

## The Historical and Social Dimensions of the Church's Ethos

Chapter 11 of *The Freedom of Morality*  
(St Vladimir's Seminary Press,  
Crestwood, NY: 1984), pp. 195-229.

### 1. The problem of moral "efficacy"

We are trying to demonstrate the *ontological* content of the Church's ethos or morality, and how it relates directly to the salvation of life from passions, corruption and death, not to illusions and conventional projects for "improving" corporate life. But the transcendence of any corporate expediency or utility, the refusal to connect morality with improvement in the objective conditions of human life, gives rise to the reasonable question: do not the ethics of the Orthodox Church result merely in an abstract idealism or mysticism, a subjective experience unrelated to the immediate reality of life, to its social and historical realization? Is there not a danger that the freedom from any individual, objective predetermination, the way the person is distinguished and affirmed within the eucharistic community, and the transcendence of, all theories of values and obligations, end in a vague quest for imaginary goals which leave unanswered the concrete problems of human relations, those relationships which determine and shape the reality of life?

This question arises in a particularly acute form today, when the great movements for securing human rights and for the improvement of living conditions seem to have achieved in a few decades objective results far beyond anything that Christian ethics have achieved in twenty centuries. What can

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the Christians' ethic mean, then, when it lacks the capacity to change and transfigure historical reality? What meaning has the ethos of the eucharistic community, the ethos of the person, in a world of individuals suffering oppression and injustice, a world which continues to be dominated by impersonal power structures and which is crushed in the relentless circuit of autonomous economics and militarism, when it cannot even heal the open wounds of naked aggression, hunger and disease? There seems to be a very acute moral dilemma between the Church's eschatological vision or existential aims, and the immediacy of social, and more particularly political, action. Is it not incomparably more "moral" to play an active part in the political and social movements which, with varying amounts of realism, offer the immediate possibility of

action to improve the objective conditions of life and bring relief to men? And the struggle against social injustice, against the fossilized structures of oligarchy and its vested interests, with the self-denial and sacrifices this requires— is this not incomparably more “moral” than participation in a mystical experience of a “communion of saints”?

These questions certainly oppose the morality constructed by the Church to the immediate needs of society as a whole— to the claim that all should have an equal share in the good things of life. We must examine in a serious and coherent fashion how far this opposition is a real one, and how far it is artificial. The problem posed by the above questions is specific and practical, a problem of discriminating between truth and utopia, between a real possibility and a romantic illusion. In the way these questions are put, they have the clarity of “common sense.” They are, nevertheless, based on two premises which are taken as self-evident, without necessarily being so. One such premise is that organized effort, where individuals enlist in struggles against other individuals or structures which maintain social injustice, is capable of bearing fruit and restoring the life of society as a whole to its correct functioning. The other premise is the conviction that correct functioning of life in society as a whole can be secured by an objective, ultimately rationalistic, control of

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the individual’s rights and duties, and by the dynamic, political imposition of this control.

A whole culture, the western European culture which now extends world-wide, is founded almost exclusively on these two premises. Western man’s moral concern seems not to go beyond the framework that these premises define: an ethic of individual behavior and socio-political efficacy, an ethic of “improvement” both in character and in the organizational structure of society as a whole.<sup>1</sup> What, then, does this moral concern have to do with the truth and the ethos or morality of the Church? Is it possible for the churches of the Orthodox apostolic and patristic tradition ever to accord with this level of moral concern which presupposes an understanding of man, the world and history diametrically opposite to their own truth and life? In the milieu of the ecumenical movement, we often hear it imputed to the Orthodox as a shortcoming that they have no social ethic to put forward. Could it be, however, that this shortcoming means quite simply that the Orthodox are incapable of subjugating themselves to the level of moral concern imposed as self-evident and obligatory by the western way of life? And if this way of life is today taken as a *fait accompli* with world-wide possibilities,

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<sup>1</sup> “What should hold our attention is the historical conjunction of an ethical asceticism and an economic development, as part of a progressive rationalization of life. This conjunction has a significance not only on the historical level... but is of worldwide importance since it has determined the very destiny of the world”: Julien Freund, ‘L’éthique économique des religions mondiales selon Max Weber,’ *Archives de sociologie des religions* 13 (26) 1968, p. 13.

is the inability of Orthodoxy to fall in with it simply a historical embarrassment or a mere absence of theological vigilance?

## 2. The moral inadequacy of individual virtue

Why, however, do we say with such certainty that the moral concern of modern man is diametrically opposite to the Orthodox view of man, the world and history? It seems as if, in our day, the ethic of socio-political efficacy and of improving 'the structures of social life provides the supreme

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possibility for man to realize his "social" nature and justify his existence by extending it into the realm of "Public concerns." Socio-political claims do not necessarily stop at utilitarian immediacy; they do not end with the satisfaction of sectional or class demands. One might say that the inner motivation with which modern man takes up the struggle for these claims is almost metaphysical; consciously or unconsciously, it looks to the vision of the Kingdom of justice, reflecting, perhaps, some sort of corporate archetype of the lost paradise.

Even beyond this existential justification for western man's socio-political ethic, there is no mistaking its concrete historical results. The declarations of human rights and the popular struggles to have them applied, the progressive political movements and their efforts to extricate power from its subjection to the interests of an economic oligarchy, trade unionism and the organized struggle for the rights of the unprotected working man— all these forms of "moral" mobilization may not have transformed the world into paradise, but they have achieved, chiefly in western societies, a significant improvement in the objective conditions under which human beings are living, a definite moderation in the high-handedness of autonomous structures, and a fairer distribution of the good things of life.

The magnitude of these achievements in western societies far exceeds the dreams of the nineteenth-century European. Indeed, it has surpassed the expectations of even the most optimistic visionaries. And these are achievements of a sociopolitical ethic which seeks as a rule to be not merely unrelated to Christian ethics, but actually opposed to them—at least on one westerner's view of Christian ethics.<sup>2</sup> Being a Christian, as the average western man understands it, means that you transfer the immediate problems of social prosperity and historical progress to an abstract "transcendence," or that

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<sup>2</sup> "Insofar as economic, political and cultural reasoning long ago won its own freedom, the claim of faith functions all the more as a subsequent justification of that which has been reached without it. The Church's claim to free worldly systems from their worldliness... today has become ineffectual": Jürgen Moltmann, *Kirche in der Kraft des Geistes* (Munich, 1975), p. 190.

you confront them with the passivity of an individual virtue which, however rationally justified, is never sufficient to influence the march of history as a whole.<sup>3</sup> In the eyes of modern western man, the truth of the Church is no longer a teaching with the power to transfigure the world, as opposed to merely interpreting it. It is not a truth which can have a vital influence on social development, or give meaning and purpose to human history and man's relationship with the material reality of life. The western alienation of Christianity has turned the truth of the Church into an "ideology of decline," a soothing moralism powerless to free man from the various alienations into which modern social groupings lead him, restricted as it is to the sorry utilitarianism of "improving individual character.

Today, certainly, it often seems as if western Christianity has a sense of moral inadequacy. This is the only way to explain the manifest crisis of historical inferiority expressed in the desperate effort on the part of Christians to conform to the standards and requirements of the ethics of the irreligious European, which have proved so efficacious.<sup>4</sup> It is above all the so-called "political theology," that synthetic neo-leftism which is neither politics nor theology, which seems to bear the brunt of western Christianity's historical inferiority complex and to serve as a psychological over-compensation for it. It looks for the roots of the revolutionary socio-political movements in the Bible itself: the Bible serves as a treatise on political ethics, a theory of revolution whose aim is the

paradise of a classless society. In consequence, being a Christian today means that you take an active part in the dynamic uprising against social injustice and political oppression. A

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<sup>3</sup> "The impression was given that Christianity had nothing more to say than 'love and do what you will,' and that it now had nothing definite or peremptory to declare about the norms of good conduct that make for the good life and the common good": A. Vidler, *The Church in an Age of Revolution* (Penguin Books, 1976), p. 279.

