

Regnum Dei, Regnum Caelorum

by

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Source: *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Vol. 12, No. 1 & 2. (Winter-Spring, 1978). © World Wisdom, Inc.
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This phrase, the Kingdom of Heaven, which the Lord so frequently uses, I know not if anyone has found...in the books of the Old Testament. For it belongs rightly to the revelation of the New Testament, and it was reserved to be uttered by His mouth Whom the Old Testament foreshadowed would reign as King over His servants. This end, therefore, to which the commandments are to be related, was concealed in the Old Testament; although even then there were those who, living according to it, became saints [and] looked to the revelation to come. (St. Augustine, *Contra Faustum* XIX, 31).

THE theme of the Kingdom of Heaven or Kingdom of God (the two are strictly equivalent, as we shall see below) is central in Christ's teaching and that of His apostles. Indeed, the Gospel¹ is precisely the good news of the Kingdom. Yet Jesus does not define for the benefit of His hearers what He wants to convey, but assumes rather that in some measure His meaning will be perceived by those who "have ears to hear". This has demonstrably been the case from the beginning of the Christian dispensation down to the most recent times at least; for it is not recorded that anyone asked Him what He meant by Kingdom of God or Kingdom of the Heavens. Today, however, within a wasted and wasting Christianity one might forgive (*salvo meliori iudicio*) the erstwhile Christian if he sees in the term Kingdom of God chiefly a residual and now merely sociological platitude that neither compels one's interest nor engages one's concern. For the notion of the Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven, along with so many other Christian concepts and perhaps more than others, have been debased and emptied of any transcendent significance. Nevertheless, the Gospel bids us *querite primum regnum Dei...*"seek first the Kingdom of God and His justice" (Mt. vi, 32); and to those who do so is given the promise that "all else will be given to you besides"—a commandment and a promise which are universal and valid until the consummation of the world. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away" (Mt. xxiv, 35). If the Kingdom of Heaven seems an empty phrase, the paucity is with us.

¹ Greek, *evangelion*, good news, i.e., of salvation in Jesus Christ; the English gospel, notably, has retained this sense through many filtrations down through the centuries.

In the words of Meister Eckhart, “as Christ bids us to seek the Kingdom of God, it is our duty to know what this Kingdom is”. It would be presumptuous and stupid, however, to seek facile definitions where Jesus resorted to parables. What we propose in this study is to set forth something of what may be rightly understood by the great complex of meanings and associations synthesized in the idea of the Kingdom of God. We shall draw on the Old Testament, in which the first traces of the concept are to be found; especially on the New Testament; on the Church Fathers, especially the earlier ones: on some of the great medieval doctors, especially Eckhart; on several contemporary writers, among whom Frithjof Schuon in particular; and on the standard commentaries.²

As stated above, the phrase “Kingdom of God” is synonymous with “Kingdom of Heaven”. In the latter the effect of the figure of speech is to emphasize Heaven and implicitly God, rather than Kingdom. In the New Testament the phrase Kingdom of Heaven, or Kingdom of the Heavens, is used almost exclusively by St. Matthew who was writing among Jews for Jewish Christians; and who, perhaps with their scruples in mind, perhaps from his own sense of propriety, used an oblique Jewish expression to avoid direct utterance of the Divine Name even in an already veiled form. Other equivalent terms are: especially, “eternal life”, as used by St. John; “salvation” and “gospel” as used by the early Christians; “justification” as used by St. Paul; and finally, “Providence”, when this is used as a divine name signifying the active rule of God over the universe and men. But our attention will focus primarily on the terms Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Heaven.

The importance of the idea of the Kingdom of God in the New Testament, particularly in the synoptic Gospels, cannot be over-emphasized. Its roots, though not the term itself, go back to the very beginnings of the Old Testament, to the creation narrative in Genesis (i, 26ff). God the Creator is Lord and Ruler over all; He delegates to man dominion over all creatures on earth (an idea common to the three forms of monotheism). Man’s disobedience and fall do not remove him from the divine governance and providence. The one God gives assurances of His mercy even as He punishes. “Then the Lord God said to the serpent: Be-cause you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among beasts of the field; on your belly shall you crawl, dust shall

² The critical apparatus available in the scripture commentaries and reference works of more recent date may often provide precious ancillary information for understanding the inspired texts, particularly in the philological and archeological fields. On the other hand, studies undertaken from a predominantly or even exclusively academic and secular point of view, as is not infrequently the case, have the effect of levelling the sacred texts and emptying them of transcendent significance. “For the Scriptures crave to be read in the spirit in which they were made; and in the same spirit they are to be understood”. (William of St. Thierry, Ep. x, 31). If this is more than one can regularly achieve, it may be possible nevertheless to “search the scriptures” with the mind open to the larger sense. Much the same may be said of many if not of most of the recent translations of the Bible. There is unquestionably a rôle for scholarship, and it is a rôle that increases with the passage of time; but it is a truism that the word of God cannot be subordinated to secular disciplines without vitiating it.

you eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed; he shall crush your head and you shall lie in wait for his heel” (Gn. iii, 14, 15). This is the Protoevangelion which the Fathers and later exegetes in the Church, until quite recently, have with St. Matthew (i, 23) associated with Is. vii, 14: “...the Lord Himself will give you this sign: the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall call him Emmanuel” (God-with-us), understanding the latter as a prophecy of Christ and the fruitful virginity of Mary. More-over, “no one has gone up into Heaven except he who came down from Heaven, the Son of Man who is in Heaven. And even as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, it thus behooves the Son of Man to be lifted up, that everyone that believes on him may not perish but may have eternal life. For God sent his son into the world not that he might judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him. He that believes on him is not judged; but he that believes not, already has been judged because he has not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the judgement: the light has come into the world and men have loved the darkness rather than the light, because their works were evil” (Jn. iii, 13-19). This struggle ordained by God is in our very nature; there are two in man, two potential kingdoms, one of which must die; cf the apocryphal II Baruch liv, 19: “...each of us has been the Adam of his own soul”.

