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Theological Heritage

Mysticism and Liturgy (In the Greek Orthodox Thought)

John D. Zizioulas

Editor's Note: *This text is published here for the first time. It marks the inaugural scholarly work of the late Metropolitan John D. Zizioulas (1931–2023), written while he was still a lay theologian pursuing his post-graduate studies at the prestigious Divinity School of Harvard University, dating back to 1956. The text was prepared for a special seminar titled "Mystics in Church History," taught by Prof. Paul Tillich (1886–1965), a theologian who had, at least indirectly, an influence on Zizioulas' subsequent theological formation. In this text, Zizioulas delves into the significance of mysticism from an Orthodox perspective, most likely for the first in his entire body of work. He underscores the relevance of the Divine Liturgy in general, and the Eucharist in particular, for both the essence of the Church and theological discourse. Additionally, he reflects on the importance of the "symbol" and the "icon" in theology, engaging extensively with the writings of his patristic hero, St. Maximus the Confessor. Those familiar with his work will recognize core tenets of his theological vision articulated and further developed throughout his writings—such as his Eucharistic outlook, existential interpretation of the patristic tradition, to name only a few—culminating in his posthumous magnum opus, "Remembering the Future." The text has remained unpublished since 1956, while certain sections, particularly those focused on the "icon" and the "symbol," echo insights found in Zizioulas' mature work in a significantly developed form. (See, for instance, "Symbolism and Realism in Orthodox Worship,"* Sourozh, *no. 79*

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[2000] 2–17). The text, recently discovered in the archives of Metropolitan John, is published here with minimal editing to preserve its original handwritten form and style.

Introduction

(Theological thought and liturgical practice in their mystical connection)

Liturgical practice is the sphere of Orthodox thought. In the tradition of the Eastern Orthodox Church theological thought and liturgical life have appeared as an organic unity and their divorce would mean a loss of their specific character. It is remarkable that the whole worship in the Orthodox Church is baptized in theological thought and that the whole theology finds its expression in the form of the Liturgy.

But what is the bond that brings the two manifestations of the life of the Church into such an organic interrelation? The answer to the question is that both theology and liturgical practice are deeply mystical. They are justified only so long as they share the attitude of experience and participation, the living realization of the divine presence. To know God means to enter into union with Him, i.e., to participate in the divine life. The mysteries of God are only revealed in a state of deification (θέωσις) when man becomes by grace what God is by nature. This has been the main scheme in which the Greek Fathers conceived salvation. Revelation cannot be a mere rational achievement; it belongs to the totality of life.[1] It is, therefore, in the participation in the divine life as it appears in the Incarnate Christ and his Body—the Church, which one can speak about God, that theological thought can be conceived.

[1] Sergius Bulgakoff, "Revelation," in J. Baillie and H. Martin (eds.) *Revelation*, translated by Oliver F. Clarke and Xenia Braikevitch (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1937), 146: "Revelation represents the divine-human life of the church and our own participation in it. … Revelation is life in God, a process of deification."

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The same mystical motive is to give the explanation to and get support for, the fact that a mere soteriological interest characterizes all the involvement of the Greek Fathers in theological controversies. They understood salvation as "θέωσις," and they could not accept any doctrine that would destroy this mystical and only possibility. Thus their attitude in the whole history of dogma has this deep mystical motif. They condemn Arius because if the Logos were not consubstantial with the Father our deification—possible only through participation in Christ—would be impossible. They fight Nestorianism and monophysitism because they want to secure perfect participation of humanity and divinity in the person of Christ. They do the same against Monothelitism because they are anxious to see human will in a possibility of union with the will of God in Christ. They, finally, struggle hard to secure the acceptance of the Icons in order to affirm the possibility of expressing divine realities in matter. Their theology is moved by the same mystical motive: man needs for his salvation a participation in the divine life. Christ is the only ground of this union. In Him we find the divine and human united and it is He who "became Man so that we may become divine."[2] Thus *the motif*, *the possibility,* and *the content* of theological thought were based on a mystical ground.

There is no mysticism conceived in the Greek Orthodox tradition without a theology. But more than that, there is no theology without mystical quality. It probably is not by accident that in the long history of the Eastern Church up to the last few centuries, the name of "theologian" has been specially reserved for only three writers: Saint John, the most mystical of the four evangelists; St. Gregory of Nazianzus, the author of contemplative poems; and St. Symeon, "the New Theologian," the chanter of the union with God. Thus "the mystical is considered as the perfection, the summing up of the whole theology, as a theology par excellence."[3]

[2] Thus, the motif, the possibility, and the content of theological thought was based on a mystical ground.

[3] Vladimir Lossky, *Essai sur la théologie mystique de l'Église d'Orient* (Paris: Aubier 1944), 7.

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This mystical theological thought, with its soteriological accent, could not but seek a deep unity with what constitutes the incarnation of all mystical experience and the accepted means of soteriological realizations, namely the Liturgy of the Church.

In a deep mystical participation in the Eucharistic-centered Liturgy, the theologian realizes the presence of the Divine in whose life He is called to participate if he is asking for any knowledge of Him.

This attitude of the Fathers towards theological knowledge has made worship in the Greek Orthodox Church the mystical ground of her whole life. "The Church lives by the Eucharist and in the Eucharist."[4] All vitality and creativity have been used in order that liturgical worship may become a realm of man's meeting with God and a revelation of the reality to which he is called as a participant.