<sup>4</sup> "The Church cannot remain neutral, but must engage itself strongly in favor of social justice. Without judging our predecessors—popes, bishops and priests— it is necessary to admit that preoccupation with affirming authority and maintaining the social order has hindered us from recognizing that this so-called order was a stratification of injustice, with our passivity vis-i-vis oppression. We have justified Marx when he said, 'Religion is the opium of the people.' We have offered to all the oppressed—those from poor countries as well as those from rich countries— an opium for the peoples": Don Helder Camara, *Au Synode des Évêques*, October 1974. Dorothee Sölle, *Atheistisch an Gottglauben* (Olten, 1969).

mass-meeting is an act of “worship,” a revolutionary slogan is a creed, and unity in political action is the new form of ecclesial communion.<sup>5</sup>

The question very naturally arises: why is it not enough just to be politically committed or to be a revolutionary? Why does one need to be a Christian as well? But this is precisely the question that brings us to the psychological motives behind “political theology.”

### 3. The totalitarian dimension of objective ethics

“Political theology” seems to have accepted the two premises which are taken for granted by socio-political movements in the West. One of these is the feasibility of determining solutions to social problems objectively, in terms of concrete proposals, schemes and demands. The other is the feasibility of imposing these solutions dynamically, politically. The attitude or approach represented by these two premises is summed up in the demand for objectivity: the solutions should be objectively determined and objectively imposed. And objectivity means opposition to the subjective factor: it means precluding personal differentiation, and making the theory which introduces the solutions and the policy which imposes them independent of any actual human being’s wish or capacity to put the proposed solutions into practice. Political theories and the corresponding political action which

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accompanies them take precedence over the human being they want to help, and whose life they want to “improve.” The intellectual forms of the solutions, the structures of the organization which applies them, and the “ethics” of obedience to the ideological “line” subjugate individuals and make them all alike; and the same happens also to thought and judgment, and to the dynamic differentiation in approaches to solving the problems of life. Theoretically it is the majority or the faceless and mythical “people,” but in practice it is a tiny minority which decides and imposes the solutions which are to “save” everyone, whether they like it or not.

*Totalitarianism* is another word we can use to express quite candidly the meaning and content of that “objectivity” which is taken as a self-evident premise for the “moral” concern of socio-political systems in the West— or at least of the extreme consequences of that objectivity.

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<sup>5</sup> From the extensive bibliography on the subject, see for example: Francois Biot, *Théologie du politique. Foi et politique. Eléments de réflexion* (Paris, 1972). Alan Booth, *Christians and Power Politics* (London, 1961). René Coste, *Les dimensions politiques de la foi* (Paris, 1972). André Dumas, *Théologies politiques et vie de l’église* (Lyon, 1977). Alfredo Fiarro, *The Militant Gospel: An Analysis of Contemporary Political Theologies* (London, 1977). Joseph Hromadka, *Der Geschichte ins Gesicht sehen. Evangelische und politische Interpretationen der Wirklichkeit* (Munich, 1977). Juan Luis Secundo, *Liberation of Theology* (New York, 1976). Gustavo Gutierrez, *Théologie de la liberation— Perspectives* (Brussels, 1974). Siegfried Widenhofer, *Politische Theologie* (Stuttgart, 1976).

Totalitarianism is not the exclusive characteristic of certain political regimes, parties or organizations which manifest it more or less undisguisedly. It is not an exceptional phenomenon, detached from the fabric of western civilization; it is an organic symptom, a product of that civilization which is entirely in character. The basis on which the historical and cultural life of the West has been built is the objectification of truth, the identification of truth with a particular function of human logic, a function which restricts knowledge to the conventionally “consistent” and therefore commonly accepted use of concepts, or, even more positively, of mathematical relationships.<sup>6</sup>

“Objective” truth presupposes “rationality” as the one and only possible way of interpreting and ordering natural and historical reality. Truth is no longer something achieved by a personal approach and personal experience, but a complete, closed “system” of concepts and intellectual relation-

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ships which interprets natural and historical reality definitively and with authority, with the “axioms,” “principles” and “laws” of “scientific” positivism. Thus truth becomes a useful means and an instrument in man’s hands for subjugating the world and history to the rationalism of need and desire. Those who possess “objective” truth with the help of the “laws,” “principles” and “axioms” of “scientific positivism, and who represent and interpret it with authority, are also the people who determine the “objective” needs and desires of the whole society which the truth is meant to serve.

When truth becomes “objective,” this leads to the “infallibility” of its representatives and interpreters,<sup>7</sup> of the bureaucratic structures which ensure its “objective” implementation. It is thus justifiable even to subjugate by force people who disagree with the visible authority of dogma. The institution of the Holy Inquisition and torture as a method of interrogation in the trials of heretics, the concentration camps, the psychiatric hospitals for “reforming” dissidents, the emasculation of conscience by the party line, one-dimensional trade unionism and the organized brain-washing of the masses— all these are consequences which come inevitably with every use of rationalism in the service of religious, political or any other “sacred” ends—

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<sup>6</sup> “In the West for several centuries, this peculiar imaginary notion has been created according to which everything is ‘rational’ (and in particular mathematizable), that is to say, it is essentially exhaustible; and the goal of knowledge is mastery and possession of nature”: Cornelius Castoriadis, *L’institution imaginaire de la société* (Paris, 1975), p. 369. See also M.-D. Chenu, *La théologie comme science au XIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1969). H.-X. Arquillière, *L’augustinisme politique. Essai sur la formation des théories politiques du Moyen-Age* (Paris, 1972<sup>2</sup>). Gerald Cragg, *The Church and the Age of Reason* (Penguin Books, 1976<sup>6</sup>) pp. 159 and 280.

<sup>7</sup> For the first formulation and defence of the principle of “infallibility,” see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 11, 2, 1, art. 10.

with every demand for the objectification of the truth. It was the Christian theology of the West which first taught the “objectivity” of truth,<sup>8</sup> so that without reference to Thomas Aquinas and Calvin it is impossible to interpret the totalitarian manner in which even advertizing works today: we remain unaware of the foundation of the West’s cultural and historical life, which is the objective

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proof and imposition of the usefulness of God, or Capital, or the Proletariat, or the Revolution.

The objectivity and efficacy of social ethics in the western world seems to begin by doing away with the very goal at which it aims: the possibility of *communion* or *society*, of the corporate functioning of life. Communion or society— personal relationships which go to make up a community of life— cannot possibly exist when truth is an objective datum, when there are no distinct personal approaches to the truth which permit the distinctiveness and freedom of persons— the potential for relationship-to become apparent. In an age when the rights and duties of the individual are rationalistically regulated there is no “society,” despite the multiplicity of “social” systems. In the same way, the truth of the city, the *polis*, is gradually being lost, even though individuals are becoming generally more politicized. Our life together is being neutralized into the coexistence of anonymous individuals, living in parallel and without contact; and these individuals are prisoners, packed away in the spaces created by modern, “efficient” housing, mobilized *en masse* in the party or in class factions pursuing individual rights to prosperity (meaning total solitude). They are “one-dimensional” individuals whose judgment and thought have been formalized by the mass media— by the propaganda of consumerism or of the party. Every aspect of the lives of the anonymous masses— their margins for consumption, the educational possibilities open to them, and the range of ideological influences on them— is regulated by rationalistic means; it is the technocrats, embodying the doctrines of cybernetics or some other special “applied” science, who achieve this regulation best, which is to say most efficiently.

