

**CONVENTION OF THE SPIRITUALLY AND CULTURALLY RELATED
EASTERN CHRISTIAN PEOPLES**

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**EPIPHANIES
ETERNITY IN TIME AND THE TELEOLOGY OF CREATION**

1. The Man of the East is in tune with the Great Mother, Nature. Like a child, he loves her caresses and fears, but accepts, her chastisements. Inwardly he feels that it is all to the best. She works in him, he is part of her. His fate is involved in her's. He works and he rests, he revels and he mourns, he wars and he feasts, secure in her embrace, content with her gifts, satisfied with her general course, even if displeased and pained by particular dispensations of her lawfulness. The cosmic "sympathy" limits for Man the bottomless pit of anguish: no calamity is so heavy as cannot be counterbalanced by the next eruption of natural joy; no ugliness and imperfection so downtrodding as will not be amply offset by the exhilarating effect of majestic beauty; psychic perturbations however violent, are calmed by the mere contemplation of harmonious sensible serenity. Nature is, positively, the affluent, prodigal dispenser of felicities and achievements, the unenvious treasurer of perfections. She is not an alien object of exploitation and violation, the irrelevant at best, or rather corrupt field for the futile exercise of an unsubstantial subject's inessential freedom of will. Man adores in the East the Great Mother, even as the natural Womb of God's Incarnation; he violates her in the West. But we cannot be saved apart from the Earth that we come from, and the flesh that we are: Man and Nature are eternally coimplicated.

2. Yet the natural is intrinsically limited and conditioned. In space and time, in essence, power and operation, in causal passivity and activity, it enters into a multifarious network of relationships, which are so many constraints on its existence, but which are at the same time the direct result of the determinateness of being, necessary for natural existence. Before the speculative step from the limitation of the natural being (its createdness) to the uncreated absolute being, or Godhead, which is presupposed by that nexus of co-dependencies as the independent principle upon which all else is ultimately dependent, there worked its way in the Man of the East the craving for the absolute by the side of (and indeed called for by) the contentedness at the natural. For identifying oneself with the natural and reaching towards its deepest roots of power or its sublimest flowers of perfection, one discovers in the end a piercing sense of dissatisfaction, the more intense as it comes from the enjoyment of real excellencies: the void felt is then nothing but the acute feeling of limitation as such, however magnificent it may be or potent. Hence the ardent impatient desire for the absolute takes the form of renunciation of the natural, not out of repulsion at its ugliness or aversion to its corruption, but because precisely of enthrallment at its resplendent beauty as a final bond of nature hindering absolutization by its unavoidable limitedness. This is the genesis of Oriental Ascetics. The full enjoyment of the natural or the adoration of the Mother-Nature on the one hand; and the mighty drive towards the unconditional or the adoration of the Father-God, on the other; constitute jointly the basis of that Antinomianism which so often the West imputes on the East, as for example when they see a formidable combination of gross indulgence and mystic devoutness in the Russian character, or of hypocritic deviousness and sublime speculation in the Greek.

3. The adorable motherhood of Nature is the first distinctive experience of the East. Fervent craving and irresistible aspiration for deification or absolutization of being is the second. Both

are supplemented and confirmed, while their antinomy is sublated, by Nature's awesome Sacredness. Nature is thoroughly imbued by divinity. Divinity pervades the World through and through. Epiphany is the manifestation of God in Nature, the immediate presence of divinity in the World. Divinity appears in the ordinary marvel of the World's structure and function, in the sheer wonder of the fact of existence, of the contents of being, of the gradations and hierarchies of reality, of the that-is and of the what-is. The very existence of natural being, as well as the determinate content in which its essence consists, are founded upon an uncreated divine act which spermatically contains and controls the entire development of the thing in question. That divine act sustains the thing in existence, determines its being-content (the what-it-is), and governs providentially all its "history". In this sense the natural World may be considered as itself epiphany, a manifestation of divinity - but only as the result of God's creative activity; somehow the activity remains external and transcendent as regards its product although it constitutes the latter's very existence.