In the coming chapters, we are going to see the mystical implications of liturgical practice with the help of some of the Greek Fathers, especially St. Cyril of Jerusalem and St. Maximus the Confessor, who attempted to interpret it in a mystical way.

In the Realm of the Mystery

The terminology of Orthodox worship prefers the use of *mystery* (μυστήριον) instead of sacrament for the Divine Liturgy. The term is very old and perhaps there has never been a difference between the two Latin terms, *sacramentum* and *mysterium*, as they translated the Greek term.[5] Yet, the preference of the term is very characteristic of the mode of the worship. It describes the atmosphere in which the Liturgy dwells and discloses its very meaning.

But the word undoubtedly needs some explanation, since it has been deeply distorted. Many uses of the word have appeared; it

[4] Georges Florovsky, "Orthodox Contribution," in P. Edwall, E. Hayman and W. Maxwell (eds.), *Ways of Worship*: *The Report of a Theological Commission of Faith and Order* (London: SCM Press 1951), 58.

[5] Louis Bouyer, "Mysterion," in *Mystery and Mysticism: A Symposium* (London: Blackfriars Publications 1956), 25.

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seems that the most popular one hardly allows it to mean more than just something misty! Mystery tends to be understood as something hidden, incomprehensible, and above any understanding.

Louis Bouyer[6] undertakes the job of pointing out that this is not the right interpretation that the term deserves. Even in the pagan use of the word we cannot say that a mystery is an un-revealed doctrine, since it has been proved that they never had any secret doctrines—they had only secret rites.[7] No matter how true this reference to the pagan use is, it remains true that in the Christian use of the word the mystery is not a hidden and unapproachable reality. It is on the contrary *something disclosed.* The nature of mystery is such that it ceases to be a mystery if it is not disclosed, although *it always remains inexhaustible* in the process of disclosing itself.[8] Thus St. Ignatius of Antioch in his Epistle to the *Ephesians* (19:1) calls the virgin-birth and the death of the Lord as "μυστήρια κραυγῆς" i.e., as mysteries which now stand revealed and must be proclaimed to the whole world. St. Justin approaches the term with his characteristic typological intentions and finds that in the Pascha "the mystery of the Lamb was the type of Christ."[9] The next characteristic step is taken by Origen. Here we have the old apocalyptic idea of a mystery as a symbol foreshadowing eschatological realities. The Cross is not only the revelation of God's plan in history but also a figure foreshadowing the way in which the whole Church is to follow her divine head to a glorious end.[10] In Origen, "the Passion and Resurrection (of the physical

[6] Ibid., 18–32. See also Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology,* vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1951).

[7] Ibid., 20.

[8] In supporting this view, Bouyer points out many New Testament passages; *Eph.* 1:9; 3:9 and the entire context to say that the Epistle to the Ephesians gives us the final revelation of the mystery as the completion of history and also of God's work; since it consists in the recapitulation, the comprehensive summing-up of the whole human history and its successful outcome. Ibid., 22.

[9] *Dial. with Trypho* XI. In Irenaeus, despite the fact that he is the first writer who sets the Christian mystery in direct relationship with the non-Christian mysteries of his day (especially Gnostics), the mystery is almost identified with οἰκονομία. *Adv. Haer.* I, 20.

[10] "Just as the visible and tangible body of Jesus was crucified and buried and then rose from the dead, so likewise the whole body of Christ's saints is now nailed to the

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body of Jesus) is the 'μυστήριον' of the passion and resurrection of the mystical Christ."[11]

This is precisely the decisive point in the history of the concept. Origen's interpretation of mystery as symbol of eschatological realities prepared the state with which we are mainly concerned in the present paper, namely *the application of the term μυστήριον to the rites of the Church*. This appears for the first time in the middle of the 4th century. It is in the *Catecheses* of St. Cyril of Jerusalem that we first meet it.

Mysterion, now, is not only the fact which lights up divine revelations, it is also the rite in which all this is expressed and brought into effect for us. Baptism is a *mysterion*. Before Baptism man "heard mysteries and did not understand, "he heard Scriptures and did not know their depth." But now, in Baptism it is no more hearing "about" mysteries but hearing "in" them ("οὐκ ἔτι περιηχῇ, ἀλλ' ἐνηχῇ").[12] Man becomes "οἶκος θεῖος" where the Holy Spirit speaks. This is not a mere intellectual relationship between the baptised and the divine reality expressed in the mystery. Cyril does not hesitate to quote from the *Psalms* the phrase which also appears in the gospels: "ἐγὼ εἶπα· θεοί ἐστε καὶ υἱοὶ Ὑψίστου πάντες."[13] It is the same idea of deification that appears here. Through and in the mystery of Baptism the Holy Spirit acts as "θεοποιόν."[14] But this deification has a necessary Christological basis. It is described as a marriage relationship between the Baptized and Christ. It is a "καθοσίωσις"—a dedication to the heavenly Bridegroom.[15] Thus the baptised becomes able to see and receive in himself ("χωρητικὸς") the most divine mysteries,[16] yet only in the sense of these mysteries being the mysteries of Christ.[17]

cross. ... But when the resurrection τοῦ ἀληθινοῦ καὶ τελειοτέρου Χριστοῦ σώματος takes place, then the many members will form a single body." *In. Jon. Com.* (6, 10, 20).

[11] Hans von Balthasar "Le Mysterion d'Origène," *Recherches de science religieuse* 26/5 (1936): 543.