It requires a degree of short sight not to perceive that the need for rationalistic and “efficient” regulation, a basic premise of western man’s social ethics, inevitably puts the management of public affairs, in other words politics, in the hands of the technocrats. They are the people who

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas’ definitions of the objectivity of knowledge: *De anima* II, 12 and III, 8; *Summa Theologiae* I, 87, 3 and I, 88, 2 ad. 2; *De veritate*, qu. I, art. 9 and qu. III, art. 2; *Summa contra gentiles*, I, 53; *De potentia*, qu. XI, art. 5. See also M.-D. Roland-Gosselin, “La théorie thomiste de l’erreur,” *Mélanges thomistes* (=Bibliothèque thomiste 3, 1923), pp. 253-274. *Idem*, “Sur la théorie thomiste de la vérité,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 10 (1921), pp. 223-234. C. Van Riet, *L’épistémologie thomiste* (Louvain, 1946). Étienne Gilson, *Le Thomisme* (Paris, 19726), especially p. 281 ff. *Idem*, *Réalisme thomiste et critique de la connaissance* (Paris, 1938).

have the specialized knowledge required for such regulation, especially in the highly-developed and complicated mechanisms of the economy, the balance of armaments, and the control of those

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who manipulate armed force. To be sure, while preserving impersonal, “efficient” structures the technocratic bureaucracy does not neglect to preserve also the need felt by the “masses” for idealism; and this it does with romantic catchwords from the pretechnological era, such as democracy, parliamentary government, freedom of thought and expression, and the like. Or alternatively, they make use of analogous but more modern idealistic inventions, like anti-imperialism, the new economic order, world peace, or power for the people. And the masses give vent to their emotions, applauding those who mouth these catchwords and making legends of them-or alternatively demanding a greater show of democracy and “freedoms,” intoxicated with the utopianism of political mobilization, of “man’s direct power to shape his historical destiny and his future with his own hands,” a utopia which again is made possible through rationalistic regulation. One, respects and sometimes admires the pure heroism and self-sacrifice that may accompany this political commitment, but one is also pained by the tragic senselessness: by the way man is alienated and estranged from the essentials of his existential truth without suspecting his own alienation, so that he is unequivocally “antimetaphysical” and yet subject to childish myths and medieval expectations. Today, politics is plainly the opium which drugs the masses, and more particularly the intellectual masses, against metaphysics.

#### **4. Visions of “general happiness” and their cost**

The achievements of western socio-political “efficacy” are greater than the nineteenth-century European could have dreamed of. But then neither could he have contemplated how great would be the cost of bringing them about. This cost alone accounts for the fact that, in countries where the ideals of western man’s social ethics— material comfort for all and a distribution of good things which is not provocatively inequitable— have been implemented with satisfying completeness, it has not ceased to be taken for granted that people should join ever more radical politico-social movements in

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pursuit of basic demands concerned with the *quality* of human life, with how to save man from the mechanistic, leveling organization of his “happiness” as a prosperous consumer.

The two rival systems which vie with one another to put into effect the vision of “general happiness,” capitalism and marxism, are almost on a level in the price they have demanded for putting their principles into practice. And it is precisely this virtually equivalent cost which reveals in practice how the two systems are essentially identical: they have common



starting-points and premises, a common descent from western metaphysics, and common roots in a rationalism which necessarily produces infallible authority and totalitarianism.<sup>9</sup>

This revelation to which the cost has led us is perhaps more painful than the magnitude of that cost itself. Against the nightmare of the totalitarian and imperialistic structures of capitalism, nineteenth-century man could at least set the concrete hope and dynamic of the marxist movement: marxism made its appearance as a message of radical change in human society. It was a philosophy which aspired to transcend abstract theorizing and become a daily dynamic act, giving man the capacity to shape history with his own hands. He would be able to shatter the structures of his oppression and alienation, liberate work from enslavement to the interests of an oligarchy, and show the value of the material side of life, transforming the world, its natural resources and its good things into a gift offered equally to all.

Twentieth-century man has seen marxism reach the great moment of putting its principles and ambitions into practice— he has seen the popular uprising of 1917 in Russia, which enabled the marxist vision of social change to become a possibility. But the price exacted in the name of this change has

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made it clear that by the very nature of its theoretical origins, marxism is subject to the laws and premises of the capitalist system. In order to become political action and a social order, marxism, proved bound to submit to the capitalist methodology of “efficiency,” which means that the centralized, bureaucratic structures of the system of production become autonomous. it had to submit to the deterministic relationship between capital and labor which degrades the human “material” into a neutral, secondary factor subordinated to the needs of capital production— with the trifling difference that, in the case of marxism, the capital is state-owned rather than private.<sup>10</sup>

Russia had to go through the most inhuman atrocities history has ever known: the “Gulag archipelago” with its tens of millions of victims, the nightmare of the police state, compulsory submission by the people to religious worship of those in power, and the destruction of all forms

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Lukacs’ apophthegm: “Historical materialism is the self-consciousness of capitalist society,” in Maurice Clavel, *Ce que je crois* (Paris, 1975), p. 156. See also the similar conclusion reached by Julien Freund: “Capitalism and all the economic systems born of it, socialism included, have developed the rule of the *impersonal* and have elicited, at this point, a break with the old economic mentality, dominated by personal relations”: “L’éthique économique et les religions mondiales selon Max Weber,” *Archives de sociologie des religions* 13 (1968), pp. 24-25.

<sup>10</sup> “Never did Marx or the marxist movement think otherwise than of ‘placing technique (capitalist) at the service of socialism,’ of shifting the ‘profits of production’ (rapidly identified, moreover— and not by chance— with legal forms of ownership)”: C. Castoriadis, *L’institution imaginaire...*, p. 479.

of individual freedoms and rights.<sup>11</sup> The ruthless force of military occupation was required to subjugate the countries now known as the “eastern block” to the marxist ideal, and uprisings by the workers and people in East Germany, Hungary and Czechoslovakia had to be drowned in blood. This enormous and agonizing price had to be paid, not to realize the marxist vision of

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social change, but to destroy it once and for all; to transform the “great soviet fatherland” of the proletariat into a typically capitalist, imperialist superpower. The internationalist ideal of marxism has been swallowed up by the Russian party oligarchy’s greed for military and economic strength. The messianic aspirations to produce a classless society have been betrayed, since centralized bureaucracy inevitably creates its own rigid aristocracy. And the Russian model has been copied universally and with perfect faithfulness, so that today there is no longer any marxist group or movement over which the grass roots have any real control. The idea of obedience to the party and of infallible leadership, the rationalistic conception of unity and the bureaucratic way it is institutionalized, are the basic characteristics of marxism in the second half of the twentieth century—organic consequences of positivism and objectivity, those basic premises for every form of western social ethics.<sup>12</sup>

In terms of theoretical interest, the most important modern survival of this ethic is the critique of marxist theory and practice “from the left,” the search for dynamic forms of liberation to free man from the tyranny of the autonomous structures of technocratic bureaucracy, capitalist and marxist alike. This search found a striking and unexpected embodiment in the spontaneous student uprisings of 1968, in America, Germany, France, Italy and Japan. This was the first time that violent and radical questioning of the objectified, oppressive structures of social life in the West had broken out on such a scale.

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<sup>11</sup> Amidst a host of now well-known historical indications and personal testimonies, as well as critical analyses and political theories, I should like to single out the violent and bitter commentary on the collapse of the marxist vision in Russia represented by André Glucksmann’s book, *La cuisinière et le mangeur d’hommes., essai sur l’État, le marxisme, les camps de concentration* (Paris, 1975). Glucksmann asks “But what about this Marxist-Leninist doctrine which, in claiming to be the ‘science of government’ of the twentieth century, has undertaken the second campaign for the westernization of Russia— after that of Peter the Great— injecting it with those European values which have always governed the relations of master/slave, despot/plebian, or State/People? Is not the ‘Gulag Archipelago’ the cutting edge of the West? What blindness or calculation could oppose radically challenging this theory and this practice of ‘revolution from above,’ the modern version of tyranny, which claims to end in having the State governed by the simple Russian ‘stew pot’ and has done nothing but deliver it to the cold monster of the Gulag, to statist barbarism, to the law of ‘eating men’?”

<sup>12</sup> “The essential point is that [Marxism] is a rationalist philosophy, and like all rationalist philosophies, it gives in advance the solution to all the problems that it poses”: Castoriadis, *Institution imaginaries...*, p. 57.