There are stronger senses of Epiphanies. Under two heads specifically is the divine presence in Nature most conspicuous: in effects of superlative perfection; and in workings of irresistible power. Nature was created perfect, in the way, of course, of limited and dependent being. But having fallen, she was debilitated; her self-inflicted impotency explains the suffering of the created being in its endeavour to attain the perfection for which it was meant and constituted; everything proceeds in the midst of unbearable toil. What is really only too natural (the perfection of created substance) became rare and burdensome; while the abnormal (frustration and failure) was established as ordinary and usual. Thus achieved perfection, as well as the generative power for anything great, require the divine succour for their realization, especially when the end result is overwhelming in might or inimitable in excellence: there is heavy need of supervening intervention by Godhead, in order for Nature to reach her promised, in-written and natural end, her own essential entelechy.

Natural perfection, however, as intrinsically multifariously limited and dependent, craves for absolutization, i.e. divinization. But as there is an unbridgeable gap separating created from uncreated being, dependent from absolute existence, finite from Infinite essence; deification cannot regard substance, but only activity and even this conditionally. The natural activity of the created being yields itself totally passively to the overmastering grasp of the divine activity, and in this self-effacement it so to speak forgets its createdness and loses itself into the glory of the uncreated Ocean surrounding it. With an act of unconditional submission, of absolute abandon, by the complete quieting (Hesychasm) of all movements stemming from its created nature, the created being encounters directly the uncreated creative activity that constitutes it and lies at its existential core. In a similar way, natural existence can communicate immediately with the divine foundation of any preeminence of might or perfection with which it can effectively identify itself. The natural entity gains divine filiation not in essence, nor in activity strictly speaking (for nothing created can become uncreated) but in the Grace of God and by the Grace of God. It enters into communion with the triunic life by a mystic act of extortion, by obligating and compelling God himself to appear through its own absolute yielding passivity, through the total sacrificial self-offering and self-efacement, imitating from the opposite direction the supreme divine condescension.

4. God is thus manifested in the World according to three grades of revealing. First in creation, in the fact of existence and the content of being, in the kind of created nature (substance, life, intelligence) and its subdivisions, in everything that is and everything that becomes. Second, in

the enormity or splendour of the cosmic processes, by the way of extreme power or the way of unsurpassable perfection. Third, in the beatific illumination of self-negating nature, the gift of active filiation as a reward of unreserved abandonment. All Epiphanies so far classified consist in divine activities. They are all the result of Grace and constitute the bearers of them as participants in the realm of Grace, which is coextensive with the World of Creation. The sheer existence of anything is the result of an act of Grace, the outcome of that uncreated divine activity which brings it into being. Cosmic Potency and Entelechy are also results of acts of Grace, but also reflectors of divine Glory and Grace. Beatific vision is, too, result of an act of Grace and simultaneously divine irradiation and Grace in itself. The Grace of God is His active Glory, and this is manifested by degrees everywhere right from the beginning. The Creation was neither an error, nor a field of experimentation, nor an irrelevancy to be dispensed with in the final scheme of things, nor a neutral framework in which God and Devil expect the resolutions of the human free Will in order to devise accordingly the appropriate Final Act in the Drama of Existence. These are occidental naiveties. On the contrary: Divine Providence effectuates ineluctably the determinations of divine Wisdom in realizing the Plan of God: Predetermination covers much more than the mechanical saving grace for the individual will and goes much deeper than the preelection in Western Systems. What has been created was meant preeternally for its own natural entelechy, as well as for the superperfection of deification. Creation is essentially (though not universally) incorporated into Salvation. Grace, besides, supervenes at each stage to succour what has been imparted by a preceding act of Grace, and thus to bring the recipient into the next stage of achievement. It is like the Aristotelian finality which acts causally to raise things to itself: it is both the presupposition of the amelioration as well as its end and purpose. This provides the solution in the Eastern Spirit of the Pelagian controversies. Grace assists what has been imprinted already indelibly in creation and has not been deleted by the Fall: namely the constitutive twin tendency of created being towards first its own perfection as a limited existence, and secondly the appropriate deification as an image and assimilation of absolute existence, a direct communion with absolute activity by a totally yielding conformation to it, effected by it.