[12] *Pro catechesis* (PG 33:344).

[13] PG 33:344–345.

[14] PG 33:476.

[15] Ibid., PG 33:345.

[16] "Χωρητικοὶ τῶν θειοτέρων μυστυρίων" (PG 33:1065).

[17] "Χριστοῦ μυστηρίων κοινωνοὶ" (PG 33:369).

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In this whole process of mysteriological practice, the initiated and baptised into the mystery man does not remain passive. The mystery is offered to him, but his will is asked. The mystery influences nature; nature is not unable to receive salvation. A strong distinction is made by St. Cyril between nature and will. Nature is able to accept salvation; the will remains[18] and it is the will that both produces and fights evil.[19] Thus the mystery is given, but a full acceptance of the mystery is a matter of entire process through progressive realization and participation in the divine life.

This immediately introduces the connection asceticism has with the realm of the mystery. It is true that the struggle introduced by asceticism aims to detach man from self and the world[20], but it should not be seen as introducing a dualism. This detachment does not stand in opposition to what we are detached from, but it is necessary in order to make mysteries efficacious. It is not a struggle against matter, for matter has already been used in the *mysterion* itself; it is a transfiguration of matter, a transcendence of matter into the realm of the ultimate, which has to travel the hard path of denying self and world when they insist upon arresting our participation in the divine reality of the mystery itself. Thus it is not surprising that for the ascetic the whole creation becomes a mystery, and revealed mysteries can manifest all their mystery-power.[21]

Looking therefore toward the struggle of asceticism through the eyes of the *mysterion* we can realize how asceticism and mysticism stand together in the spiritual life. This is what makes St. Cyril so anxious to secure a connection between the mysterious rite and a struggle against evil. The ethical imperative is not absent, but it is entirely baptised in the waters of mysticism. It is only because unity is possible with the divine that purity and virtue are required.

[18] Ibid., PG 33:389.

[19] Ibid., PG 33:381, 384.

[20] I.e., from the human and symbolic realities of the mystery.

[21] One could say that ascetic detachments themselves may be called mysteries, for they are experiences of the divine through the path of the "apophatic" approach to God. For even what we do not understand of God may be a revelation of His Glorious Majesty and as such a deep mystical experience.

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Since the greatest mystery is Christ Himself[22] the Church found in the idea of Herself as the Body of Christ, the center of all mystery-minded mysticism. The expression of St. Paul in Eph. 5 that "this mystery is great," namely the mystical union of Christ with the Church has served as the basis of a Church-centered mysticism. Yet, this mystery of the Church is disclosed through another mystery, and that is the Eucharist. The Eucharist is *the* mystery of the Church. It is a double mystery, or a mystery of the "Whole Christ," the Head and the Body—*the mystery of the Lord and the mystery of the Congregation*.[23]

The offering of the gifts and the miraculous change (μεταβολὴ) of them into the Body and the Blood of Christ through the invocation of the Holy Spirit constitutes the central and most important part of the mystery of the Eucharist. This is the great moment and perhaps the moment of the "*mysterium tremendum*." In fact, the phraseology of the Liturgy itself is full of adjectives corresponding to this idea, and it is notable that after the sanctification of the gifts, they are always called *mysteria* accompanied by some adjective of this kind. Thus they are called "φρικτὰ μυστήρια, or πῦρ," i.e., the fire that burns the unworthy.[24] Is this to be understood in the way that Rudolf Otto describes the phenomenology of the "mysterium tremendum"?

At first it is true that the entire Liturgy cries out to God with trembling and fear. It calls him "φοβερὸν" and just before the Lord's prayer is uttered, God is asked to make us worthy of *daring* to call Him "our Father..."[25] Thus it seems that the element of "absolute unapproachability" which Otto points out[26] is dominant in the worshipping heart. At the same time, the confession of the

[22] See Col. 1:27.

[23] The term is used by Nicholas Cabasilas in his "Commentary" of the Holy Rite. See Florovsky, "Orthodox Contribution," 58.

[24] "Καταξίωσον ἡμᾶς μεταλαβεῖν τῶν ἐπουρανίων σου καὶ φρικτῶν μυστηρίων..." "Ορθοὶ μεταλαβόντες τῶν θείων, ἁγίων, ἀχράντων, ἀθανάτων καὶ ζωοποιῶν φρικτῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ μυστηρίων..." (From the Divine Liturgy of St. John the Chrysostom.)

[25] "Καταξίωσον ἡμᾶς τολμᾶν ἐπικαλεῖσθαι σέ..." from the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.

[26] *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. J.W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 19.

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soul during the Liturgy is very often what the same author would call "I am naught, Thou art all."[27] Yet, the Liturgy does not stop here; and it is of absolute importance that we do not miss this point. The Liturgy interweaves this distance of God with His presence in His Christ. In a clearly historical "*ἀνάμνησις*" after the expression of His absolute "majestas"[28] the man turns to the remembrance of the visitation of Christ and through an unseen, yet deeply felt "despite" he is transmitted from the abysmal distance to the mystery of the presence. Thus he can call upon the Holy Spirit, Whom he believes as indwelling in the Church. The Holy Spirit will then guide him to the great mystery. And there will be no hesitation in his mouth to utter the words which appear to be so contradictory:

"ἐλθὲ εἰς τὸ ἁγιάσαι ἡμᾶς ὁ ἄνω τῷ Πατρὶ συγκαθήμενος καὶ ὧδε ἡμῖν ἀοράτως συνών..."

i.e., Come to sanctify us, Thou who sittest above with the Father, and (yet) who are here invisibly with us.[29]

This is the *mysterion* in its mystical and only meaning. The *mysterion* is *not* the "wholly other" as Otto would say[30] but the reality where the "wholly other" presents himself to us in a form as accessible as the elements of the Eucharist before us. The Liturgy is based upon such a conception of the *mysterion*. It still remains dreadful (φρικτὸν) but not because of distance and inapproachability; it is dreadful, on the contrary, because of frightful approach and real presence in a form so accessible and simple.