The prescript of Heaven continues without let or hindrance, but nevertheless the estrangement between Yahweh³ and man grows until finally Yahweh regrets having made man and even animals, and withdrawing His creative dispensation abandons the world to watery chaos. Noah, however, who “walked with God” (Gn. vi, 9ff) found favour because of his virtue; and he and his posterity re-peopled the earth after the flood. Yahweh, as El Shaddai⁴ (God of the Mountain), enters into a covenant with Abraham; or rather imposes a covenant, but with it promises lands, protection, assistance, and blessings to Abraham and his descendants. Yet these promises were merely outward signs of the real import of the Covenant—Yahweh’s promise to Abraham: “I am thy exceeding great reward” (Gn. xv, 1).⁵ This is the beginning of the theology of promise, and a step toward the concept if not the language of the Kingdom of God. Abraham was faithful, even unto willingness to sacrifice that which he held most dear, Isaac, his only son

³ Some have objected to this rendering of the Divine Name as being a human construct. We opt for it here because it seems as close as one can get to the Tetragrammaton which, itself, has the strongest possible ontological significance (cf [as for compare] the etymology of Ex.iii, 14). There is evidence that this modern reconstructed form, Yahweh, is not so far removed from the original as has been thought; moreover, this rendering is said to have been used by some of the Fathers, among whom Clement of Alexandria; in any case, it is generally recognized that the form Jehovah is untenable. It is understood that the form Yahweh has no ritual validity.

⁴ Possibly an allusion to Jerusalem and to Mount Sion, centre of Jerusalem, and *axis mundi*.

⁵ Rendered thus in the *King James Version* and similarly in the English Douay version. This text, however, is said to be hopelessly corrupt. If so, *felix erratum*, for these early translators clearly captured the interior sense of the Covenant.

and the vehicle of the promises. One cannot but think of the exemplar of Abraham's attitude in the divine paternity, and also of the Virgin Mary, in this context. Mary believed in the promises made to her by the Angel, in spite of her intended virginity. The Fathers, of course, saw in the figure of Isaac a prefiguration of the sacrifice of Christ.

Yahweh chooses Jacob, "the Supplanter", already set aside in his mother's womb. Jacob, blessed not only with greater cunning but also with much greater vision than Esau, accepts the Covenant. Later, he wrestles with God the Word (Gn. xxxii, 23ff) at Penuel⁶ and prevails, but by his faith rather than by his strength. His name is changed to Israel, "he contends against God"; or, according to Philo: "he who sees God". The name is used to designate the sons of Jacob, and later the tribal confederation of Israel. Still later, it denotes the monarchical nation ruled by the house of David; and then, the northern portion of the divided kingdom. But all along, "Israel" is more than an exclusively political term.

Yahweh sends Moses⁷ to the captive Hebrews and brings Israel out of Egypt, extending His Covenant anew to the sons of Jacob. At Sinai, Yahweh promises that if Israel keeps the Covenant, He will make of the Israelites a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex. xix, 5ff). This is the beginning of the formal notion of the Kingdom of God. Yahweh also promises another prophet to Israel (Dt. xviii, 15 and 18) who would be of the stature of Moses.

Yahweh leads Israel into the Promised Land, already a figure of a more universal promise and of those whom He will lead into His Kingdom, an insight which down through the centuries of Jewish history is to be refined through much suffering and misplaced hope. Israel, from near the earliest period of her self-awareness, is conscious of being the chosen people who stand in a special relationship to God Who reigns over them. Yahweh is king to the Israelites (cf the Song of Moses, Dt. xxxiii, 5ff); and Gideon, the Judge, returning victorious from battle, rejects royalty for himself and his house, "for it is Yahweh who will reign over you" (Jg. viii, 23). Abimilek's usurpation of royalty was abortive, and the fable of Yotam (Jg. ix, 7ff) asserts the uselessness of a human king. But Yahweh nevertheless has decreed a king for Israel's future (Dt. xvii, 14 and 15), and as His people move from a nomadic to a sedentary life, He gives them institutions of king-ship which reflect the divine and archetypal sovereignty. If in earlier days "...there was no king in Israel, and every man did as he pleased" (Jg. xvii, 6), this was because Yahweh was effectively King and the institution of judgeship was adequate to the needs of the times.

The concept of Yahweh as King was not weakened, but rather intensified, by the establishment of concrete royalty in Israel. Under Samuel (I Sm. v, 9 and 10) political rule was reformed and passed to the first king of Israel, Saul. What had been deemed a sin in the past, i.e., the rejection of the divinely given institution of judgeship, was transformed into an insight and a

⁶ *Penuel* = "Face of El", *El* being an early Semitic form of a divine name.

⁷ There are interesting parallels between Noah and Moses; the same Hebrew word *tebah* is used to designate both the ark and the papyrus basket, and is used only in these two instances in the Pentateuch.

virtue—hope placed in a divinely chosen king, eventually a Messianic king. A king, yes, but in theory more aptly a viceroy who would hold his sceptre from Yahweh, the true and unique King.

Note that one element in the implicit idea of the Kingdom of God as this was found among the Jews, is that of “Israel”—Israel not as a political entity but as a theological concept; the people of God chosen by Him, with their particular institutions of royalty and temple worship. After the demise of the northern kingdom of Israel, the name was taken by the southern kingdom which continued to bear the theological character of Israel even though politically it remained Judah (whence the appellation “Jew”). The concept of “Israel” foreshadows that of the Kingdom of God.

In the notion of the Kingdom of God implicit in the Old Testament, the supreme factor is always Yahweh. “Yahweh reigns forever and ever” (Ex. xv, 8); “thine, Lord, is the Kingdom” (Chr. xxix, 11); “Yahweh reigns, the ruler of nations” (Ps. xxii, 28); “for terrible is Yahweh, the Most High, great King over all the earth” (Ps. xlvi, 3); “for Yahweh is a great God, a greater King than all the other gods” (Ps. xcv, 3). The good news announced to Jerusalem is, “your God reigns” (Is. lii, 7); and “Yahweh, the King of Israel, is in your midst” (Zp. iii, 15). Yahweh is always the real king, the earthly monarch or even the messianic king being rather Yahweh’s viceroy. Israel, the nation constituted by the chosen people, is midmost in the world; and Jerusalem, replacing the Ark of the Covenant, is the centre of Israel, the point at which Yahweh enters into contact with His people. Men will come from all directions to adore. “Then Yahweh will be king over all the earth; in that day Yahweh will be unique and his name will be unique” (Zc. xiv, 9; cf I Chr. vi, 32ff). “The moon will be confused, the sun will be ashamed, for Yahweh Sabaoth is King on the mountain of Zion and at Jerusalem, and the glory shines forth among the ancients” (Is. xxiv, 23; cf Ap. xxi, 23 and xxii, 3). A high degree of universalism is already implicit in Hebrew beliefs from the time of the monarchy and the prophets.