The manifestation of God in created being, His self-revealing in the that and the what of natural existence, is clear in the state of affairs obtaining before the Fall; after it, nature is emasculated and dramatically impoverished: its general character is no more one of glorious beauty, but of suffering and failure, of toil and frustration. The divine stamp appears perhaps no more evident and all-absorbing. We then are left with the exceptional two other grades of Theophany, with divine manifestations of Strength and Worth, or with such of Renunciation and mystic Illumination. With Epiphanies of nature-affirmation and Epiphanies of nature-negation.

5. Divine activity directed to created being proceeds from Self-Goodness and is thus inherently providential love and grace for what is essentially non-divine. Such creature-orientated divine activity realizes a coherent Plan, which starts with the creation of natural being, passes through its natural perfection (spontaneous at the beginning, then impeded and frustrated in the sequel as a result of the aboriginal Delinquency), and is fulfilled by the adoptive incorporation of created reality in the field of activity of the uncreated Existence. Since nothing is superfluous in this scheme, nothing will be left out in the final arrangement not in the sense of a final, total Restitution of the entire Creation, but as the saving integration of all gradation in created existence from material substance to mental activity. The essence of created being will remain intact, and its (permissible) deification will crown in the lightnings of the divine Glory its natural

perfection, which again, and as a result of that august superexcellence, will reach the very extremities of its essential limits. Saved Nature will glow with the fire of Divinity, without being abolished.

6. It follows that the ascetic way of mystic Illumination is a partial aspect of the final solution. On the opposite pole stands, a partial also aspect, the way of natural perfection spiritually gifted. In between the natural vacuum replete with divine inundation which characterizes Mysticism on the one hand, and the natural pleroma rising to deliverance from the shackles of the Fall on the other; stands the way of power in a World of weakness, a sign that Nature, though grievously sick, is yet the Work of God, a work wielding potencies fearful, devastating, unopposable: this is the road of Mystery.

For cosmic Power tends to concentrate in regions of opposing tension, to focus on antinomial points. Heat, the most drastic material potency, softens and renders malleable, invigorates, causes things to ripen, matures and digests and assimilates, but also burns and consumes and conflagrates. Impure liquids may putrefy or give birth to life. Death and Life appear as two aspects of the same reality. Production and Destruction is the same process seen from two different perspectives: every new composition brings into existence a new entity, while destroying the preexisting ones, which serve now as elements or materials. And, more importantly, it is the same Law and the same Power that dispenses formations and dissolutions alike. The corn-fruit, dead when reaped, is the seed of a new life: the great Symbol in the Eleusinian Mysteries. In fact Power consists in the ability to effect contrasted transitions: to combine opposing determinations, to control contradictions, to resemble that Heraclitean harmony of the opposites, the *παλιντονος ἄρμονιῇ ὁκωσπερ τόξου καὶ λύρης*. The more marked the contrariety, the more strong the Power in question. Power is pre-eminently to be found where opposite poles coexist, their tensional contrariety being sublated into efficacious dynamism. Here is another aspect of that Eastern Antinomianism, the West is so violently against.

7. But that Antinomianism is the thriving soil of Mystery. The general form of Mystery is precisely coincidentia oppositorum. Now the greatest existing real gap is that between uncreated and created being. And thus the enormous Mystery simpliciter, and the mightier reality in the World, is the Incarnation of God, this unique (a kind of its own) Epiphany of divinity as God-Man: it is therefore for deep reasons that the crux of Eastern Dogmatics consisted in the Christological question; its investigation should be pursued further as a matter of foremost urgency.

The arch-Mystery is the natural Suffering of Divinity, the extreme Humiliation of Infinite Power, the burden and toil and anguish of created being as endured by the Absolute. The horrendous ways of Power are emphasised, and the chthonic (to speak with ancient Greek religious terminology) infrastructure of the olympian flights of excellence, the soiled roots that bear the immaculate bloom of flowering in this World of frustrated aspirations, are laid bare.