Such a conception of the Eucharistic mystery allows the Liturgy to arrive at the second point of its mystical implications.

This point is the Communion of the Mystery to the members of the Church. This is another mystery or rather another side of

[27] Ibid., 21. See the prayer before the "Holy, holy, holy..." in the Liturgy of St. Basil of Caesarea.

[28] The term belongs to Otto again.

[29] Liturgy of St. Chrysostom.

[30] Op. cit., 28: "The truly 'mysterious' object is beyond our apprehension, because in it we come upon something inherently 'wholly other,' whose kind and character are incommensurable with our own..."

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the same mystery, because it remains incomplete without that. The mystery of the Present Lord is meant to be distributed to the members in order to find itself as a *mysterion*. Communion is an inseparable part of the whole mystery. Here again, the worshipping heart stands between fear and joy, for the same tendency lies again in the core of the *mysterion*. "The holy are for the holy" and yet the response spontaneously appears: "One only is holy, one only is Lord, Jesus Christ."[31] But the approach will be done and the result will come: it is the unity with Christ, His dwelling in our hearts, and the transcendence of our bodies to temples of the Holy Spirit.[32]

But it is not only for the individual that the Sacrament of Eucharist has a living, mystic meaning. In fact, there is no such thing as individualistic mysticism in the Orthodox Church. No mystical experience is understood outside of a "social ego" rooted in the mystical participation of the Body of the Church. "Even in the solitude, in the chamber, a Christian prays as a member of the Church."[33] With rare exceptions, the mystical literature of the Eastern Church does not possess such autobiographies of the inner life as those of Saint Angele de Foligno, Henri Suso, or the "History of a Soul" of St. Tereza of Lisieux.[34]

Thus the mystery of the Eucharist has in its very essence a communal character. The line of unity is not only from the soul to the Lord but it goes through all the souls, the members of the Body. Furthermore, the mystery covers and unites even time in a common participation to its divine reality. Past, present, and future are united. Prayers are offered for the dead and by them in an at-

[31] I would like to quote a prayer of Symeon Metaphrastes of the 10th century, which is used as a thanksgiving prayer after Communion: "Thou who hast willingly given Thy flesh for my nourishment, Thou fire that consumest the unworthy, consume me not. O my Creator! Rather penetrate my limbs, my bones, my inmost being, my heart! ... Nail me wholly to fear of Thee! ... O awful mystery, O mercy of God! How can I, *even I*, unclean that I am, receive the Sacred body and blood and *become incorruptible*!" (Canon before and after the Communion, Canto 8). See also Nicholas Arseniev, *Mysticism and the Eastern Church*, Eng. Trans. (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1926), 57 ff.

[32] See St. Basil's Liturgy, prayer before Holy Communion.

[33] Florovsky, "Orthodox Contribution," 54.

[34] Lossky, *Essai*, 18.

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mosphere that ignores the division of time. The Saints are commemorated (very frequently—above all the Virgin Mary, because all of them participate in the great celebration of the *mysterion*. Moreover, the whole cosmos is involved in it. Here the divine mingles with the human, the terrestrial. The praise and sacrifice is offered for the whole world and by the whole world:

"Τὰ σὰ ἐκ τῶν σῶν σοὶ προσφέρομεν κατὰ πάντα καὶ διὰ πάντα..."

this is the center of the Liturgy.

The Old Egyptian Liturgy of St. Mark declares: "Verily heaven and earth are filled with the Glory through the coming of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ."[35] The kingdom is all-embracing for Christ is the "ἀνακεφαλαίωσις" of all and all nature is waiting for its deliverance. Thus angelic power co-celebrate, and nature offers its fruits, the bread, and the wine, to participate in this "cosmic liturgy."[36] Thus not only the individual, not only the whole of mankind but the whole of creation is embraced by the Eucharistic mystery in a kingdom of eternal life.

Thus we arrive at the last characteristic of the Eucharistic mystery. The Liturgy ends its whole process by the declaration of the Resurrection of Christ. This is the underlying power behind all the Greek Orthodox worship. But now, as the Liturgy reaches the end the mystical Joy springs out of the Church which has tasted the fruits of the kingdom. The bridegroom has revealed Himself and offered Himself once again to the Bride. The Bride rejoices. The worshipping soul has touched "the wells of living water," has drunk eagerly of them, and declares its joy. Because of mystical experience the Church *can* now reassure and re-proclaim in joy that Christ *is* risen. And having tasted the mystical presence she declares singing at the end of the Liturgy:

"Ἴδομεν το φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν, ἐλάβομεν Πνεῦμα ἐπουράνιον, εὕρομεν πίστιν ἀληθῆ..."

[35] Frank Ed. Brightman (ed.), *Liturgies, Eastern and Western: Being the Texts, Original or Translated, of the Principal Liturgies of the Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1896), I, 132, 176.