Yet, even when their affairs prospered outwardly, the germs of messianism remained innate in Hebrew beliefs; e.g., that Yahweh intervened in history in the interest of the people when He had chosen, and their conviction of the sacral character of their royal institutions. And there were other continuing reminders of a less narrow role than mere self-sufficiency (cf Pss. lxviii, lxxxvii, xcvi); indeed, a universal significance was already included in Yahweh’s promise to Abraham (Gn. iii, 13ff). Their king was the anointed one” (Hb *mashiah*, Aramaic *m’shiha*, Gk *messias*), and David and the Davidic line were conceived as central to the relation between Yahweh and the people of Israel. When their affairs went badly, as they so often did, a shift of emphasis was easily made to a messianism that telescoped and confused different levels of reality and different time frames. The precariousness of Israel and Judah as states weakened, and their demise as independent political entities dealt heavy blows to, the earthly messianic hopes of the Hebrews. But the conviction of being the uniquely chosen people, of being the substance of a kingdom greater than any in this world, disposed the Israelites to expect a divinely sent king. These beliefs and expectations, the vicissitudes of the Jews notwithstanding, were too great to die; for they reflected, however imperfectly, a divine descent yet to be eventuated. “He shall be

great and shall be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God shall give him the throne of David his father, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for-ever, and his kingdom shall have no end” (Lk. i, 32 & 33). These words of the angel Gabriel to Mary repeated the thought of several Old Testament passages, and were part of the content of current Hebrew beliefs.⁸ Other developments in the history of Israel—defeats, captivity, the diaspora, synagogue worship, contacts between Hebrew and Hellene, the struggles of the Maccabees—affected the Hebrews’ understanding of their own vocation sometimes by broadening their concepts or at other times by narrowing and politicizing them. But with very few exceptions, none of the Jewish sects or parties had a conception of the Kingdom of God adequate to the implications of the Old Testament, and even less to those of the New.

Yet, the idea of the Kingdom of God is implicit in the Old Testament. If it be objected that this is reading too much of Christian perspective into pre-Christian Judaism, one might answer simply that it is inherent in the Christian perspective to do precisely this. “Do not think that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill” (Mt. v, 17). Moreover, the Aramaic phrase *malkuth Yahweh* does appear in the Old Testament, in I Chr. xxiii, 5: *...elegit Salomonem, filium meum, ut sederet in throno regni Domini super Israel*, where *malkuth* means reign, realm, dominion. And in Tobias xiii, 1, we have: “Blessed be God who lives forever, for his kingdom endures for all ages”. The word *malkuth* or kingdom occurs frequently—His kingdom, My kingdom—both in the Hebrew canon and in extra-canonical literature. In the latter, e.g., the equivalent of Kingdom of God is used in the Targum on Is. xl, 9: instead of “behold your God”, the glossator wrote “the Kingdom (*malkuth*) of your God has become manifest”. And the Kaddish prayer asks for the hallowing of the Name of God, that He may “establish His Kingdom”. The daily recitation of the Shema, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one God...” (Dt. vi, 4, 5; cf Mk. xii, 28) was considered as “taking on oneself the yoke of the Kingdom of God”. Finally, a late canonical text (Wisdom x, 9, 10); cf Gn. xxviii, 10-17) uses the actual expression: “But wisdom delivered from tribulation those who served her. When the just man fled from his brother’s anger, she guided him in straight paths, showed him the Kingdom of God, and gave him knowledge of holy things”. Apart from offering a remarkable clue to the nature of the Kingdom, this passage immediately suggests the New Testament passage (Jn. i, 43-51) in which Jesus, contrasting Nathaniel with the guileful Jacob, says: “I tell you most solemnly, you will see the heavens open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man”. For a continuity between the Old and the New Testaments undoubtedly exists, though not on the more obvious level. Jesus used much of the language and many of the figures of speech current in the Judaism of His time, charging them heavily with His own intended meaning but without excluding their positive prior content. “Christ revealed what Moses veiled”. But there is discontinuity, too, between the Old and the New, between the current popular conceptions and His own. Between them, indeed, there was an aspect of irreconcilability

⁸ We see in these words of the angel to Mary not a mere literary device of the Evangelist, but an example of thinking (and speaking) with the tradition which extends to angelic pronouncements.

in the mind of Jesus Himself, as e.g. in the parables of the new patch on the old garment and that of the wineskins (Mt. ix, 16, 17). And Origen (in *De principiis x*) alluding to the perspective of the old dispensation, wrote that “such are the views of those who understand the divine scriptures in a kind of Jewish sense, drawing from them nothing worthy of the divine promises...according to the measure of things in this life, in all similar matters do they desire the fulfillment of all the things looked for in the divine promises, i.e., *that what now is should exist again*” (emphasis added). This criticism has lost none of its validity, and certainly not as applied exclusively to the ancient Jews; but rather it is applicable to the limitations inherent in an excessively or exclusively exoteric perspective. All the limitations which characterized the outlook of the Jews at the time of Christ were to reappear in that of later Christians. But be that as it may, an expectation of salvation and blessing through the house of David had become an ineradicable element in the Hebrew heritage, at least from the time of the Babylonian captivity—a son of David who would be the “Lord’s anointed” and who would gather together his people. Immediately after the Resurrection and before Pentecost, Jesus’ disciples asked: “Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?” (Acts i, 3). After centuries of hope, many among the Jewish people lived in expectation of a restored kingdom, an expectation that implied a socio-political form, the Davidic kingdom restored by the Messiah. Jesus, in His public ministry, confronted not only the incomprehension and the hostility of the Jewish traditional authorities in their major schools, but also the incomprehension if not the hostility of most of His contemporaries. Part of the mystery of the Kingdom of God lies here.

II

The English word “kingdom”, in practice if not by definition, is somewhat ambiguous, suggesting notions of spatial extension; or perhaps to the more modern outlook, a rather quaint polity. Not so with the Aramaic *malkuth* and the Greek *basileia* which renders the former in the phrase, Kingdom of Heaven. *Malkuth* clearly means kingship, rule, sovereignty; and the Aramaic word and behind it the Hebrew *malkut* imply an active divine presence to which the English word *kingdom* is by no means adequate. That Yahweh is absolutely King and that the universe is absolutely His creation are fundamental concepts of the Hebrew tradition and equally of the Christian which, in this respect, scarcely differs from its parent. Clearly then, the rule of God, the living and active⁹ law of Christ, is one element in the meaning of the Kingdom of God; a rule which, *mutatis mutandis*, is always and everywhere the more profound law of human nature.¹⁰ Further, by Kingdom of God we also understand “those states to which the just accede after the direction of their spiritual development is fixed at the time of the dissolution of the body”. And

⁹ *Living*, as applied to God, refers to eternal and absolute life.