The most representative of these uprisings was undoubtedly the “French May ’68”; this above all embodied the peculiar complexion and the uniqueness of these student disturbances. It was also the most general of the uprisings, uniting workers and peasants alongside the students and producing the most impressive mobilization of the people and general strike in the history of Europe. Within a few hours, it had paralyzed the whole “system” of social organization,

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bringing the mechanisms for its functioning to a standstill. And all this took place in an atmosphere of spontaneity and improvisation with no predetermined purpose or rationalistic organization. With unpremeditated “occupations” of their places of work or study, people were laying claim to the places and material facilities which made up their daily lives— claiming them from the neutralized structures and impersonal intermediaries who managed them by default.<sup>13</sup>

This claim had such an unfounded romanticism and was expressed in such anti-rationalist slogans<sup>14</sup> that it seemed more like the uproar caused by a festival or a popular fair— though this is not to say that the revolt was not daily paid for in blood. And it was typical that the institutionalized, bureaucratic representatives of the “people,” the communist party and the trade unions alike, denounced the revolt and ultimately betrayed it: the revolt was stifled with the first rationalistic manoeuvrings of political strategy, and also by the ruthless force of the inevitable state intervention to safeguard “order” and “security.”

The lesson of May ’68 was a traumatic one; it gave western societies a severe shock and left its mark on their life. For the first time, the wave of questioning went beyond utilitarian demands and the institutionalized representatives of such demands, bringing to light an “ethical” understanding of life which was not confined to consumer prosperity or to the utopianism of totalitarian “paradises.” And it is this taste of a life freed from mechanistic rationalization which the theorists of the “meta-marxist” quest continue to cultivate.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See Jacques Baynac, *Mai retrouvé* (Paris, 1978). Alain Delale and Gilles Ragache, *La France de 68* (Paris, 1978). Jean-Marx Salmon, *Hôtel de l'avenir* (Paris, 1978). Patrick Poivre d'Arvor, *Mai 68, Mai 78* (Paris, 1978).

<sup>14</sup> Be realists: Demand the impossible!” “After the barricades (lit.: beneath the paving stones), the beach.” “Life (*vie*) against survival (*survie*).” “Get out of sight, thing (i.e., world of objectivity)!” “Imagination takes power.” “Action shouldn’t be a reaction but a creation.” “A storm is brewing: We must try to live.” “Creativity, spontaneity, life.” “The revolution leads nowhere. It is free. It is the dance of Dionysus.” “Shit to prosperity. Live!”

<sup>15</sup> See C. Castoriadis, *L’institution imaginaire de la société* (Paris, 1975). *Idem*, *Les carrefours du labyrinthe* (Paris, 1978). Claude Lefort, *Éléments d’une critique de la bureaucratie* (Geneva, 1971). *Idem*, *Un homme en trop, réflexions sur “L’Archipel du Goulag”* (Paris, 1976). *Idem*, *Le travail de l’oeuvre, Machiavel* (Paris, 1972). *Idem*, *Les formes de l’histoire* (Paris, 1978). Edgar Morin, Claude Lefort, Jean-Marc Coudray, *Mai 68: la brèche* (Paris, 1968). Bernard-Henri Levy, *La barbarie à visage humain* .(Paris, 1977). Andre Glucksmann, *La cuisinière et le*

Among the representatives of this quest, it is the Greek Cornelius Castoriadis who has taken his questioning right to the basis of the ontology on which the western way of life and organization is founded. He was felt to have played an important part in preparing the theoretical climate which gave birth to the French May of '68.<sup>16</sup> In his book *L'institution imaginaire de la société*, Castoriadis outlines an interpretation of how the structures in the capitalist system have become autonomous, and of the bankruptcy of the marxist vision, with reference to their common "metaphysical" starting-point in the foundation underlying what he calls "Greco-western" civilization.<sup>17</sup> This ontology objectifies being into an intellectual datum, an inevitably entitative concept which correspondingly petrifies the historical and social realization of being— the functioning of knowledge, the development of science and the way life is organized-into definitive aspects of a simplified logical identity, and ultimately into institutionalized objective forms and rigid structures. In exceptionally ingenious arguments, drawing on virtually all areas of modern knowledge, Castoriadis indicates the arbitrary and conventional character of this "deterministic" ontology and the consequent objectification of being, setting against it all the data

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constantly arising from both scientific research and historical experience which point to the "essential" indeterminacy of natural, historical and social "becoming." He concludes with the proposition that the objectification of the concept of being into a logical and intellectual identity, the identification of the existent with its definitive meaning or essence, should be replaced by an understanding of *being* as *becoming*. It is the tendency and movement of dynamic realization which constitutes being and which cannot be limited to a defined entitative identity, and therefore cannot be made subject to *a priori* principles and laws of conventional logic, but can be interpreted only with reference to the *imaginary element*, which is shaped in an

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mangeur d'hommes, essai sur l'État, le marxisme, les camps de concentration (Paris, 1975). Idem, *Les maîtres penseurs* (Paris, 1977).

<sup>16</sup> Typical is the reference to Castoriadis by Daniel Cohn-Bendit— the student who came to symbolize the student uprising of '68 because of the leading role he played and his subsequent deportation from France— in an interview given on French television (TF3) on 7 May 1978.

<sup>17</sup> Castoriadis takes for granted the arrogant scheme of western historiography: western civilization is the only direct and organic continuation of the ancient Greek tradition. Western philosophy, though it started from nothing more than a few books of Aristotle, translated from the Arabic at that, likes to consider itself unique in its direct line of development from pre-Socratic and post-Socratic philosophy. The "Hellenic" reading of the ancient Greek philosophers by the Byzantine commentators, and the organic assimilation of their thought in the dynamic synthesis of the Greek fathers— the ontological premises of that other civilization, diametrically opposed to the utilitarian "objectivity" of the westerners and its inhuman consequences— remains a closed book to Castoriadis.

indeterminate way through social coexistence, and at the same time constitutes the dynamic for transforming social life.

The socio-political and therefore “moral” consequences of Castoriadis’ ontological theories certainly require extensive study and need to be confronted—although his views probably will be illustrated and worked out more fully in works still to be published. The extremely summary indication of his position here serves simply to introduce the following question: Does an “objective” or “holistic” or “general” theory of the dynamic indeterminacy of being really amount to transcendence of the static “objectivity” of western metaphysics? A holistic theory inevitably makes life subject to its own general and consequently schematic limits, even if it presupposes the dynamic indeterminacy of life and the freedom and distinctiveness which give rise to it. And the theory of the dynamic indeterminacy of life *is* holistic when there is no *hypostatic* bearer of this freedom and distinctiveness; that is to say, when freedom and distinctiveness are not an achievement but an objective datum. As for replacing the “entitative identity” of the structures of historical and social life with the indeterminate dynamism of the “imaginary element” which gives shape to those structures, the interpretation Of *being* as *becoming*, is there not perhaps a danger that this may lead to a neo-Hegelism which makes the indeterminate “becoming” into a metaphysical absolute, and may at the same time force us to defer to or even mythologize

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the impersonal “dynamism” of the masses? And within this given dynamic indeterminacy of social and historical “becoming,” what room is there for man’s failure and “sin,” for the egocentric way in which he fortifies himself in the secure forms of conventional identity, in the efficiency of objectified structures or in the authority of oversimplified mechanistic theories?

These questions, however, lead on to the area of enquiry which principally concerns us here, and which arises out of the connection between social and political ethics and ontology—and that enquiry takes us back to our initial question about the social ethic of the Orthodox Church.

## **5. The ontological fact of communion and its existential realization**

The ethos of the Church is a communal or “social” ethos, and the communal ethos of the Church is identified with the ontological content of her truth, the truth of life as communion. Communion constitutes life; existence is an event of communion. The “cause” of existence and the “source” of life is not being-in-itself-being does not represent an absolute category *per se* but it is the divine, trinitarian communion which hypostasizes being as a fact of life. For the Church, communion is an *ontological* fact: not the consequence of the ontological fact, but a fact essential to being. The historical fact that people live together in groups and the

phenomenology of what is called “communal” or “social” life— the political, social, economic and governmental organization of human groups— is only one expression of this fact.