8. But the Mystery of Incarnation and its culmination, the Crucifixion, as a unique event in time, would be either intellectually (and psychically i.e. relatively and dispositionally) or mystically (i.e. as a means only of illumination, to be discarded in principle together with all else natural once ascetic deification has set in) present to all non-contemporaries of it, if it could not be mysterically repeated as an always present reality. This is a second application of the Mystic

Principle: the reality of the symbol of a reality is identical with the reality whose symbol the symbol is. The tension here lies between the material vehicle and the fact conveyed: the rite empowers the vehicle with the full reality of the fact. The materiality of the symbolic rite as against the immense spirituality of the reality symbolized and presented constitutes the intense antinomy of the mystery, and thus its heightened efficaciousness. The rite belongs intrinsically to the divine manifestations by way of Power and thus, though material, is more effective than intellectual conceptions, non-symbolic imitations or representations, or mystical intuitions, in achieving the full working of the thing symbolized.

Nonetheless the mystic rite is embedded in a suitable environment of varied perfection: architectural setting, pictorial illustration, incantation and chanting, hymns, prayers, sequence of events, divine Word and pastoral instruction, vestments and lightning and behavioural modes - all converge in enhancing the concentration of power included in the rite by the accumulated perfection of its performance and of the total context in which it takes place. Thus the two modes of nature-affirmative divine presense before indicated are combined harmoniously, in so far as human preparations extend, to provide the appropriate natural manifestation of the descending divine energy, which as Glory and Grace permeates the material and activates it as divine Revelation. The Grand Duke Vladimir was persuaded to be baptized, and with him the entire Russian nation, to Orthodoxy on aesthetic reasons: his messengers told him that the performance of the Byzantine Divine Liturgy in St. Sophia was so exquisitely beautiful, so extraordinarily solemn and awe-inspiring, so transcendently sublime, that they could not tell whether they were in heaven or in earth.

9. The Man of the East will not accept the western dilemma between Nature and God. The World is certainly not only the best possible one, but necessarily perfect (in the sphere of course of limited existence), since it is the product of overflowing Self-Goodness, the realization of the providential predeterminations of Divine Wisdom. Goodness as cause creates an effect necessarily καλὸν λίαν. Now, of course, this piece of created excellence is spoiled after the Fall, not as a result of inimical influence on the part of some independently acting Principle of Evil; nor in consequence of a vile willing on the part of the creature; but because of the immeasurable, deep craving of Nature for the absolute Good, the rash impetus to identify herself with her divine Cause, Goodness itself, the God. The resulting alienation of created being from its Creator is part of the divine Plan which culminates in the raising of the natural perfection of Creation to supernatural glorification. The connection between Cause and Effect can never be severed totally; it is relaxed as a consequence of the Transgression and the Fall, but even this proves to be the indispensable preparatory step for its eventual highest intensification.

For the Man of the East, God unmanifest is irrelevant; and Nature unpermeated by divinity is reckoned a phantastic impossibility. As to the former, it is to be emphasised that God manifest means God naturalized, means divine activity which appears and is revealed as natural, and in a unique case, it means Incarnation, i.e. the manifestation of the very hypostatic existence of the God-Logos in humanity: God manifest does not mean God whose transcendence is disclosed by (miraculous) signs which indicate, not intrinsically (that is in essence or activity), His merely external relationship to the sign in question. As to the latter and converse point, creation is not a momentary act which constitutes the World and then leaves it on its own; this could happen only if matter preexisted before the creation of the World, in which case it might conceivably retain the form imposed on it by God even after the withdrawal of the divine formative activity. But in

creatio ex nihilo this is sheer impossibility: the effect exists so long as its cause acts creatively in constituting it in all its development, and vanishes into nothing once it is withdrawn. Otherwise, the effect would exist independently, and thus be absolute being and cause – a blatant contradiction.