¹⁰ At least for those chosen by Christ (You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you . . . Jn. xv, 16) for whom He is the New and Eternal Law.

in the course of this study we propose to show, *Deo volente*, that King and Kingdom are in principle identical.

In the language of a beautiful and eloquent Jewish prayer, one “takes on oneself the yoke of the *malkuth* of heaven”. So it must be with the followers of Christ; for the Kingdom of God has come, or rather has been revealed, for our weal or our woe. And if we are bidden to seek first this Kingdom, it is necessary that in some sense we know what we are to seek, that we know in what this Kingdom consists. When some scribes looking on at one of Jesus’ exorcisms accuse Him of being in league with Beelzebub, the prince of demons, Jesus replies with a question revealing their malice and directed at the motives of their own exorcisms, and continues: “but if I by the finger of God¹¹ drive out devils, then be sure that the Kingdom of God has come upon you” (cf Lk. xi, 14-16). In addition, Jesus states the impossibility of living with existential contradictions; and further, indifference is no more of an option than enmity, “for he who is not with Me is against Me, and he who gathers not with Me scatters”. This life is the focus of a deadly serious warfare between the powers of light and the powers of darkness, and the field of battle is primarily within ourselves, even as is the field in which the great treasure is hid. Our own souls and our own times, in the late twentieth century of the Christian reckoning, are similar in certain respects to the intertestamentary period and to the advent of Christ and the origins of Christianity, e.g., the sense that received conventions have run their course, a widespread decadence, the pullulation of false prophets, and a compensatory baring of spiritual mysteries. End is like beginning; issues are sharpened, choices made more acute; and the Kingdom of Heaven and Kingdom of God metaphors, which passed out of common use with apostolic times, regain a timely appositeness because of their messianic, eschatological, and metaphysical implications with which they have not been openly invested in the intervening Christian centuries —though in principle these significations have always been present as the terms and the ideas are scriptural.

The key of our destiny lies with ourselves; to refuse it is nonetheless to decide one’s fate. *Verumtamen quarite primum regnum Dei, et justiciam ejus; et haec omnia adjicientur vobis. Nolite timere pusillus grex, quia complacuit Patri vestro dare vobis regnum* (Lk. xii, 31, 32). Without excluding subordinate meanings, this *regnum* and this *omnia* are, as we shall see, literally infinite.

Before proceeding, a few words on the Church as the Kingdom of God, an identification often advanced on south scriptural and traditional grounds; but also advanced from time to time from motives that would seem not to bear too close scrutiny. The interpretation has been offered that the Church in her earthly existence is to be identified with the Kingdom of God, this group or that naturally claiming special if not exclusive distinction. There is certainly basis for some measure of identification of Kingdom and Church, even the Church in this world. Jesus used the

¹¹ St. Matthew (xii, 28) has by the “Spirit of God”, from whence by combination the symbolism of the finger (*digitus paternae dextrae*) for the Holy Spirit (cf Ps. viii, 4).

word *qâhâl* (Gk = *ekklesia*) side by side with the phrase Kingdom of Heaven, indicating thus a social organization at the commencement in this world of the Kingdom. The parables of the darnel and of the fishing net (Mt. xiii, 24ff & 47ff) confirm this from other points of view; similarly, the parable of the marriage feast (Mt. xxii, 1-14; Lk. xiv, 15-24). St. Augustine considered the Catholic Church in this world to be the visible image of the Kingdom of God. To Peter are given the keys of the Kingdom, and here it is almost certain that Kingdom means Church. Yet, there can be no reasonable doubt, to borrow the words of one wise man; that “the Abyssinians, too belong to Christ”. Origen (AD 185-c254) in his *Commentary on Matthew* (xii, 10) writes that “if we too have said like Peter, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God”, not as if flesh and blood had revealed it unto us, but by light from the Father in heaven having shone in our heart, we become a Peter, and to us there might be said by the Word, *Tu es Petrus...*”¹² For a rock (ie., a Peter) is every disciple of Christ of Whom those drank who drank of the Spiritual Rock which followed them.¹³ And upon every such rock is built every word of the Church, and the polity in accordance with it; for in each of the perfect who have the combination of words and deeds and thoughts which fill up the blessedness, is the Church built by God”.

It is not with the wish to deny any of the rightful prerogatives of the Petrine office, itself divinely founded,¹⁴ that we point out some of these neglected but intrinsic implications of the Gospel. Origen goes on to ask in what consists the gift of the keys (*clavis regni caelorum*) to Peter and to every Peter (for if we rightfully call ourselves Christian, we may *a fortiori* bear the name of Peter, the greater term including the lesser). Origen relates the gift of the keys to the promise, *et portae inferi non praevalent adversus eam*. *The clavis regni caelorum* imply gates, and the gates are the gates of godliness, the keys being the virtues. “And he [i.e., the Christian] enters in as a temperate man, through an open gate—the gate of temperance... and so with the rest of the virtues... for every virtue of knowledge certain mysteries of wisdom corresponding to the species of the virtue are opened up to him who has lived according to the virtue...he is already in the Kingdom of Heaven who lives according to the virtues, so that according to this the saying, ‘Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand’, is to be referred not to the time but to deeds and dispositions; for Christ Who is the perfection of virtue, has come, and speaks, and on account of this the Kingdom of God is within His disciples and not here or there”. Similarly, Clement of Alexandria (*Exhortation to the heathen* i): “For ‘I am the door...’ (Jn. x, 9) which we

¹² *et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam, et portae inferi non praevalent adversus eam. Et tibi dabo clavis regni caelorum. Et quodcumque ligaveris super terram erit ligatum et in caelis; et quodcumque solveris super terram, erit solutum in caelis* (Mt. xvi, 18 & 19).

¹³ i.e., the Israelites in their wanderings before reaching the Promised Land; cf Num. xx, 3-11 and In. vii, 38.

¹⁴ Cf Jn. xxi, 15-17 and 20ff, where Peter is solemnly charged to “feed My sheep”, but where his authority is expressly limited vis-a-vis John, whose prerogatives are not defined but are clearly imprescriptible. John, of course, is taken as the representative of esoterism.

who desire to understand God must discover, that He may throw heaven's gates wide open to us. For the gates of the Word being intellectual are opened by the key of faith".