Communion constitutes life; it also constitutes the ethos of life, the dynamic of life, the impetus and movement towards the realization of life. The phenomenon of what is called “communal becoming”— the historical or “objective” dimension of communion— expresses and indicates the ontological fact of communion, certainly; but it does not exhaust the *ethos* of communion, the *manner* in which life is existentially realized as communion. If we make the ontological fact of

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communion definitively objective in its historical, phenomenological dimension, we then remain bound by the metaphysics of conventional intellectual identities; we are simply putting the idea of “communion” in the place of the concept of being-in-itself as an entity.

If communion is an ontological fact and not an entitative, intellectual concept which objectifies the phenomenology of history, then this presupposes that it has a dynamic, existential realization—that there must be a *hypostatic* bearer of the potential for communion, which is every member of the communion or society. And the potential for communion assumes also a potential for non-communion, which is to say that it presupposes freedom as a definition of the fact of communality. In the same way, it assumes a differentiation in the potentialities for communion; each will participate in communion, in society, in a distinctive way. The dynamic, existential realization of communion—communion as an existential achievement and not as an “objective” datum— brings out the distinctiveness of the hypostasis bearing the potential for communion.

Thus freedom and distinctiveness *define* the ontological fact of communion; there is no communion unless participation in it is free and distinctive. And this is an *ethical* definition of the fact of communality: the realization of life as communion has an ethical dynamic indeterminacy irreconcilable with any definitive relation of identity any schematic or legal predetermination of communion, because the fact of communality is defined by the freedom and distinctiveness of the members who *achieve* communion.

The dynamic indeterminacy of -communal life, and the fact that freedom and distinctiveness are *ethical* coordinates for the ontological fact of communion, are not conclusions drawn from syllogisms or abstract principles which enable us to form a logical, holistic view of the given reality of history and society. Freedom and distinctiveness are the hypostatic realization of life, the existential fact of the person. The person is the hypostasis of the existential potentiality for life, for the life which is communion and relationship; but it also represents the hypostatic possibility of refusing communion

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and alienating life. The freedom of the person hypostasizes life, the ontological fact of communion. But it is freedom, an existential event of self-realization for the person, because the person is able also to negate itself; to put into effect, existentially, the rejection of life, the replacement of communion with individual survival and egocentric self-sufficiency, and the alienation of life into a conventional coexistence. This is a coexistence which simply puts a cloak of rationalism over the threat to individual survival represented by the “other’s” independent claim for individual survival, the existential *distantness* of the “other’s” hypostasis when it is individual and no longer in communion.

Only when it is seen in this way is communion not an objective datum, but a personal existential achievement of authentic life. The dynamic indeterminacy of communal “becoming” may present freedom and distinctiveness as notional “objective” coordinates for human coexistence; but this “objectivity” is simply an intellectual conception making an abstract composition out of historical data, while the real sphere in which freedom and distinctiveness are realized existentially, as an event of communion or a failure to attain communion, is the human person alone.

It is consequently contradictory to talk about an objectively applicable “communal” or “social ethic,” since the ethical dimension of the fact of communion or society, its dynamic realization, is judged exclusively within the framework of personal freedom. Whenever the possibilities for ethical, dynamic realization of communion are taken outside the sphere of the personal existence which is the hypostatic bearer of these possibilities, this inevitably creates types of communion with no substantial, hypostatic basis; imaginary and abstract forms of communion alien to life and its existential realization. And when we try to impose these forms, alien as they are to life, by convention or compulsion, and to “create” communion “from above,” setting our programmatic limits and rationalistic laws or using unsubstantiated canons of freedom or justice or other objective “values,” then we are crippling life itself and tormenting mankind.

If by the term “social ethics,” then, we mean a theory, a

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program or a code which aims at an “objective” improvement in people’s corporate life, an “objective” change in the structures and preconditions for their coexistence, and better regulation of the “objective” relationships which form people into organized groups— if these aims are pursued independently of personal distinctiveness and freedom, the sphere in which they are dynamically and existentially realized— then certainly so long as the Church remains faithful to her ontological truth she has no such ethics to display, nor could she come to terms with such an ethic.

It is hardly necessary to stress that *personal* existential realization of life as an event of communion does not in the least mean taking refuge in an individual or subjective ethic, and

identifying the ethos or morality of human coexistence with the sum total of “virtues” achieved by the individuals living together: the difference between the *individual*, and the *person* has been set out repeatedly in the preceding pages. Indeed, the very concept of an “individual” precludes the ontological view of the fact of communion: it confines being to the “closed” entitative identity of the existent being and its character as a phenomenon. This is why an individual ethic is not substantially different from a holistic ethic, an ethic of general rules and principles for the organization of corporate life. What we usually mean by the term “individual ethics” is nonetheless an “objective” ethic, an objectification of life within the framework of given evaluations of behavior— categories of behavior made into entities in themselves. The idea that by achieving a moral “improvement” in individuals we shall have a resultant moral improvement in corporate life, and the idea that achieving a moral “improvement” in the organization, structures and principles of corporate life results in individuals being “happy” and “moral,” both assume the same phenomenological interpretation of life and its reality as communion. Such an interpretation bears no relation to the existential adventure of human freedom, or to the existential achievement of life as communion.

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## **6. The communal dynamics of repentance**

The Church is a fact of communion and a dynamic realization of communion. The Church’s truth is the only ontology of the fact of communion, the ontology which identifies being with the person, that is to say, with the existential realization of life as communion. This realization is a dynamic ethical event. Communion for the Church is an ethical existential achievement. The truth of communion is the ethos, the “morality” of the Church. The ethic of the Church is a communal ethic, a social ethic.

The ontological content of the Church’s communal ethos leaves no room for compromise with religious, political or ideological systems of ethics and social organization which distinguish the fact and the ethos of communion from its precondition of personal freedom, from the dynamic existential realization of communion in the framework of personal distinctiveness. It is a matter of incompatible ontologies, not merely incompatible value-judgments. For the Church, to treat freedom as a precondition for realizing the fact of communion is not a “principle” in her system of values. It is a presupposition for remaining faithful to the existential truth of man, to his true mode of existence. Every vision or aspiration that overlooks or violates personal freedom, even the vision of a “paradise” of universal happiness, is a denial of existential truth and consequently a distortion of life, a cause of alienation and torment for man.

The Church respects and values freedom not only as the realization of communion, but also in the form of personal failure to attain communion. Respect for man’s failure to realize life as communion is respect for his freedom; it affirms freedom, not as a “value” and a legal “right “ but



as man's existential truth. And this affirmation of freedom has practical significance, because the Church accepts the sinner, the person who has failed, and transforms his failure into an event of communion through repentance. The ethical "paradox" of the Church, which makes her radically different from any system of ethics or social organization, is the way she renounces any

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objective, evaluative precondition for the individual's participation in the community. Only the personal dynamics of love can save freedom and form a communion out of failure to attain communion. The event which constitutes the Church is the dynamic act of taking man up, in his failure, and "grafting" that failure into the communion of saints; it is the freedom of love, the "absurdity" of love which rejects every rationalistic criterion for participation in the life of communion: "It receives the last even as the first; it shows mercy to the last, and cares for the first. To the one it gives, and upon the other it bestows freely. It accepts the works and welcomes the endeavor: it honors the deed, and commends the intention."<sup>18</sup>

## **7. The eucharistic starting-point for transformations in society**

The social ethic of the Church aims neither at an "improvement" in the objective conditions and structures of corporate life, nor yet at an "improvement" in the character of individuals. Its aim is to enable life to operate in the limitless scope of personal freedom, the freedom which can be existentially realized only as an event of communion. This one, unique criterion for the Church's ethos means overturning the conventional canons of moral behavior in the most radical and revolutionary way: it signifies the dynamic indeterminacy of life once it is freed from slavery to objectivity and individualism. By this criterion it is possible, in the framework of organized coexistence, for the endurance of tyranny, injustice and oppression to be an achievement of freedom and a realization of communion. In the same way, an uprising against tyranny and oppression can also be an achievement of self-denial and an extreme risk taken by love; an event, once again, of freedom and communion.<sup>19</sup> The right and wrong

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<sup>18</sup> Paschal Homily attributed to St John Chrysostom.