Not only is divine presence (as activity) implicated necessarily in the sheer existence of the World and all things created; furthermore, created being bears in a certain sense the image of God: for it consists in the evolution in time and space of the λόγος of its essence which is contained eternally and implicitly in Divine Logos. Man's resemblance to Godhead is of a superior kind, although it also involves the image-carrying character of the universal nature as well. Man is an image of Logos-incarnate, and his deification repeats Incarnation from the other end, so to speak. He represents divine naturalization, God-manifest-in-the-World, by constituting in Salvation the reality of natural deification, Nature-present-in-divinity.

10. The Man of the East experiences God and Nature as necessarily coimplicated. Nature is pregnant with divinity. Even his ancient overnaturalism was deeply religious: it expressed the feeling of divine omnipresence operating through and in nature: it divinized nature as much as it naturalized divinity and in an indistinct way prefigured the legitimate forms of their intercommunion revealed in Orthodoxy.

The permanent and continual unconfused interfusion of God and World in the natural manifestations of the divine; and the consequent urgent and impatient quest for absolutization now; (for the ardent craving for divinization of natural being thrives upon the splendour of unremittent self-revelation of the divine; and, furthermore, the natural Epiphany of the divine is numerically identical with the divinization of the natural in which the Divine is manifested as such); both crucial features of the Eastern World-view are detrimental to the significance of Time. For every Epiphany is an infusion of Eternity in Time; every deification is an integration of Time into Eternity. In both aspects of the same phenomenon, the moment of Time becomes the wholeness of Eternity: Time stops: the End has been achieved: History has no further Meaning.

11. This repeated cancellation of the Flux of Time can be observed in each kind of divine manifestation and corresponding deification of the natural. Firstly, Creation is an act not in time; for Time is created simultaneously with the World and with the cyclic regularities (chiefly the movements of the celestial bodies), that constitute Time. Nature exists both in time (since the existence of the World is inconceivable without the existence of time, and vice versa); but also in eternity (since the creative act constituting her, together with time, in existence, is an eternal uncreated divine activity). This existence of World-Time in Eternity, accounts for the idea of the Infinity of Time: it represents a rough attempt to combine the two contradictory predicates in one imaginary conception. But it is a not particularly happy one: for one thing, it entails the actuality of infinity in the sphere of created being, at least in the concrete consequence of the time lapsed from the assumed infinite past till now.

A similar antinomy as the one applying to the Creation of the World as a Whole holds true with regard to every individual thing. Its existence is in time, and temporally limited. But the specific divine act that constitutes that existence as well as the essence of the substance in question involves, as uncreated, essential eternity: for something uncreated cannot have in itself temporal limits. The apparent temporality of a specific divine act is the projection on the created level of limited being of its relatedness to other such acts and to the general creative decrees which realize in succession the entire Logos of Cosmos as existing implicitly, spermatically,

atemporally and unifiedly in God-Logos under the form of the preeternal divine providential Plan of Creation. The relations of coherence, of whole-part, of implication, of dependence, of interconnection, are spun out, as it were, as temporal succession; for the limited being cannot hold together the members of those relationships of articulation all at once.

12. Secondly, the eminences of perfection and the enormities of power in the World halt the forward movement of Time and suppress its momentum. Once the entelechy of its essence has been achieved for any thing, its end and purpose has been realized, its development has no more cosmic significance. Time now may lapse, but it is no more the internal measure of an organic process towards fulfillment, the purposeful unfolding and gradual realization of a predetermined accomplishment. What remains is the mathematical law of instant-succession, an abstract framework of change, itself reflecting an actual cyclic regularity. In an entelechy of being (as in an Aristotelian activity) there is no prior and posterior part (since activity is complete at any moment), hence no priority and posteriority, therefore no real flow of time. The End (τέλος) of being, is the Finish of its meaningful development, and thus the End of (real, internal) Time.