Speaking of the episcopate, Origen similarly relates the gift of the keys and their use to the virtues. In this sense, then, among others, the visible Church partakes of a shared identity with the Kingdom of Heaven. St. Irenaeus of Lyon (AD 120-202) in *Adversus haereses* v, 21, states the inconsequence of the "blasphemous and impudent sophist" as compared with even the private Christian, i.e., as against him whose utterance bears something of the authority inherent in the tradition. He counsels his readers to flee to the Church which "has been planted as a garden (*paradisus*) in this world", and warning against the pretensions of the gnostical heretics, he concludes that "into this paradise [i.e., the Church] the Lord has introduced those who obey His call, 'summing up in Himself all things which are in heaven and which are on earth' " (cf Eph. i, 10). The visible Church does share a certain identity with the Kingdom of God, at least as a kind of outer limit. But the Kingdom of God is a much vaster and more profound conception than that of the Church as an institution in this world, even an institution with roots above. "There will be sobbing and gnashing of teeth when you will see Abraham and Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God, and you yourselves chased outside" (Lk. xiii, 28)—words not addressed exclusively to the Jews. "But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in" (Mt. xxiii, 13). "Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered" (Lk. xi, 52). Note the equivalence of Kingdom and *gnosis*, rendered all the more striking by the progressive exteriorization of Christian doctrinal understanding and Christian institutions ever since the so-called Renaissance. And what is one to say of the possibility of the Church, or a great portion of it, becoming so far exteriorized as to be reduced to a frightful caricature of herself? Certainly there is evidence enough and more to make Catholic Christians, especially, acutely anxious as regards the future of their Church. Whatever the future may hold, however, the full significance of the divine promise remains: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away" (Mk. xiii, 31). And out of the present debacle, it may be easier than before—at least in certain important respects—to understand, to discern the Way back to our Source, to penetrate into the Kingdom.

In their innermost nature, both Church and Kingdom are beyond time and space; and ultimately ecclesiology, Christology, and Kingdom merge. We cannot here discuss the doctrine of the "mystical body", but this idea, too, with its ecclesiological implications of the Christian's identification with the resurrected body of Christ, is closely related to the idea of the Kingdom of God.

Finally, it must be abundantly obvious that the Kingdom is no utopia; not some absurd "democracy of the Kingdom", as it has in fact been called; not a state of affairs to be ushered in by men, however necessary effort unquestionably is in certain directions; and not a restored and perfected Davidic kingdom, that last desperate, misplaced hope of the Jews. It should be obvious,

too, that no more than the ancient Jews do Christians have any sanction for drawing from the Scriptures conceptions unworthy of the divine promises, “desiring according to the measure of things in this life that what now is should exist again” (Origen, *ibid.*). Nor have Christians a sanction, any more than the Jews of the New Testament, to think of themselves as God’s uniquely chosen people in spite of all countervailing evidence.

“Then Pilate again entered the praetorium; he called Jesus and said: ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ Jesus replied: ‘Do you say this of yourself or have others said this of me?’ Pilate responded: ‘Am I a Jew? Your own people and the chief priests have delivered you to me. What have you done?’ Jesus replied: ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom was of this world, my men would have fought in order that I should not be delivered to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from here’. Pilate said to him: ‘Then you are a king?’ Jesus replied: ‘Thou saigest it, I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, that I may bear witness to the truth. Everyone that is of the truth hears my voice’ “(Jn. xviii, 33-37). This passage contains a few apparent difficulties, but it is rich in nuances and in meaning for understanding the doctrine of the Kingdom of God. The *Vulgate* reads: *Tu dicis quia rex sum ego. Ego in hoc natus sum, et ad hoc veni in mundum, ut testimonium perhibeam veritati...*, in which reading Jesus would seem to disclaim any mundane royal or messianic role for Himself. This is true enough, but the emphasis lies elsewhere, for kingship is implied wherever there is question of a kingdom. Even reading the *Vulgate* as it stands, *Ego in hoc natus sum...* can very legitimately be understood as referring to a kingship of truth; indeed, any other reading would constitute *a non sequitur*. It is, in any case, redundant to argue that Jesus refused an affirmative answer to Pilate’s insistent questioning from concern that He might be misunderstood as claiming earthly office. Such suspicions are already laid to rest by Jesus’ statement that “My kingdom is not of this world”. Further, Jesus implicitly denied such claims by His rejection of that common political expedient—violence—on the part of His disciples. In fact the whole context of the Gospels is patently against any such reading. Moreover, the Greek texts that have come down to us favour the first reading above, in which Jesus affirms His kingship: *O ukoun basileus ei su? Apekrithe o lesous, Su legeis oti basileus eimi ego*; “You have said it, I a [a] king”. The question is important, because immediately after this, Jesus asserts in the strongest possible terms that His royal sovereignty and His kingdom have to do with truth. “For this was I born, and for this have I come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Whoever is of the truth hears my voice”. He gave no scope in any of His responses for suspicions of seditious intent. Pilate understood as much and, though convinced of His innocence in political matters, he was quite unable to follow Jesus when He identified Himself with Truth. “For this was I born, and for this have I come into the world, to bear witness to the truth”. This witness, this martyrdom, is not only the denial of any claim to earthly royalty, but it is also the condition of the manifestation of Jesus Christ’s supreme sovereignty. *Amen, Amen, dico vobis, nisi granum frumenti cadens in terram, mortuum fuerit, ipsum solum manet...* (Jn. xii, 24). “Unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground should die, it remains alone”. Only through the abasement and sacrifice of the human

vehicle of the revelatory and redemptive Logos, the man Christ Jesus, could the Christian revelation be accomplished, the tradition be established, and the way opened to the Kingdom.

*Vexilla Regis proderunt
Fidget crucis mysterium
Qua vita mortem pertulit
Et morte vitam protulit.*¹⁵

It becomes easier, perhaps, to accept if not fully to understand that the Kingdom of God is no conventional thing. And when we hear that the least in the Kingdom of God is greater than the greatest of the Old Testament prophets—an assertion of the ultimately esoteric character of Kingdom doctrine—we may perceive something of the supreme character of this Kingdom. “I say unto you, there is none greater among those born among women than John the Baptist; yet the least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he” (Lk. vii, 28)—an assertion also of the esoteric character of original Christianity. John who with joy leapt in his mother’s womb at the presence of the *Theotokos*, and who as a child and adolescent was alone in the desert until the time of his manifestation to Israel (Lk. i, 80); this John was the Forerunner of the Messiah. He was a prophet, and more than a prophet (Lk. vii, 26); he was the first to proclaim the Kingdom of God. According to an idea that apparently had some currency in the early Church, John was the incarnation of an angel: “behold, I send my messenger before thy face”—*ecce mitte angelum meum ante fadem tuam...* (Lk. i, 2), and likewise the Greek *ton aggelon mou*. That this is not solely a play on words is apparent from Origen who speculated that the Incarnation of the Word brought in its wake angelic incarnations as well. Forerunner, baptizer, prophet, apostle, angelic messenger, witness, martyr, voice of the Word, lamp of the Light—if the least in the Kingdom of God is greater than John, then how incomparably great that Kingdom! And how utterly inadequate those notions of the Kingdom formed “after the measure of things in this life”. And equally how insufficient our conventional notions of the levels of concentration and virtue necessary to gain access to the Kingdom.