[36] See: Hans von Balthazar, *Kosmische Liturgie. Maximus der Bekenner, Hohe und Krise des greishishen Weltbilds* (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 1941), where is the remarkable analysis of St. Maximus the Confessor's mystical development of the Eucharistic mystery.

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i.e., we saw the true light, we received the heavenly Spirit, we found true faith in worshipping the indivisible Trinity, because He saved us.

The Symbolic and the Real

Liturgical rite aims to prevent the worshipping soul from a pure subjectivity or more "psychologism" in his mysticism. The Liturgy is a constant invitation of the soul to project her subjectivity into the objective pole of the cult. This becomes possible through *symbolism*.

Symbolism is based on a law of correspondence between the spiritual and the material world[37]. St. Maximus the Confessor exhibits this law when he says that: "the entire spiritual (νοητὸς) cosmos seems typified (τυπούμενος) mystically (μυστικῶς), through symbolic things (εἴδεσι) in the entire material (world) (ὅλῳ τῷ αἰσθητῷ), for those who can see."[38] Thus the symbol is taken over from the visible order to signify the realities of the religious world and it is very much used in Judaic-Christian tradition.[39] But above all, symbolism has been taken over by cult and Liturgy. Very early in the history of the Church the feasts of Nativity and Easter appeared bound up with symbolism. Nativity was the celebration of the Sun that is eternally rising out of the New Creation, of whom the prophet Zacharias tells us that "His name is Orient." And the new fire in the Paschal night was a symbol of the column of fire which guided the Jews in the desert.[40]

[37] On a common sharing by the two of the same ground of existence.

[38] *Mystagogia*, PG 91:669. Perhaps it is relevant to state here Aristotle's same view (*De Partibus Animalium*, i, 55): "Εν πᾶσι τοῖς φυσικοῖς ἔνεστί τι θαυμαστόν· καθάπερ Ἡράκλειτος λέγεται εἰπεῖν· εἶναι καὶ ἐνταῦθα θεούς."

[39] Jean Daniélou, "The Problem of Symbolism." *Thought: Fordham University Quarterly* 25, no. 98 (Sept. 1950): 424. The first book of the Bible compares the creative power of God to a great bird wheeling over the waters to rouse life out of them, and the last book, the Revelation of John, describes the new creation by using symbols: there will be no more sun for Christ will be the light and the sea which is the symbol of the kingdom of death and the home of the dragon, will disappear.

[40] "He who follows me does not walk in darkness."

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Similarly, the baptismal rite, since its very simple New Testament form, is nothing but an allusion to the Biblical symbolism of water. Christ was the first to descend into the water of Baptism ("I thirst to be baptised with a baptism") and accordingly, all Christians are plunged into the pool. In the baptismal rite, a whole symbolic system of death and resurrection appears and the water symbolism is now taken from the creation and the deluge to come through the filtering of the Passion of Christ and Baptism.[41] Later on, the baptismal rite is enriched with more symbols, the basic and central, of course, being the descent into the water as a death and resurrection representation. St. Cyril of Jerusalem has left us a symbolic interpretation of the baptismal rite, which is the one that has since been used unchanged by the Eastern Orthodox Church. The baptismal candidate's turn from the west to the east side of the church is a symbolic turn from the "life of darkness" to the "paradise of light."[42] His taking off of his old dress symbolises the undressing of the "old man" with all his sinful past life.[43] The oil of the exorcisms is the symbol that we have been drafted into Christ's cultivated olive tree, according to 2 Romans, 24.[44] In the Baptism itself the descendence into the water is for St. Cyril a symbol of Christ's dark tomb and our own death and resurrection in the new life.[45] In an analogous way, the chrism that follows the mystery of Baptism is our symbolic chrismation by which we become "Christ-s" and "images of the Christ."[46]

In a similar way is the entire process of the Divine Liturgy interpreted by St. Maximus the Confessor. The entrance of the holy *synaxis* represents the first advent of Christ. The bishop's ascendance to his throne—Christ's Ascension. The entrance of the assistants symbolizes the entrance of the Gentiles into the Church. The sacred hymns express the joy that embraces the pure hearts as they are lifted towards God. The invocations of peace—the peace-

[41] Per Ivar Lundberg, *La typologie baptismale dans l'ancienne église* (Lund: A. Lorentz, 1942), 25ff.

[42] *Mystagogical Catechesis* I (PG 33:1073).

[43] *Mystag. Catech*. II (PG 33:1078/80).

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., PG 33:1080/81.

[46] *Mystag. Catech*. III (PG 33:1088/89).

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ful life of contemplation which succeeds the struggles against sin. The reading of the Gospel is the symbol of the last days before the end of the world, when "the Gospel shall be preached to all the world." All that follows after the reading of the Gospel, namely the bishop's descent from his throne, the expulsion of the Catechumens and the penitents, and the closing of the doors symbolize the last judgment: the second coming of Christ, the separation of the righteous from the condemned, the "disparition" of the visible world. Following, the entrance of the sacred gifts represents the revelation of the new world; the kiss of peace—the union of all the souls in God; the confession of faith is the great action of gratitude of the saved ones. The "Sanctus" is the elevation of the souls to the choirs of angels who, in the immobility of the eternal movement around God, praise Him. The Lord's prayer represents our filiation in Christ and the final: "One is holy ... Christ the Saviour," the supreme entrance of the creature into the mystical divine unity through the Communion of Eucharist.[47]

Accordingly, the Eucharist sets before the congregation in symbolic utterances and gestures the whole life of the Lord, from the Bethlehem manger to the Mount of Olives and Calvary including also His Resurrection and Ascension, and anticipating His second and glorious coming.[48]

But what is the relation between the symbols and the reality itself? In other words, what is the nature of the mystical world to which the worshipping soul is called when the symbols are put before her? Do these symbols have objective signification? The answer lies in one of the following two: either the very nature of the realities of the visible world is attached by specific signifying value or they take a signification from a positive and *external* relation that has been set up between themselves and the reality signified by them. In the latter case, symbols, at the core of their own natures, have no capacity for meaning or signification.[49]

[47] *Mystagogia*, Cap. 8–21 (PG 91:688–697); see also: von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, 396–327.

