed *is* sacrament: one, organic, consistent passage, in which each step prepares and “makes possible” the following one.

For the Eucharist, we have said, is a *passage*, a procession leading the Church into “heaven,” into her fulfillment as the Kingdom of God. And it is precisely the reality of this passage into the Eschaton that conditions the transformation of our offering— bread and wine— into the new food of the new creation, of our meal into the Messianic Banquet and the Koinonia of the Holy Spirit. Thus, for example, the coming together of Christians on the Lord’s Day, their visible unity “sealed” by the priest (“ecclesia in episcopo and episcopus in ecclesia”) is indeed the beginning of the sacrament, the “gathering *into* the Church.” And the *entrance* is not a symbolical representation of Christ going to preach but the *real* entrance— the beginning of the Church’s ascension to the Throne of God, made possible, inaugurated by the ascension of Christ’s Humanity. The offertory— the solemn transfer of bread and wine to the altar is again not the symbol of Christ’s burial (or of His entrance into Jerusalem) but a real sacrifice— the *transfer* of our lives and bodies and of the whole “matter” of the whole creation into heaven, their integration in the unique and all-embracing sacrifice of all sacrifices, that of Christ. The *prospora* (offering) makes possible the *anaphora*— the lifting up of the Church, her eschatological fulfillment by the *Eucharist*. For Eucharist— “thanksgiving”— is indeed the very content of the redeemed life, the very *reality* of the Kingdom as “joy and peace in the Holy Spirit,” the end and the fulfillment of our ascension into heaven. Therefore, the Eucharist *is* consecration and the Fathers called both the prayer of consecration and the consecrated gifts “Eucharist.” The insistence by the Orthodox on the *epiclesis* is nothing else, in its ultimate meaning, but the affirmation that the consecration, i.e., the transformation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, takes place in the “new eon” of the Holy Spirit. Our earthly food *becomes* the Body and Blood of Christ because it has been assumed, accepted, lifted up into the “age to come,” where Christ is indeed the very life, the very food of all life and the Church is His Body, “the fullness of Him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:23). It is there, finally, that we partake of the food of immortality, are made participants of the Messianic Banquet, of the New Pascha, it is from there, “having seen the true light, having received the heavenly Spirit,” that we return into “this world” (“let us depart in peace”) as witnesses of the Kingdom which is “to come.” Such is the sacrament of the Church, the “leitourgia” which eternally transforms

the Church into what she is, makes her the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

7.

The reader may get the impression that I have forgotten the initial theme of this paper— theology in its relation to the Church. The preceding developments were necessary, however, for it is only after the terms of reference have been defined that we can now try to explain what was meant by the affirmation made above about the Eucharist as the source of theology, as the way of the latter's reintegration into the Church.

In the past years we have been often told that Orthodox theology, if it wants to overcome its inner weakness and deficiencies, must *return to the Fathers*. "Patristic revival," "neo-patristic synthesis"— these and similar expressions are frequent in current Orthodox writings and they point, no doubt, to a very genuine and urgent need. The interruption of the living patristic tradition was indeed the origin of the great theological tragedy of Orthodoxy. But what exactly is meant by this "return" and how are we to perform it? To these questions no satisfactory answer has been given. Does it mean a mere repetition of what the Fathers said, on the assumption that they have said everything that is essential and nothing is needed but a recapitulation of their consensus? Such an assumption, even if it were a valid one, would certainly not solve the problem, as we stated it before,— that of the present theological *alienation*. No collection of highly technical patristic monographs, no edition of patristic texts for the common use, would constitute in themselves the living and creative answer to the real questions of our time, or the real needs of the Church. There would still be the necessity of interpreting the patristic message, of its "resurrection" in the mind of the Church, or, in other words, the problem of the theological "breaking through." But we must remember that the Church has never taught that the Fathers answered all questions, that their theology is the whole theology and that the theologian today is merely a commentator of patristic texts. To transform the Fathers into a purely formal and infallible authority, and theology— into a patristic scholasticism— is, in fact, a betrayal of the very spirit of patristic theology, which remains forever a wonderful example of spiritual freedom and creativity. The "return to the Fathers" means, above all, the recovery of their spirit, of the secret inspiration, which made them true witnesses of the Church.

We return indeed to the Fathers, and not only to their "texts," when we recover and make ours the experience of the Church not as mere "institution, doctrine, or system" to quote A. S. Khomiakov, but the all-embracing, all-assuming and all-transforming *life*, the passage into the reality of redemption and transfiguration. This experience, as we tried to show, is centered in the Eucharist, the Sacrament of the Church, the very

manifestation and self-revelation of the Church. Eucharist, whether it is expressly referred to or not, is the organic source and the necessary “term of reference” of theology, for if theology is bearing witness to the faith and the life of the Church, to the Church as salvation and the new life in Christ, it bears witness primarily to the experience of the Church manifested, communicated and actualized in the Eucharist. It is in the Eucharist that the Church ceases to be “institution, doctrine, system” and becomes Life, Vision, Salvation, it is in the Eucharist that the Word of God is fulfilled and the human mind made capable of expressing the mind of Christ. Here then is the source of theology, of *words about God*, the “event” which transforms our human speculation into a message of Divine Truth.