<sup>19</sup> In contemporary "political theology," desperate efforts are made to formulate and justify objectively a "theology of revolution" which will allow Christians living under restrictive and totalitarian regimes, particularly in the third world, to engage actively and with "theological" backing in the revolutionary liberation movements usually monopolized by Marxists. This need for an a priori, objective theological safeguard in taking personal moral risks is a typical mark and consequence of any holistic ethics. As an example of a different ethical mentality, one may consider the way Orthodox clergy took part in armed struggles for the liberation of the Balkan peoples in the nineteenth century. These were mainly Greek bishops, but also some priests and deacons, who took up arms and rose up

in each case, the good and the evil, can be judged only by the measure of the realization of freedom, which is sacrificial self-transcendence and a struggle to attain communion.

The measure and standard for the communal ethos of the Church is illumined and embodied in the event which constitutes ecclesial communion— in the eucharist. The eucharist is life as communion— not an abstract life, but the precondition for earthly life which is food, that object of contention which tears life apart. Within the eucharist, partaking of daily nourishment is to partake in Christ's sacrifice, to partake in that death of individual demands and claims which raises life up into the miracle of communion. The bread and wine of the eucharist are the body and blood of Christ, the reality of His theanthropic nature— a participation and communion in His mode of existence. It is the first-fruits or leaven of life, for the transfiguration of every facet, every activity in human life into an opportunity for communion **and an event** of communion. As people live the sacrificial ethos of the eucharist, it suffuses economics, politics, professional life, the

family and the structures of public life in a mystical way— it acts with a dynamic indeterminacy beyond the reach of objective predetermination. And it transfigures them-it changes their existential presuppositions, and does not simply "improve" them.

To be even more exact, the eucharist sums up a mode of existence which finds its social realization in the asceticism of the Church. As we have seen in a previous chapter, asceticism is not an individual exercise of the will, nor a masochistic attitude towards human needs and desires, but an opportunity for communion and an act of communion. The Church's asceticism aims at the subjection of individual, biological desires to the absolute primacy of personal relation. ship and communion. Experience of true communion among human beings, like the

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with the people in 1821, often fighting as leaders of corps of soldiers. They even resorted to the use of armed force without having first assured their individual moral justification with passages of Scripture or some "theology of revolution." They knew quite well that violence was diametrically opposed to the truth of the Church and the ethos of the Church, and that according to the Church canons they were endangering the grace of priesthood bestowed on them and risking excommunication, risking the salvation of their souls. Yet what was paramount in their eyes was not their individual salvation but the salvation of the people, the liberation of its life from enslavement to tyranny— it was "we" and not "I," as Makriyannis characteristically puts it. They therefore did not care if they themselves would be "condemned." Their struggle was a feat of ultimate self-denial, an extreme risk taken out of love, an act of freedom and communion. For further information on modern "theology of revolution," see: H.E. Tödt, *Theologie der Revolution, Analysen und Materialien* (Frankfurt, 1968). J.G. Davies, *Christians, Politics and Revolution* (London, n.d.). J. Miguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* (Philadelphia, 1974). E. Feil and R. Weth, ed., *Diskussion zur Theologie der Revolution* (Munich/Mainz, 1969). G. Gutierrez, *Theologie der Befreiung* (Munich/Mainz, 1973).

encounter with the personal reason and meaning in natural reality and the discovery of the personal God in history, requires the ascetic self-transcendence of individuality and the reality of personal relationship and self-offering.

One might venture to maintain, then, that asceticism, as a social manifestation and practical application of the Church's truth, represents also a radical moral, social and ultimately political stance and action. Radical, because it directly and actively undermines the holistic systems of individualistic utilitarianism and their totalitarian mechanisms. These systems are not endangered by the revolutionary movements and ideas which are contained with painstaking contrivance in the same "logic" of systems. Holistic systems are endangered only by the existential stance, the existential action which gives absolute priority to achieving the *personal* truth of man. Not to the "development" of the individual nor to the education and "cultivation" of the social unity, but to the achievement of personal distinctiveness: that distinctiveness realized dynamically on the frontier between freedom and sin, in the trial of self-transcendence in love, in discovering and bringing out the personal reason and meaning in the reality of the world, and in encountering the personal God revealed through history.

This existential stance and action is a radical denial of the

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hypnotic illusions of consumer prosperity. It refuses to restrict its concern with political problems to the capitalist-marxist polarization,<sup>20</sup> to the issue of whether consumer needs should in principle be satisfied through competition or through state control. It refuses to imprison politics in the inhuman mechanization of the autonomous economy, and rejects the debauchery of industry over the living body of the world for the sake of consumer greed.

This is the stance and the action of the Orthodox tradition and of Orthodox life. It is the dynamics of social transformation embodied in the eucharistic community, the diocese or parish. When the diocese and the parish form a true ecclesial communion, this leads dynamically and organically to the transformation of mass coexistence into a communion of persons. It provides a basis for social justice which is genuine and not merely rationalistic; it liberates work from slavery to need, transforming it into a personal relationship, and it brings out each human being's creative distinctiveness. Through the correct functioning of the eucharistic community there is created a form of politics which serves the existential truth and authenticity of man, a form of science which gives reason and meaning to man's relationship with the world, and a form of economics which serves life rather than subjugating it.

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<sup>20</sup> See Ch. Yannaras, "Etudes de théologie politique," *Contacts* No. 95 (1976/3).

## 8. The communal ethos of the eucharist and its cultural expression

In today's technocratic society, the network of rivalries between the international holders of big capital is taken for granted; the needs of production and consumption are autonomous, the development of machines carries all before it, and political power is inevitably totalitarian. Within this framework, it seems at least like romantic utopianism or poetic nostalgia to talk about the social dynamism of the eucharistic community. Even if historically that dynamism was once real-

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ized to some extent, it still belongs quite definitely to the past.

Historically, it is true, the widespread influence of the Church's communal ethos—the social dynamism of the eucharistic community— does indeed seem to have been bound up exclusively with the rural or early urban stages of communal life. As a historical example of such influence, we probably have only Byzantium. Medieval western societies, dominated by the feudal system<sup>21</sup> and with extremely sharp class distinctions,<sup>22</sup> make it impossible for us to speak of the eucharistic community as dynamically extended throughout social life and culture. They were certainly societies organized on a religious basis, but had little or nothing to do with the primacy of personal distinctiveness and freedom which constitutes the eucharistic ethos of communion.<sup>23</sup> In Byzantium, by contrast,

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<sup>21</sup> The feudal system was a product and a hallmark of western European societies, unknown in the Greek (or "Byzantine") East. It was not until the end of the seventeenth century that feudalism made its appearance in the East, in the Ottoman Empire, as a sign that economic and social organization was becoming westernized. "The idea of *Byzantium* is strictly irreconcilable with that of feudalism... The interminable struggle of central government against the great landlords has left its mark on the whole of Byzantine history ... The absence of any formal social distinctions gave Byzantine administration a popular character which made it radically different from the stratified societies of the West... The Byzantine and Ottoman worlds alike considered any procedure for concentrating land ownership as *anti-social*": K. Vergopoulos, *The Agrarian Question in Greece* (in Greek-Athens, 1975), pp. 20, 26, 27, where the relevant bibliography is given.

<sup>22</sup> Bibliography on class distinctions in western societies includes: George Duby, *Adolescence de la chrétienté occidentale* (Geneva, 1967), p. 57ff. Robert Fossier, *Histoire sociale de l'Occident médiéval* (Paris, 1973). Jacques de Goff, *La civilisation de l'Occident médiéval* (Paris, 1972), pp. 319-386.