[48] Florovsky, "Orthodox Contribution," 59.

[49] The problem is put forth and discussed by Prof. Paul Tillich in his *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, 239 ff. The distinction between "symbol" and "sign" which is made there is to be noted especially. See also: Daniélou, "The Problem of Symbolism," 425 ff.

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The question seems to have been put forth as early as the times of St. Cyril of Jerusalem since we have in him a definite attitude towards the problem. In fact, reading St. Cyril, we are confronted with the question of what he means by "ἀντίτυπον," "σημεῖον," or "εἰκὼν" and how does he relate them with what he calls "ἀληθινόν." I find the following the most representative quotation which includes all the difficulties that the interpretation of the problem presents. It refers to the symbolic death and resurrection of Baptism and runs as follows:

> "Ὢ ξένου καὶ παραδόξου πράγματος! Οὐκ ἀληθῶς ἀπεθάνομεν, οὐδ' ἀληθῶς ἐτάφημεν, οὐδ' ἀληθῶς σταυρωθέντες ἀνέστημεν· ἀλλ' ἐν εἰκόνι ἡ μίμησις, ἐν ἀληθείᾳ δὲ ἡ σωτηρία. Χριστὸς ὄντως ἐσταυρώθη, καὶ ὄντως ἐτάφη, καὶ ἀληθῶς ἀνέστη· καὶ πάντα ἡμῖν ταῦτα κεχάρισται, ἵνα τῇ μιμήσει τῶν παθημάτων αὐτοῦ κοινωνήσαντες, ἀληθείᾳ τὴν σωτηρίαν κερδήσωμεν. ... Χριστὸς ἐδέξατο ἐπὶ τῶν ἀχράντων αὐτοῦ χειρῶν καὶ ποδῶν ἥλους, καὶ ἤλγησε· καὶ μοι ἀναλγητὶ καὶ ἀπονητί, διὰ τῆς τοῦ ἄλγους κοινωνίας χαρίζεται τὴν σωτηρίαν ..."[50]

In this long quotation two things are to be pointed out. On the one hand, there is a negation of a "true" death and resurrection. "The imitation is in image, the salvation is in truth." On the other hand, there is admitted a participation in the pain of Christ's death and crucifixion (διὰ τῆς τοῦ ἄλγους κοινωνίας), although without feeling pain (ἀπονητὶ καὶ ἀναλγητί). These expressions seem contradictory, yet there are often used, especially for the reality of the Eucharistic elements.[51] I find the key to the solution in the idea, fortunately, expressed in the very same quotation. St. Cyril interpolates this idea between the two contradictory parts; it is the person of Christ and His historical death and Resurrec-

[50] *Catech. Mystag.* II, 5 (PG 33:108). The English translation runs as follows: "O strange and inconceivable thing! We did *not really* die, we were not really buried, ... but our imitation was in a figure, and our salvation in reality. Christ was actually crucified and actually buried ... and all these things. He has freely bestowed upon us, that we sharing His sufferings by imitation, might gain salvation in reality. ... Christ received nails in His undefiled hands ... while on me without pain or toil by the fellowship (κοινωνία) of (in) His suffering He freely bestows salvation." *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. By Pn. Schaff and H. Wace, Vol. VII (New York 1904/1894), 148.

[51] *Mystag. Catech.* IV, 3, 6 (PG 33:1100 and ff).

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tion. Christ's "real" (in the historical sense) death is what allows the symbol to be both "ἀληθινὸν" and "οὐκ ἀληθινόν." Christ's "reality," of course, does not lie only in the historicity of the event but also in its religious truth. *This is precisely what saves liturgical symbolism from paganism and idolatry*. In the opening chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, we find this. "Although they (the pagans) had the knowledge of God, they did not honor him or give thanks to him as God; they became fantastic in their notions and exchanged the glory of the imperishable God for representations of perishable man, of bird and beast and reptile (Rom. 1:21–23)." Paganism and idolatry is not the use of symbols itself. On the contrary the pagans "*had* the knowledge of God," through the visible world; their sin lies in that they degraded the natural symbolism to a level that signifies more biological realities.[52] Liturgical symbolism, like all Biblical symbolism, fights against that and uses a new symbolic dimension that unites the regularity of natural events with the singularity of religious-historical events. So all symbols in liturgical rite have their "reality" rooted in a unity of the natural with the historical.[53] The same God and the same plan of God are seen in unity through nature and single events, like creation, Christ's life, and His second coming. Correspondence between the two is admitted since the "infinite (i.e., God) is being itself and ... everything participates in being-itself."[54] This is the ground and the justification of the "reality" of symbols.