With the tremendous outbursts of power, we are not at the end but at the beginning of things, at the potent focuses where eternity also works. A breakthrough is made, a novel course is chartered that gets away from present apparently unsurmountable difficulties, a bright promise is lighted, impassures are overcome, paralysing coagulations broken, and the spirit liberated for a new flight. Mighty explosions purify the putrefying dregs of cosmic fermentation, the concentrated concretions from natural operations of composition and processes of decomposition, and instigate a new productive effervescence. Natural might, however destructive, is salubrious. Even in powerful visitations deemed negative all round like Death, one feels the pledge of rejuvenation conveyed, indistinct and referenceless (when left alone in its purely natural setting), yet insistent and throbbing. The shudder at momentous events is sacred: one experiences the pangs of labour at a childbirth. We understand why mystic rites, these depositories of immense power, are forceful effectuators of regeneration.

13. Things are conceived in violent agitation and fulfilled in serene perfection. Real time starts in acts of power and ends in entelechies of completion: it is organic time. Everytime that a thunderbolt rends the fabric of the World, time begins anew; everytime that the serene light of beauty pacifies the cosmic life, time terminates. At both ends eternity lurks. In place of the temporal linearity of Western time, extending from past to future (indeterminately or infinitely) in a single continuous line of successive presents, Eastern time is a repetition of similar patterns of varying duration and generality, partly overlapping, moving parallel so that at each moment a mixture of eternity and time is interwoven.

Not only do beginnings and cessations of time occur again and again: even the direction of time is incessantly reversed. For after the perfection of a being's essence in its entelechy, what follows is, in the existing state of things, deterioration. In such decline and degeneration, we do not so much proceed to the (worse) future, as we are removed from the (better) past: it is as if the past (achieved perfection) moves away from us towards the past, which constitutes an experienced reversal of time. The Hesiodic sequence of degradation in World-Epochs presupposes such experience of backward temporal movement; which is emphatically illustrated by the Homeric attitude to time: the future is behind us, as the unseen part of Time's eternal simultaneity.

14. The more we ascend the ladder of generality in Nature, and the vaster regions we consider as (partial) wholes in it, the more conspicuous it is that cosmic regularities, and thus Natural Time, are fundamentally cyclic. Movements of stars, succession of seasons, Moon-periods, Day and Night, the fruit of the dying corn as seed for a new plant, perpetuation of species over the extinction of the individual - the World moves in cycles closed at bottom even when they appear open at the surface.

15. In the third degree of Epiphany (and corresponding deification), that of mystical illumination by way of ascetic nature-negation, mortification and absolute passivity (πάσχομεν, οὐ ποιοῦμεν τὴν θέωσιν), the abolition of Time is glaring. And so it is in the condition of Salvation, where nature, perfect in its own entelechy, is glorified being immersed in the triunic lightnings of uncreated life.

16. Varied time for contemporary events; beginnings and ends of time in time; suspension of time and breakthrough of eternity in time; reversed time; cyclic time: all point forcibly to a marked devaluation of Time in Eastern Experience on the one hand; while on the other they grant it a very definite, positive (teleological) function.

Time (and Space) are the forms of existence of created, i.e. dependent and limited, being. What exists unified in uncreated Logos, cannot but occupy duration and place when substantiated as created being, that is, it must exist in segregated parts occurring one after the other and lying side by side. The absolute unification of the divine prototype is relaxed, yet enough tension prevails to keep what is spatially extended and temporally successive as one thing in space and time: the development of the spermatic logos - idea requires variation and opposition, which cannot co-exist on the level of created being. So the thing is, so to speak, broadened, and the divine unification substituted by the cohesion of spatial and temporal parts constituting created identity. What is implicitly differentiated in the unified eternal logos becomes explicitly distinct and quasi-separate, although still grasped by a cohesive principle as in the integration of parts in a whole, - parts like the members of our body or the divided phases of our temporal duration. The perfect state of that extended identity of finite being in space and time represents the brighter image of the archetypal idea of the thing in question, of its spermatic reason. Time is basically the form of achievement of finite, natural perfection. It exists so that particular things and created being may (by unfolding what is implicitly involved in the unification of their spermatic reason, by evolving the intrinsic potencies and capabilities of their essence) move towards and accomplish their allotted perfection. Thus Time is inherently teleological. Epiphanies and deifications mark its flow, all along, and dissolve it again and again into eternity. This positive, yet simultaneously restrictive, experience of Time is inconsistent with radical Eschatology. Τέλος is end and Perfection; Ἐσχατον is mere Final Limit. There is no need for the Conclusion of Time in order for God's presence to be directly operative and felt. Eternity exists all along, and pierces Time repeatedly. Time is not something alien and adverse, which has to be completely eradicated before divine activity can become really and fully effective, just as divinization does not require cancellation of createdness. Such notions are the usually unavowed progeny of a stern zoroastrian conception of Nature. On the contrary: Time, as God's work, is an instrument of the divine Plan just as everything else; its role is positive. It is essentially the field of amelioration, and only derivatively a scene of corruption and decay.