<sup>23</sup> The totalitarian character of religious organization in western medieval societies and the way they undervalued human personality is attested generally and without dispute by western historiography itself. It would suffice to call to mind just a few institutional expressions of this religious totalitarianism: the famous *Dictatus* of Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085), the principle of papal infallibility (*De Romani Pontificis infallibili magisterio*) founded on Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, the bull of Pope Gregory IX (1233) which instituted the Holy Inquisition, the introduction of torture as a method of interrogation in heresy trials by Pope Innocent IV (1252), etc. Furthermore,

we have a popular culture which reveals in its every expression and manifestation the absolute priority of the truth of the person, and a way of life which is articulated liturgically, becoming an event of personal communion.

This is not the place to show how, in Byzantine civilization, art, economics, politics and legislation all expressed the attitude of life and the communal ethos of the Church; how they preserved the liturgical understanding of the world and history and the creative “word” or reason in man’s relationship with things, a reason which follows from the subordination of individual arbitrariness to the harmony and wisdom in the world.<sup>24</sup>

We may simply state the conclusion that, for a thousand years, Byzantium put into action the dynamic operation of eucharistic communion in the dimensions of the inhabited earth, the *oikoumene*. In Byzantium, the *oikoumene* takes on the mystical depth and dynamic meaning of the word *proslagma*, “that which has been assumed,” as this term is used in the Christology of Chalcedon. The conceptual center of the *oikoumene* is the Church, the supreme manifestation of the Wisdom of God which created the world, the fulfilment in history and dynamic continuation of the event of God’s incarnation, where He assumes the irrationality of natural man so as to transform it into a rational principle of relationship and communion, into the archetypal city, the Kingdom of God.

Within this process, there is a hard and fast distinction

between the beauty of personal life and communion and the irrational impulses of natural barbarism. But at the same time its scope is unlimited in that the rudeness and disorder of the hordes who are outside this communion have to be assumed and grafted into the liturgy of life.

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this religious totalitarianism was the breeding ground for the many forms of religious rebellion in modern European man, and also gave rise to the capitalist system which led religion decisively to lose its vigor in western societies. Specifically on the roots of capitalist ideology in Roman Catholic scholasticism and particularly in Thomas Aquinas, see Werner Sombart, *Le Bourgeois. Contribution à l'histoire morale et intellectuelle de l'homme économique moderne* (Paris, 1966<sup>2</sup>), p. 226ff.

<sup>24</sup> To substantiate this view of Byzantine civilization, the following books may be mentioned: Steven Runciman, *Byzantine Style and Civilization* (Penguin Books, 1975). A. Gervase Mathew, *Byzantine Aesthetics* (London, 1963). Philip Sherrard, *Constantinople, Iconography of a Sacred City* (London, 1965). Dimitri Obolensky, “The Principles and Methods of Byzantine Diplomacy,” *Actes du XIIe Congrès International d’Études Byzantines*, I (Belgrade, 1963), pp. 45-61. Hélène Ahrweiler, *L’idéologie politique de l’empire byzantin* (Paris, 1975). Louis Brehier, *Les institutions de l’empire byzantin* (Paris, 1970). J. M. Hussey, *Church and Learning in the Byzantine Empire* (London, 1937). P. Charanis, “On the Social Structure of the Later Roman Empire,” *Byzantion* 17 (1944-45), pp. 38-57.

In every aspect of its historical and cultural life, Byzantium brought about the assumption of whatever is natural, irrational or common, transfiguring it into communion and sacred history and God-manhood— into the Church.

With the fall of Byzantium, the social dynamism of the eucharistic community did not disappear; it simply contracted from the bounds of the inhabited world to those of the social and cultural life of *Romiosyne*, the Christian people under the Ottoman yoke. For four whole centuries, local government, local justice, business and credit, associations and guilds in the Greek East under Turkish rule, functioned, in a way that revealed a liturgical structure in the community, the priority of personal relationships and the pursuit of communal virtue. The liturgical structure of the enslaved Greek community was expressed with equal clarity in hospitality, popular song, dance, folk costume, architecture and iconography. All these manifestations of life and art serve to reveal a cultural level and ethos unattainable in later times, a real paradigm of social organization, and a rare sensitivity among the people, despite the absence of formal education

It is the ethos of *personal* life and relationship, the total exclusion of any impersonal, rationalistic organization, which provides the basis for -all aspects of social life. Nowadays we need to be exceptionally cultivated, and perhaps even to undertake special studies, in order to appreciate or even just to follow the amazing level of culture in that humiliated Hellenism. Yet we know that, at that time, this was not the level of a few experts but a general manifestation of popular sensitivity, down to the last village and monastery. The way community life operated during the Turkish occupation was born of the people's need and their virtue. It was the product of the people's ethos, not of theoretical, cerebral principles and axioms. Equally a product of the people's ethos was their

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completely original and genuine art, their song, their dancing, their costume and their festivals.<sup>25</sup>

The free ethos of enslaved *Romiosyne* remains ultimately a model for a social realization which respects personal uniqueness and manifests the liturgical unity of human coexistence. The high point of this unity is the festival. The life of the community becomes part of the eucharistic cycle of feasts in the Church's life, the daily triumph of the Church over the irrationality of time and corruption. The traditional Greek festival always centered on the Church's commemoration of a saint; it was always a feast-day. Round this ecclesial event, the

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<sup>25</sup> See John Campbell and Philip Sherrard, *Modern Greece* (London, 1968), especially pp. 189-213. Steven Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity* (Cambridge, 1968). Manouel Gedeon, *The Cultural Progress of the Nation in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (in Greek-Athens, 1976). Angeliki Chatzimichali, *The Guilds—the isnafia* (in Greek-Athens, 1950). *Eadem Greek Folk Costume* (in Greek-Athens, ed. T. Yannaras, 1978). Dimitri, Pikionis, "Our Popular Art and Ourselves" (in Greek) in *Filiki Etaireia* 4 (1925), p. 145ff.

people joined in fellowship, singing and dancing and eating together. Differences and misunderstandings melted away; people declared their love, and the foundations were laid for new families. To this day, no form of socialism nor any rationalistically organized popular movement has been able to restore this genuine dimension of the popular festival, or to respond fully to man's deep-seated need for festivals.

## **9. The sole program— reconstruction of the parish**

Today, however, that social and cultural realization of the liturgical ethos of the Orthodox Church seems just a nostalgic memory. Yet before we conclude with certainty that the social dimension of the eucharistic community is in our day pure utopianism, there is one question which needs to be confronted. In modern times, we have seen a change in the structures and premises of social life; we have passed from the limited community of personal relationships to impersonal, mass coexistence, from creative work to automated production, and from personal need to artificially contrived consumer greed. Now does this radical alteration in man's

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way of life distort even the reality of the eucharistic synaxis of the faithful? Does it alienate or destroy the existential fact of personal communion in the body of the Church? Does it neutralize the dynamic extension of the eucharist into all other aspects of social life?

The appearance of the symptoms leaves no alternative but to answer in the affirmative. Yes; the consumer culture, the culture of mass media for news and entertainment, mass production systems, housing complexes for people to live together *en masse* and organized mass demands— has proved incomparably stronger than the culture and ethos of eucharistic communion. All the immediate evidence suggests that, at least in today's big cities, the eucharistic community too has been distorted into an impersonal, mass religious grouping. A parish contains thousands of people, often tens of thousands, and there is no personal communion or sense of being a body. People do not gather in the churches to constitute the body of the Church, to manifest and realize the true life of the communion of persons; they come to satisfy their individual religious needs and to pray as individuals, in parallel with the rest of the congregation, more alone perhaps than on the sportsground or at the cinema.