Symbolic, therefore, does not bear any connotation of unreal. As in the classical essays on the "divine names" so in liturgical symbols the "intention and result is to give to God and to all his relations to man more reality and power than a non-symbolic and therefore easily superstitious interpretation could give them. In this sense, symbolic interpretation ... enhances rather than diminishes the reality and power of religious language."[55]

[52] Daniélou, "The Problem of Symbolism," 432.

[53] It is more than obvious that Liturgy admits by that the possibility of natural revelation and does not regard it as contradictory to the revelation of the Christ-event.

[54] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, 239.

[55] Ibid., 241.

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As a consequence of that the *ἀντίτυπον* is elevated to the realm of the *ἀληθινόν*, i.e., of what it represents. It is no longer secular,[56] it is holy. The Eucharistic process in its symbolic presentation is not a representation but a *re-presentation*, i.e., a "making present again" of the remote events.

But all this needs mystical eyes to be seen. It is for those "who can see," as St. Maximus says.[57] It is not to be conceived as a repetition of events, for no repetition of the Last Supper and Calvary is possible. Only as a mystical continuation of the "once and for all offered" sacrifice in the unbroken unity of the one Body of Christ, i.e., His Church, can be realized. The Liturgy explains itself, with regard to this, through its mystical phraseology. Christ is called the one "who offered and is offered, who receives and is distributed."[58] He is also called the one "who is broken and yet not divided, who is eaten and yet never spent (*μηδέποτε δαπανώμενος*)."[59]

Thus the mystical presence of the Holy is made vivid not just psychologically but realistically.[60] This sacramental "realism" is achieved by a synthesis of symbols which is so marvelously kneaded with the structure of the Liturgy.

Mysticism and the Icon

All that we have said about symbolism can also be applied to the present subject. Yet, we devote a special chapter to the icons, for there is much more and particular to say about them than about the other liturgical symbols which, in general, we have examined. Icons have been the object not only of big discussions but also of

[56] The examples Prof. Tillich gives in this respect (ibid.) can entirely fit in the case of the liturgical symbols.

[57] William R. Inge, *Christian Mysticism* (New York 1956), 260–261. "The true meaning of our sacramental system ... can only be understood by those who are in some sympathy with Mysticism ... — that which rests on belief in symbolism."

[58] The prayer of the "Cherubikon" in the Liturgy of St. Chrysostom. The office of the priest in the Liturgy needs again the symbolic interpretation, for he becomes elevated into the realm of the reality he represents as offering Him who offers and is offered.

[59] Before Communion, Ibid.

[60] Mysticism means neither mere feeling, nor irrationality. It embraces the whole of being and as such has to be understood.

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controversies which cost unusual trouble to the Church. The reason cannot be explained by referring to political, economic, and purely secular factors, as it has been done for a long time in the past. A struggle of more than a century could not take place in the Church if there was no theological connotation put upon the subject. In fact, it is now proved by mere historical research that the religious and theological factor was the predominant one in the whole controversy.

As we indicated in the introduction, this controversy over the icons was a part of the mystical line that moved the whole history of dogma as far as the Greek patristic side is concerned. In the fight against the icons, the Fathers saw an enemy of their soteriological concept of deification, which constitutes the mystical idea of the unity between human and divine. It was felt that it hurts the person of Christ Himself, since Christ was for them the organic unity between earthly flesh and divine nature. If an icon of Christ is a theological impossibility and a blaspheming then Christ Himself is denied since He is not but a perfect material man, besides being a perfect God. (Here the decision of Chalcedon stands alive and influential). The meaning of the icon does not lie in its instructive character, although this connotation has many times been given to it.[61] Looking for the mystical implications that its meaning bears, we notice that these do not refer, for the most part, to the relationship that the icon has between itself and the worshipping soul. In the great master of the interpretation of icon, St. John of Damascus, and the Second Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (787) which declared its acceptance, the explanation is given in a merely rational rather than mystical way, that the "προσκύνησις ἐπὶ τὸ πρωτότυπον διαβαίνει." So, it is a relationship between the subject represented in the icon and the worshipping soul itself which is stressed in a way that seems almost to ignore the role that the icon itself plays in this relationship.[62] What

[61] In Gregory of Nyssa imagery is called γραφὴ σιγῶσα; *Oratio laud. San. ac Magn. Mart. Theod.* (PG 46:757D).

[62] An attempt has been made to find Neoplatonic and especially Dionysian influence on a theory of the relationship between the worshipping man and the represented divine

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really and mostly constitutes the mystical meaning of an icon, lies in a timeless and cosmic relationship between the image and the prototype. Here again an Areopagitic influence may be true; just as, by virtue of the hierarchic order of the universe, there is an ascent from the lower and sensual to the higher and intellectual sphere and ultimately to God, so, in turn, God is reflected, according to the law of universal harmony, in the lower order and ultimately even in material objects. It is in their capacity as reflections that such objects may be called "εἰκόνες."[63] But what has really served as a basis of icon interpretation by the Fathers is the idea of man as created in God's image (Gen 1:27). Leontius of Neapolis argues: "The image of God is Man who is made in the image of God, and particularly that man who has received the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. Justly, therefore, I honor and worship the image of God's servants [i.e., the saints]."[64] On this basis we have also the important mystical implication that the work of an artist becomes an *extension of the divine act of creation*.