17. Natural substance is fulfilled when its development reaches the acme and apex of its being,

the perfect entelechy of its essence. The end of being is then achieved, the purpose and meaning of its particular existence as a natural entity realized, and time is thereby resolved into eternity even for a moment - an antinomy that we can now readily comprehend.

18. In the World-History, the culmination of human development was attained in the Greek Culture, this inimitable flower of the East. But the consummation of natural perfection yearned for the supernatural crowning, the grace of deification. In the impotent state of fallen Nature that transcending glorification could not happen without the unique Event which marks Time with Eternity in an infinitely strong and decisive way. The Incarnation opens the Gates of Eternity to Time, since it is an Epiphany of the very hypostatic Substance of divinity, and not merely of its uncreated activity. Time, which has for all purposes been stopped on the Cosmic Scale in the ancient Greek achievement, starts anew with the mightiest Mystery of Existence. What comes after Incarnation is in a certain sense, it is true, an anti-climax, and, after all, its necessary consequence. Deification is now a legitimate aspiration (being properly restricted to glory and activity and adoptive filiation). Salvation from the impotent suffering of fallen nature is now a prerogative of created existence, something to which it is entitled. But there remains to be done something immensely important for Man's Destiny: to bring together concretely natural perfection and supernatural glorification. For deification is deification of nature, not against nature but with her, not an abolition of Nature (but only of her unnatural impoverishment), not a transubstantiation into divinity (the arch-blasphemy of created existence), but an immersion, through supervening Grace, of consummate, full, naturalness, *salva naturalitate*, into the uncreated splendour of God's own life. The essence of created being remains unchanged even in the midst of the triunic lightnings. The majesty of natural perfection is not in vain: it is in accordance with divine Providence and is preserved and incorporated into the Next Aion.

19. The task to be pursued in the post-Incarnation Era of timeless-time was set by God-Man in His First Sojourn here, and laid under the auspices of the Paraclete. Eastern Theology faced it squarely, and it must tackle it again if it is to remain a living force guided by the Holy Spirit. This explains its ontological and speculative tendency, the emphasis on contemplative knowledge and dogmatic truth, as against Western Voluntarism, Subjectivism and Moralism.

The solution to the fundamental problem of our Era cannot be total and complete within this Era. For Incarnation does not cancel the condition of Fall, only it annihilates the necessity of its bondage. In fact the Uncreated Being condescended to the extreme Suffering of Nature, tribulation, agony, pain and death on the Cross; absolute Lordship accepted the reality of sickness and impotence burdening the creature; and divine Glory stooped to extreme humiliation. The Labyrinth of Fallen Nature is not destroyed: it is shown what it is, namely alienation from, forgetfulness of, God. Once the Labyrinth of fallen creation comprehends who has come to it, it loses its phantasmal power, just as a spectral sight concocted by Magic dissolving upon the utterance of the holy name. Knowledge of, and communion with, God is the negation of God-alienation. God-incarnate is the Road and the Truth and the Life away from the Labyrinth.