At the same time, it seems as if the axis and aim of the liturgy has been transferred away from participation in Christ's body and the approach to the cup of the unity of the faithful, and now consists in listening to a moralistic sermon offering prescriptions for social behavior. The sense of mystical unity, that unity which constitutes the Church's mode of existence and the salvation of man, is often so atrophied, even nonexistent, that one wonders how far the eucharistic synaxis today still preserves the truth of the universal Church, the full possibility of life beyond corruption and death. Where the parish has been distorted, or substantially abolished and replaced by an organizational, impersonal understanding of the Church (or "Christianity") as a

“religious” institution analogous to other conventional expedients of corporate life, this means that the Church loses her identity; there is a dangerous confusion in the preconditions for salvation, and the Church’s communal ethos is deprived of its strength.

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It is hard to imagine the possible cultural developments and the dynamic transformations in technologically advanced society if there were living liturgical communities present at its heart, if the leaven for social transformation— the eucharistic realization of the Church’s communal ethos in the parish— had been preserved. The social and historical dimension of the Church’s ethos is not a dimension of moral or ideological influence over the masses, rationalistically planned; it is a change in the way people live together, a change that is real and existential, and therefore defies objective definition. This change has its starting-point and its axis in the eucharistic body of the parish. The truth of the Church, the reality of salvation, the abolition of sin and death, the contradiction of the absurdity in life and in history, the dynamic adaptation of the organizational structures of corporate life to personal distinctiveness and freedom— all these are the eucharist incarnate in the body of the parish. The liturgical unity of the faithful, under whatever conditions and in whatever institutions, networks and structures, is the starting-point for the transformation of mass coexistence into a communion of persons, a society; for the achievement of social justice and not merely a program for it; and for liberating work from slavery to mechanized necessity and transforming it into a personal relationship, an event of communion. Only the life of the eucharistic body of the parish can give flesh to the formal idea of the “priestly” character of politics, the prophetic character of science, the philanthropic character of economics and the mystical character of the family. Without the parish, all this is theory, naive idealism and a romantic utopia. Within the parish it becomes a historical reality, an immediate possibility and a concrete experience.

It seems today that institutionalized church organizations are totally subject to the culture of “externals,” the culture of utilitarianism and efficiency, of individual logic and individual ethics; but this does not mean that the ethos of eucharistic communion is impracticable within the framework of modern social life, any more than the alienation of sexual love in the same society means that people are quite incapable of being truly in love. The eucharistic ethos is not being put into

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practice and manifested in society today, but it would be arbitrary to infer from this that such an ethos cannot possibly achieve existential realization. Precisely by virtue of the existential dynamism of the eucharistic ethos, we are enabled to discern the personal weakness of those who represent it today, and their failure to realize and manifest its social consequences.



It is not an “objective” factor, then— the passage from a rural society to a technological one or the particular way in which modern “developed” societies are structured— which prevents the eucharistic ethos from being realized in society. No objective fact can cancel out the existential possibility for life to be realized in personal ways. Only a deliberate betrayal of these possibilities— man’s sin, his failure to realize his personal distinctiveness and freedom— can explain why the Christian churches today are historically mute in the realm of social affairs. This does not mean that we should overlook the great personal trial faced by each Christian within the framework of our modern consumer way of life, in a culture which corresponds almost exclusively to man’s impersonal, instinctive nature— to his autonomous need to possess, to find sensual enjoyment and to forget his mortality.

If, even in isolated cases, some bishops decided to return to the eucharistic truth and identity of the Church, which would mean restructuring the parish as a body with organic unity, then the historical and social dimension of the Church’s ethos would not be slow to make its appearance in culture, being realized in quite specific ways. These would be living realizations, and consequently could not be determined objectively or *a priori*; and they would come about even amidst the all-powerful economic and political networks which dominate modern life. Restructuring of the parish means in the first instance local eucharistic communities of strictly limited size, so that communion and relationship amongst the faithful and between them and their pastor is a real possibility. But this is not all. The eucharistic community is not simply an arithmetical unit of a size which permits direct personal acquaintance and contact. It is first and foremost a community of life; it involves a dynamic sense of being a body, and a certain faith

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in the truth of the “true life” which is communion in love and self-offering, a realization of the trinitarian prototype of life. Concealed behind the present destruction of the parish through its enlargement is the individualism of the cultural framework of our life, the pietistic concept of individualized salvation.

Ultimately, however, even a mere reduction in the size of parishes could be a first step towards awareness of the eucharistic truth of the Church, and the starting-point from which we could eventually reach a practical theological consciousness of ourselves as a eucharistic community. All it would need is for some bishops to take the risk, and realize that without eucharistic communities gathered into a body of communion, they themselves hold merely the title and not the position of bishop. They are then mere administrative officials, however exalted, in a conventional institution which has no essential justification, despite the many “charitable foundations” that they may organize.

Having eucharistic communities of limited size inevitably means that parishes multiply, and may mean the gradual disappearance of the professional priesthood. A suitable member of the eucharistic community can receive the grace of priesthood and take on the duties of pastor,

while continuing to make his living from his private profession. Undoubtedly the professional priesthood has certain advantages for church life; but especially in today's social environment of secularism, the departure from it might help us significantly in extricating ourselves from the idea of the Church as a conventional institution with a professional hierarchy "to serve the religious needs of the people." The loss of a professional clergy, so far from hindering a return to the eucharistic basis of church life, is actually of primary importance for the social dynamism of the Church today. It would help to free the church organization from the mentality and the restrictions of an "institution" subject to relations of economic dependence and canons of professional behavior. Once the presbyter of the eucharistic synaxis ceases to make his living from serving as a priest, then he expresses nothing other than the truth and experience of his liturgical community; he is not

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the professional representative of an institutionalized organization which gives him financial support. Priesthood rediscovers its charismatic character, and the eucharistic community its missionary dynamism.<sup>26</sup>

There is always, of course, a host of ready objections based on the practical difficulties of returning to the eucharistic hypostasis of the Church and reconstituting the small parish. But our attempt to deal with the problem cannot stop at the difficulties, whatever they may be, since this is a question of the truth of the Church, of man's salvation from the tyranny of the irrational and from death. Restoration of the eucharistic community as the central axis of the Church's life undoubtedly means repudiating the centralized institutionalization of the Church as an organization which today is taken for granted, and this is no easy task: it means that we really have to abrogate the facilities afforded by the "Vaticanization" of the Church.<sup>27</sup> The

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<sup>26</sup> This experiment has begun to be carried out under pressure of immediate necessity in some parishes of the Orthodox diaspora, mainly in Europe where the small number of parishioners cannot maintain a priest financially so that he is not distracted by the cares of earning a living. Thus people qualified in widely differing fields carry on their personal professions in order to maintain their families, and look after their parishes at the same time. The results of this experiment have been exceptionally positive, especially when the break with professional priesthood is accompanied by a lively theological awareness of the priest's duty. Nevertheless, all we have said here about restricting or abolishing the professional priesthood is only one aspect of the problem: undoubtedly, a real priest and father of his parish -who does not have some other occupation in order to maintain his family has less distraction and is more dedicated to God than a real priest who does.

<sup>27</sup> "Vaticanization" of the Church means that the center of her life is transferred from the eucharistic synaxis to the institutional dimension of her organization. The symptoms of this transference are a supreme "staff" of titular bishops, archbishops and metropolitans deprived of episcopal functions in the church body, staff officers with "specialist" clergy, successive celebrations of the eucharist in the same church on the same day, or celebration of the eucharist for certain social classes, or organizations only, etc. See John Zizioulas, "La continuité avec les origines apostoliques dans la conscience théologique des Eglises Orthodoxes," *Istina* 1/1974, pp. 85-87.

reconstitution of the eucharistic community, however, is not just one of the many problems facing the Church, albeit the most serious. Prior to any problem, it is the very precondition for the true existence of the Church; it is faithfulness to the gospel of salvation, the practical

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proclamation of the truth of salvation. Once it is understood that the eucharistic theological self-awareness of the Church and its incarnation in the parish community are thus absolutely primary, then no difficulty can prevent the problem being faced and solved.

The communal ethos of the Church is not an abstract ethical theory, nor a system of values codified into commandments. It is the fact of the eucharist and its extension to the universal dimensions of life, the dynamic realization of personal distinctiveness and freedom in the context of the encounter between human effort and divine grace.

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