Another theological basis for a mystical conception of the icon is Christ's Incarnation and historical life. Here the Byzantine religious image is not a mere means of a historical demonstration, but a living and perpetual presence. [The presence of the divine in the icon is not to be considered as sin.[65]] This appears in a vivid and somehow dramatic form in that kind of icons which are called ἀχειροποίητοι—made not by hand, but either by miraculous im-

figure. In Pseudo-Dionysius' interpretation of the physical and the intelligible worlds as superimposed hierarchies one could find the idea that the image may serve the faithful as a channel of communication with the divine. To Dionysius the entire world of senses in all its variety reflects the world of the spirit. Contemplation of the former serves as a means to elevate ourselves toward the latter. He even calls the objects which make up the world of senses as "εἰκόνες." Yet, we should not forget that he does not elaborate his theory in the realm of art. *De Eccles. Hier*, I, 2 (PG 3:373AB) and *De Coel. Hier*. I, 3 (PG 3:121CD).

[63] Plotinus defends the images of the gods on this basis (*Enn*. IV, 3, 11).

[64] PG 93:1604CD. In St. Theodore of Studium (*Antirrheticus* III, 2, 5 [PG 99:420A]) we find this important theory: "the fact that man was made according to the image and likeness of God shows that in the making of an icon its form of idea [εἶδος] is something divine."

[65] See St. Theodore the Studite, *Antirrheticus* I, 12 (PG 99:344).

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pression of the saintly face or body on it, or by a divine hand in a miraculous way. In these icons a direct and intimate relationship between the prototype and the image is drastically expressed. Christ's Incarnation becomes dramatically represented and its miracle is embodied in the icon. In the same way a man-made icon can become a sacred and perpetual vehicle of the Incarnation. It can be an "indwelling" of divine presence or an "overshadowing" of it.[66]

But an icon has to be "truthful," and it is so in so far as truth can be seen at all on this earth. Thus of Christ who is the truth there can be images because his divinity has assumed visible form.[67] In the same way can the saints and all visible earthly realities be the subject of an icon so far as it bears connotation of Christian truth.

An icon, finally, is a work of art. Yet, the religious and spiritual—in a sense the ascetic—is so present in it that it tends to sacrifice the form for the sake of the meaning. Not everybody can paint an icon. Its mystical connotation of divine presence requires an analogous response on the part of the painter. The painter is involved in the icon and the more he has entered into the mysteries of the divine through prayer and contemplation, the better he can reach his purpose.

Thus the icon constitutes not simply a form but a mystical reality-an expression of divine reality in material form. In it: the represented figure, the material, used and the painter are involved in a mystical relationship with the divine.

[66] For a historical development, see: Ernst Kitzinger, "The Cult of the Images before Iconoclasm," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 8 (1950): 144 ff.

[67] St. John of Damascus, *De Imaginibus*, Oratio III (PG 99:1361). Characteristically enough, on the basis of this idea, the representation of Christ as a lamb has been forbidden in the Church since the council of Trullo (691).

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Conclusions

In the words of the introduction, we have seen how deeply and organically theological thought has been bound up with liturgical practice in the Greek Orthodox tradition and that the reason for all this is the strong mystical character that unites both. Thus, worship has been deeply baptized in theological thought and theology finds its most adequate expression in the form of the Liturgy.

Since the whole liturgical practice in the Orthodox Church is Eucharistic-centered we went on to examine the mystical implications in the Eucharist itself. In examining the right meaning of the term "mysterion" which has been so much distorted we found ourselves confronted with a special type of mysticism peculiar to the Eucharistic Liturgy, which one could call mystery-minded mysticism. Here the entire mystical experience appears in a confrontation with the divine presence in a sacramental ritual which both reveals and offers for participation the divine reality to man. In a further analysis of the mystical meaning of a "mysterion" we noticed that: a) this mysticism is deeply and exclusively Christocentric. Its manifestations appear in a clean connection with Christ as the only ground of mysterious relation and divine presence; b) this Christocentricity appears actually in the form of church-centricity which is created by the mystical idea of the Church as the Body of Christ; c) the entire mystery-mystical experience is not deprived of an ethical element which however is so deeply baptized in the waters of mystical union that it always appears as a mystical imperative; in connection with this asceticism is also to be interpreted and understood in a mystery-minded perspective. In the same way Liturgy itself, by indication of the name, is a concrete "action," yet so deeply baptized in the mystical world; d) the entire liturgical process is a transmission of the soul between fear and joy, a realization of God's omnipotence which however finds a solution in the confession of His presence in Christ through the Church; thus the Liturgy ends with the ancient Resurrection joy and with the gift of "μυστικὴ ἀγαλλίασις";

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e) The union with Christ that Eucharist implies is stressed, yet not in an individualistic sense as a relationship between the soul and Christ, but in a dimension that involves the entire body of the Church and furthermore the entire cosmos.

In order to avoid mere "psychologism," liturgical mysticism adopted to a great extent the symbolic presentation. Thus, the Liturgy becomes a re-presentation of the divine not in an impressionistic way of mere representation but in a real symbolic way, which unites the regularity of natural events with the singularity of the events of the Bible. The *antitypon* of all symbols in the Liturgy bears the reality of the *prototypon* in a way, however, that only by mystical eyes can be seen.

In a special chapter we dealt with the mystical implications of the icons. Their mystical basis lies in that they express divine realities in material form by virtue of the idea of man as the image of God and of Christ's Incarnation, which have offered the ground of mystical union with the divine. In an icon divine, cosmic and artistic elements are united. An icon thus becomes a little "liturgy" itself and the painter involvement is more mystical and existential than in the rest of art.

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