Where, then, is this Kingdom now? And when will this Kingdom come, for which Christians daily petition the Father? Christ replies to us as to the Pharisees: *Non venit regnum Dei cum observatione; neque dicent: ecce hic, aut ecce illic. Ecce enim regnum Dei intra vos est* (Lk. xvii, 21). The modern practice of rendering the Greek *entos hymon* in *ē basileia tou theou entos hymon estin* as “among you” is an instance of the exterior and derivative assuming the ascendancy over the interior and principial, of linguistics taking precedence over sacred science. The Greek *entos hymon* undoubtedly carries the several senses of “among you”, “in your midst”, “within you” as well as the sense of “within your grasp” as Tertullian and Cyprian understood it (and with which Athanasius must have agreed). In any case, the several divergences—which,

¹⁵ The standards of the King appear/The mystery of the Cross shines out in glory/The Cross on which Life suffered death/And by death restored us to Life. —Hymn for Sunday Vespers in Passiontide.

reduced to their proper dimensions, are more apparent than real—can be traced to the apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas*, to Ireneus, Hippolytus, Origen, Athanasius, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Jerome,¹⁶ Cassian, and Bede, who among a host of others have understood the primary sense as “within you”; and to Ephraim the Syrian, Cyril of Alexandria, and Theophylact for “in your midst”. Only with certain modern exegetes, who have so far lost the sense of the Scriptures, have we come to the grossly attenuated notion that “among you” refers primarily to a social or even physical phenomenon, objecting that in the context of Lk. xvii, 21 the words *entos hymon* cannot mean “within you”. But as men, with the common human vocation, Pharisees—including the Pharisee in ourselves—are called to interiorization. The Kingdom of God, then, is in our midst as in John i, 26 and 27, where the two senses of “in your midst” and “within you” are obvious, though for the most part we are aware of neither. It is “within our grasp”, as in Mt. vii, 7-12, Lk. xi, 9-13, and Lk. xii, 31. Why is the Kingdom unknown if it is within us? Because we have fled our Centre, because we have fallen, because we are beguiled and alienated, because we are beholden to all manner of creatures, because, of the astonishingly narrow focus of our awareness, because we have forgotten who and what we are. The Kingdom is an interior virtuality to be realized in the most inward parts within us, as any virtue or knowledge worthy of consideration are interior. “But nothing else can be within you”, writes John Cassian, “but knowledge or ignorance of truth, and delight either in vice or virtue, through which we prepare a kingdom for the devil or for Christ in our heart. For just as the Kingdom of God is within you, so are a man’s foes those of his own household” (cf. Mt. x, 36). *In interiore homine habitat veritas*; it could not conceivably be otherwise. The statement in Lk. xvii, 20, 21, that the Kingdom of God is not empirically discerned but is rather hidden in the depths of our own nature, may be compared to the statement of the goal of the Christian vocation in John xvii, 3: “This is eternal life, to know thee who alone art truly God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent”. According to more than one of the Fathers, the soul of man, being intellectual, can know God if it be true to its own nature; the road to Him is not outside, but within ourselves—as Moses taught when he said “the Word of faith is within thy heart” (Dt. xxx, 14). *Intrare in semetipsum, ascendere ad Deum*; “the end of the human race is the inheritance of God”.

So the Kingdom of God is not of this world, and Jesus was not deluded as to the best means of propagating the good news of the Kingdom; for He, “...knowing...they would come and take him by force to make him king, departed again into a mountain himself alone” (Jn. vi, 15; cf. Jn. xvi, 7: *Sed ego veritatem dico vobis, expedit vobis ut ego vadam...*).

St. Mark the Evangelist equates the Kingdom of God with life (Mk. xi, 43-48), where the life in question is indubitably eternal life. Elsewhere the same Evangelist identifies the Kingdom with salvation (Mk. x, 23-27). What is eternal life and what is saved? St. John hints at the answers in the magnificent Prologue to his rendering of the Gospel where he says of the Word:

¹⁶ “Access to the courts of heaven is as easy from Britain as it is from Jerusalem, for ‘the Kingdom of God is within you’”.

‘By him all has appeared, and without him has nothing appeared. That which has appeared was life in him, and the life was the light of men’.¹⁷ “Appeared” is used advisedly, though a departure from most readings; it is adopted from a recent meticulous and particularly meritorious translation.¹⁸ The Greek *egeneto* has the sense of appeared, among other senses, and this rendering has the distinct advantage of emphasizing a thoroughly valid but often neglected metaphysical perspective, i.e., the role of the Logos as immediate Principle and Exemplar of the entire created order; and further, that of the strictly contingent character of the totality of existence. But notwithstanding this contingent character of all that exists, ourselves included, an essential element in *our* “body politic” remains simultaneously within the Logos; our life is “hid with Christ in God” (Col. ii,3), and this life is the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is a mystery; for when the Gospel speaks of the Kingdom of God, or the Kingdom of the Heavens, it speaks from a point of view accessible in some measure to man *hic et nunc* of that which is most real, most interior and central, both within man himself and within the cosmos. The Kingdom is secret and mysterious insofar as it extends beyond the normal possibilities of human understanding and articulation, and it is thus that “the burden of Scripture is parabolic”. And thus so often in His teaching on the Kingdom Jesus resorts to parables passing *a minore ad maius*, from immediate circumstances to eternal archetype.