20. The Mystery of Faith, and its contemplative intellectual articulation in dogmatic Theology, and archetypal consolidation in the Creed, (for to have faith is primarily to believe the Creed in the East, not to be graced with an inarticulate Will-attitude or disposition as in the West), has been and is the key to post-Incarnation developments: it revolves round the unique Epiphany of

God-Man, which explains all other theophanies. The speculative-dogmatic knowledge of God (which necessarily involves knowledge of God-in-Nature), is strengthened and secured by the mysteric knowledge of Him in the sacramental communion through the rite of the ultimate Sacrifice; and is also complemented by the mystic knowledge of Him in deifying hesychastic illuminations. But as the state of Fall continues, knowledge of God can now be only partial and conditioned by the impotence, toil and dissipation characterising the obtaining situation of created being. The Incarnation rendered possible the guided and directed movement towards re-familiarization with God on the level of natural perfection and, additionally, towards adoptive filiation. (Natural perfection was possible also before Incarnation, but without correlation and integration in knowledge of God). This movement, which defines the Time of the present Era, will End with the Second Advent of God-Incarnate as the Lord of Glory, i.e. with transfigured natural manifestation (just as His first Coming was steeped in post-Fall impotence and extreme humiliation). The Labyrinth of created Existence will then disappear as the divine Epiphany will be absolutely revealing, that is without dispensative and "oeconomical" "concealments" and "hiddenesses". Those on the road to knowledge will be absolutized at the station that they have reached, they will have their nature raised to the pre-Fall state of natural normality, they will be granted the grace of global essential perfection, and the grace of deification. Those wandering away from the Road will be delivered to eternal Perdition, confirmed i.e. perennially in their own God-alienation. Thus the restitution of original nature will be realized with superadded divine glorification for the saved ones. Meanwhile, the time of our era is simultaneously reversed (after the Classical Perfection), static (because of Incarnation and the mysteric reality of the Eucharist-sacrifice) and forward teleological (in virtue of the Second Advent and the Coming Age).

21. In the experience of the East the Will is no primary factor in human destiny. Will is the appetitive principle in a living being endowed with knowledge and consciousness in so far as it is related determinately to such endowments. Wrong action or disposition may result from either weakness of the will (as when a desire is followed against the will); or error of the will (as when the will chooses what appears good without really being). To will the bad qua bad (i.e. genuinely evil will) is a monstrous impossibility in our tradition. In both possible cases the real cause is defective knowledge: 1) an error of the will is a misnomer; it clearly is an error of judgement of the understanding faculty; 2) weakness of the will entails indistinct and feeble representation of the better alternative, and is thus basically a default of the comprehensive ability; for it is not possible that the superior option will not necessarily exercise superior attraction if it is only adequately conceived by the understanding faculty. The worse is chosen because the better is apprehended confusedly, and is thereby prevented from exerting the full weight of its loftier and stronger influence.

Will is thus conscious and knowledgeable appetite. It errs through errors of representation. Its freedom of choice is the possibility of self-determination in cases of doubt, of indecisive knowledge; it consists therefore in controlled arbitrariness. Something which is next of kin to that underground sense of rebellion against the Good and True and Beautiful that can be detected in western exaggerated preoccupation with, and morbid emphasis on freedom of Will, and express at bottom the Subject's revolt against the (objective) decrees of God and God's Natural World, of Nature and Nature's God.

22. The Man of the East is intimately at home, he identifies himself with Nature (including his

own). He strongly feels the attraction of natural beauty, he seeks satisfaction in Nature's processes, he is immersed in her radiant charm. But in the midst of his grossest enjoyment of her secrets in the present, he hearkens for the silent voice of the Eternal. He, again, wholeheartedly craves for the absolute contentment of divine Contemplation and Union with the Infinite. But his ardent flight to the Heaven, is not untainted by the nostalgic yearning for the sensible magnificences on the Earth. His ruptures, divine and natural, now piously, now dangerously, commingle and blend, often resulting in works of superlative splendour, repeating in architecture, oratory, painting, psalmody, or theology the pattern of ancient sublimities, where again the driving experience was one of interfusion between the spiritual and the material, the chthonic and the olympian. The God-Man, in weakness and in majesty, in Passion and Glory, in Death and resurrection, is the archetype of our eastern modality of existence, of our spirituality: all else is merely psychic, if it is not crudely material.