8.

I will conclude with two remarks, one dealing with the more immediate theological “agenda” of our time, and the other with the general spirit of Orthodox theology.

1. First of all, there should be no misunderstanding. The “eucharistic conversion” of theology does not mean an imposition on the theologian of a definite program, of a prescribed set of themes and questions. On the contrary, properly understood, it liberates him from the dead authority of pseudo-traditional systems, puts him into direct contact with the whole of *reality*: God, man and the world. “The spirit bloweth where it listeth . . .” There exists however, a preliminary problem, which must be dealt with, for it constitutes precisely the condition of the “eucharistic conversion” of theology. It is, to put it bluntly, the theological rediscovery of the Eucharist itself. It is here, we have seen, that the official, post-patristic theology has suffered its most obvious, most harmful metamorphosis, has deviated from the living Tradition, has “alienated” itself from the experience of the Church. It is here, therefore, that its deficiencies and limitations must be judged and overcome. To “rediscover” the Eucharist means, as we have tried to show, to recover its ecclesiological and eschatological “fullness” to know it again as the Sacrament of the Church. This, in turn, means that the reduction of the Eucharist to a multiplicity of artificially isolated “questions”: sacrament, sacrifice, communion, etc., must be transcended in a reintegrated vision and experience. Such reintegration is possible only when one ceases to abstract the Eucharist as “sacrament,” “sacrifice or communion” from the Eucharistic *leitourgia*, from the action in which all these aspects can be understood in their proper perspective and in their organic relation with one another. The *lex orandi* must be recovered as the *lex credendi*. The rediscovery of the Eucharist as the Sacrament of the Church is, in other words, the rediscovery of the Church *in actu*, the Church as

the Sacrament of Christ, of His “Parousia”— the *coming* and *presence* of the Kingdom, which is *to come*.

Let us not be mistaken: the task presents enormous difficulties. So much has been forgotten or neglected. The true meaning of the *leitourgia* of the Church has to be found again. The whole development of the liturgical piety must be reevaluated. The formidable inertia and opposition of dead conservatism and pseudo-traditionalism has to be met and overcome. Theological “regeneration” however, demands this price and nothing short of a *crisis*— constructive criticism, critical reconstruction can restore theology to its real function within the Church.

2. The term “eucharistic ecclesiology” has been recently introduced into our theological vocabulary. One can speak of even greater reasons for *eucharistic theology*, and this entire essay is nothing but an attempt to prove that truly Orthodox theology is by its very nature “eucharistic.” This does not mean that the Eucharist as such is the only object of theological contemplation and analysis. It was precisely such a transformation of the Eucharist into an “object” that obscured its function as the source of theology. It means that in the life of the Church the Eucharist is the *moment of truth* which makes it possible to see the real “objects” of theology: God, man and the world, in the *true light*, which, in other words, reveals both the *objects* of theology as they really are and gives the necessary *light* for their understanding. “We have seen the true light, we have received the Heavenly Spirit . . .” Theology, like any other Christian service or “leitourgia,” is a *charisma*, a gift of the Holy Spirit. This gift is given *in the Church*, i.e., in the act in which the Church fulfills herself as the communion of the Holy Spirit, in which she offers *in Christ* and offers *Him*, and is accepted *by Christ* and receives *from Him*; in the act which is, therefore, the source of all charisms and ministries of the Church. It is the moment of truth, indeed, for there we stand before God, in Christ who is the End, the Eschaton, the Fullness of all our humanity, and in Him offer to God the only “reasonable service” (*logike latreia*) of the redeemed world— the Eucharist, and in the light of it see and understand and recapitulate *in Christ* the truth about God, man and the world, about the creation and fall, sin and redemption, about the whole universe and its final transfiguration in the Kingdom of God, and we receive this truth in participation of the Body and Blood of Christ, in the unending Pentecost that “guides us into all truth and shows us things to come” (John 16:13). The task of theology is to bear witness to this truth, and there is no end to this task. Each theologian will see it only partially and partially reflect it, and each one will remain free, indeed, to reflect it according to his own particular charisma and vocation, but just as all charismata

have one and the same source, all vocations ultimately contribute to the edification of one catholic theology of the Church.

Return to the Bible, return to the Fathers . . . This means, above all, the return to the Church through the Eucharist and to the Eucharist through the Church: here the “texts” of the Scripture are given to us again and again as the living and life-creating Word of God, here we meet our Fathers not in “books” but in reality, the Reality to which they bore witness in their time and in their language, to which we are called to bear witness in our time and in our own language. “For the languages in the world are different,” says St. Irenaeus, “but the power of tradition is one and the same” (Adv. Haer. 1, 10, 2). “Our teaching,” he adds, “is confirmed to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist confirms our teaching.”

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