How then to enter the Kingdom? By a *metanoia*, a conversion, a reversal of inborn and conventional perspectives and intentions. How to achieve this *metanoia*? By initiation, by ritual grace, by baptism. One must be reborn, from above, of water and the Spirit (Jn. iii, 1-5; cf. Ez. xxxvi, 25). A purification, regeneration, and reorientation of man’s psychic substance are potentially effected which, unaided, man is quite unable to attain. Flesh and blood, i.e. the strictly limited possibilities of the natural man, cannot inherit the Kingdom of God (I Cor. xv, 36). Heavenly influences, intelligent and benevolent energies, i.e., graces, are engaged in and by the rite of baptism. “The cathartic virtue of baptism by natural water comes springing out of the eternal formal baptism of the mirror of God’s nature” (*Meister Eckhart*, Sermon ci, pt. 1, C de B. Evans’ translation, hereinafter cited simply as Evans). The rite itself is always in imitation of that which is done in the beginning, *in principio*, the Spirit of God moving over the face of the waters, the fecundation of the Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit. “...The conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus...which took place ‘at night’...where it was said that ‘unless a man be born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God’. Now the water, apart

¹⁷ Punctuation, better illustrated in the Latin, plays an important rôle in understanding this essential passage. *Omnia per ipsum facta sunt, et sine ipso factum est nihil. Quod factum est in ipso vita erat, et vita erat lux hominum.* Until the fourth century the understood punctuation was as above, the first sentence ending after *nihil*. Then motives of the defense of orthodoxy against gnostical and Arian heretics led to a revision so as to read: *...et sine ipso factum est nihil quod factum est.* A number of the more recent translations offer the alternatives or opt for the earlier form as more correct.

¹⁸ *Le Bible Osty*, traduction française sur les textes originaux par Emile Osty avec la collaboration de Joseph Trinquet. Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1973.

from other more contingent significations, is perfection according to Mary, and the Spirit [is] perfection according to Jesus, their cosmogonic prototype being the ‘Spirit of God moving across the face of the waters’” (Frithjof Schuon, *Forme et substance dans les religions*, p. 107). The Good Shepherd gives His life for His sheep, whom we are; and we share His death as we enter the baptismal waters or receive the ritual lustration, and share His resurrection as we emerge. “And because...all the sacred rites of the seven sacraments wherein the soul is sanctified and initiated into godly life...were instituted to show forth the workings of grace in the soul...therefore God [knows] all the seven sacraments in eternal pre-existing forms...” (Eckhart, Sermon ci, in Evans). Normally necessary, the rite can in certain extreme cases, e.g., martyrdom, be dispensed with; cf. Lk. xxiii, 42, 43: “Remember me, Lord, when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom...Today thou shalt be with Me in Paradise”. But whether received ritually or “of desire”, baptism is the primary Christian initiation¹⁹ and is indispensable. “By the water which represents sacramental grace in its outward form, and the Spirit Who bestows the benefit of grace in its inward power, cancelling guilt, restoring goodness, man deriving his first birth from Adam alone, is regenerated in Christ alone” (St. Augustine, *Ep xcvi*). “‘Except a man be born again’, not meaning...birth from a woman, but speaking of the soul born and created anew in the likeness of God’s image” (St. Augustine, *De incarnatione verbi Dei*, 14). “The divine good [i.e., the Kingdom of God] is not something apart from our nature and it is not removed far away from those who have a will to seek it; it is in each of us, ignored and unnoticed while stifled under the cares and pleasures of life, but found again when we turn our power of conscious thinking toward it...in one’s own house, within oneself, we should seek for the lost coin and by that coin the Parable doubtless hints at the image of our King, not yet hopelessly lost but hidden beneath the dust. ‘Rejoice with me...for I have found the drachma which I had lost’—the neighbours, i.e., the soul’s familiar powers” (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginité*, xii); note the key role of intention and concentration.

Other conditions of entry into the Kingdom are: poverty of spirit, as stated in the first of the beatitudes (Mt. v, 3, *beati pauperes spiritu quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum*; cf. Mt. xix, 16-22, the question of the rich young man where, in spite of reference to the commandments enjoining the social virtues, the emphasis is on a fundamental interior attitude and orientation, on being more than doing. It is nonetheless necessary to do the Father’s will (Mt. viii, 21; vi, 10; xxvi, 42; and Lk. vi, 46), “for not everyone that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter to the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that does the will of my Father who is in Heaven”. This disposition must extend even to the sacrifice of one’s life, exemplified by Jesus in His own passion: *Pater mi, si non potest hic calix transire nisi bibi illum, fiat voluntas tua*. Spiritual childhood is necessary for entry into the Kingdom (Mt. xix, 14; Mk. x, 14; Lk. xviii, 16). Likewise, an active search is necessary: *quaerite ergo primum regnum Dei et iusticiam ejus* (Mt. vi, 33); and bearing persecution (Mt. v, 10 and Jn. xv, 20). Essential also is a more far reaching renunciation than the

¹⁹ Primary, but not central; the latter distinction pertains to the Eucharist which is the fount of the other six sacraments.

merely ascetical (though the ascetical is not excluded): *nisi granum frumenti cadens in terram, mortuum fuerit, ipsum solum manet...* (Jn. xii, 24-26), a law written into the very nature of our being (cf. also Mt. xvi, 24-27 and Lk. xiv, 26, 27). And one must make the best of one's possibilities, which implies a considerable latitude of creativity (cf. Mt. xxv, 15ff and Lk. xix, LLff). With the truly orthodox—who sometimes can be distinguished from those who are orthodox politically as it were—with the truly orthodox, interior disposition and orientation are all important and ultimately dominate all the more contingent orders of existence. So true is this that such outcasts as extortionists and whores, once converted, enter the Kingdom before the merely correct (cf Mt. xxi, 31).

“The Kingdom of Heaven is taken by violence and the violent take it by force” (Mt. xi, 12)—the violent, i.e., the intense, the single minded, the desperate. “‘...Those who seek for gold’, says Heraclitus, ‘dig much earth and find little gold’. But those who are of the truly golden race, in mining for that which is allied to them, will find much in little... When a certain slave once asked the oracle what he should do to please his master, the Pythia replied, ‘You will find if you will seek’. It is truly a difficult matter to find out inherent good... ‘For narrow’, in truth, ‘and straitened is the way’ of the Lord...Nor does the Kingdom of Heaven belong to sleepers and sluggards, but ‘the violent take it by force’.

And him who toils, God helps;
For the gifts of the Muses, hard to win,
Lie not before you for any fellow to bear away.

Thus Clement of Alexandria in his *Stromata* (iv, 2). According to St. John Chrysostom, the statement that “the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence” is an invitation; it is a fault to covet the things of this world, but it is blameworthy not to be grasping and rapacious regarding the Kingdom; “seize Christ, who will praise thee for it”. And St. Augustine (*On the Psalms*, cxlvii, 28) says: “God made Jacob to wrestle with an Angel; under the guise of which Angel, God himself wrestled with him. Jacob held Him, he exerted violence to hold Him; He caused Himself to be held, in mercy not in weakness. Jacob, therefore, wrestled and prevailed...” And cf Hos. xii, 4-6, which states the basis of Jacob's greatness: “From his mother's womb he supplanted his brother, in his vigor he was strong against God. He was strong against the Angel and prevailed; he wept and he implored Him. At Bethel he encountered Him. It is there that He spoke with us... Yahweh, the Lord of Hosts...”

Beati pauperes spiritu, quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum...beati mundo cordi, quoniam ipsi Deum videbunt (Mt. v, 3 & 8); again an implied identity of King and Kingdom, and an identification by gnosis. “It is the will of God that we should attain to the knowledge of God, which is the communication of immortality” (Clement of Alexandria, *ibid.* iv, 6). Generally, however, the early Fathers were preeminently pastors and did not often have the occasion to speak openly of gnosis, though the implied affirmations are almost as frequent as the reticences. As pastors they were not primarily concerned with the articulation of metaphysical doctrine

except insofar as this is inherent in the integral forms of the Christian revelation; it is the latter that they were concerned to expound and protect.

For St. Augustine, the “one reward which is the Kingdom of Heaven is the perfect and highest wisdom of the rational soul”. For St. Basil, the inner man consists of nothing but contemplation. The Kingdom of Heaven, then, must be contemplation.²⁰ One could easily believe that Saints Augustine and Basil, like St. Matthew, opted for the more reserved expression. St. Basil continues: “Now we behold their shadows [i.e., of the heavenly realities] as in a glass darkly; hereafter, set free from this earthly body, clad in the incorruptible and immortal, we shall behold their archetypes; we shall see them, i.e., if we have heeded the right faith, for otherwise none shall see the Lord. For...into a malicious soul Wisdom shall never enter, nor dwell in a body that is subject to sin”. In his *Commentary on John* (i, 16) Origen writes of the condition of the blessed: “Then those who will have been brought to God by the Word, Who is with Him, will have only one activity: knowing God, in order that all may become perfectly one Son, being transformed in knowing the Father as now only the Son knows the Father”. For, according to Eckhart, “the kernel of eternal life lies rather in knowledge than in love”; similarly, no less, the Kingdom relates to knowledge.

“Then shall the righteous shine forth as the Sun in the Kingdom of their Father” (Mt. xiii, 24 & 38-43), where the Sun is Christ the Logos, *verusque Sol, Sol justitiae*. This passage is to be compared with Ap. xxi, 23: “And the city [i.e., the Heavenly Jerusalem] has no need of the sun [*helios*] or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb”; and Ap. xxii, 3: “And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign forever and ever”.²¹ Though this is anticipating our study, it may be pointed out that these texts relate directly to the doctrine of the *apokatastasis*, the universal reintegration and restoration of Acts iii, 21 and Ep. iv, 13, “of which God has spoken by the mouth of his holy prophets from ancient times”—an affirmation of the *religio perennis et universalis* even in the Christian canon. At this point we are already in the realm of pure metaphysic to which, *Deo volente*, we shall return in the third section of this study. But for the moment let us approach these anthropological and Christological considerations from another perspective, bearing in mind that “...what the Gospels say is to be regarded in the light of the promises of good things, and the good things that the Apostles announce in this Gospel²² are simply Jesus” (Origen, *ibid*, i, 10), i.e., all that is implied in the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. Or in the words of St. Thomas Aquinas, “...in the New Law, whatever our Head has done is a type of what we ought to do...the New Law itself is a figure of future glory” (ST. I.I, 10).

²⁰ According to Ruysbroek, “we are what we contemplate, and what we contemplate we are”.

²¹ Cf Jean de la Cèpède, *Ce grand Soliel de qui l'autre n'est qu'un flame*.

²² “Gospels” or “this Gospel” does not connote one rather than another Evangelist’s rendition, but the one and unique Gospel which is Jesus Christ Himself.

Christian doctrine all hangs together; it is a coherent whole, though by no means a system for it opens on the Infinite. One element cannot be neglected or distorted without damage or compromise to other vital doctrine. A case in point, quite apart from the pertinent Old Testament considerations, is to be found in Lk. iii, 23-38, in which the Evangelist traces the genealogy of Jesus back to Adam "...who was of God".²³ The divine origin of the human race is categorically stated; divine filiation (natural and supernatural) is an integral element in the Christian understanding of man. God, by His primordial and eternal creative act subsumes the entire human race in the creation of Adam. Human nature, humanity, is an ontological unity—a truth nevertheless which does not jeopardize individual responsibility, intellection and understanding, or virtue, because of the multiple hypostases within this unity. Mankind is absolutely God's creation. "Yonder, where God speaks it is God; but here it is creature. People fondly think that God became man yonder [i.e., in Bethlehem, at the origins of Christianity]. No, God was made man here as well as there, and He was made man for one purpose only: to beget thee His only-begotten Son" (Eckhart, Sermon lxvi, Evans). As with Adam, the entire human race is made in the image of God the Word and, mediately, of God the Father; which implies a pristine perfection, *secundum quid*. Apart from the Word, at once mankind's exemplar, sacred centre, beginning and end, man could not possibly exist just as on our own level a man can make or fabricate nothing whatsoever without a prior conception. "All that ever issued forth or is issuing forth or ever shall, has in God eternal life and being; not defective as in creatures, but as His very being for it is His nature. God has His own being not from naught, He has it from His proper nature which in itself is truly aught though naught to the intelligence of creatures" (Eckhart, Sermon xxxiv, Evans). Whence the Psalmist (xxxii, 9): "He spoke and it was made; He commanded and they stood forth", for in the Word is the operative idea of what God makes.

All our race is made of the same clay and each man is a son of Adam, including his potentiality for sin. Adam is human nature in its original centrifugal aspect, externalized and outward bound. Left to its own powers, this nature is not only incapable of returning to its primordial and paradisaic state, it is equally powerless to arrest its excentric and exponential flight. The alleged "mutation" in the psycho-social substance of "twentieth century man" is, insofar as it answers to any reality, another and probably final fall.

But there is another Adam, the new or second Adam, Jesus Christ, Son of God, Son of Man, the perfect and interior Man and the Man in everyone, Whom the first Adam foreshadowed (Rm. v, 12-21), from Whom the first Adam originated and Who is the archetype of the first Adam and with Whom the first Adam is thus identified *in principio*. The first Adam is the progenitor of psychic life; the new Adam is the *fons et origo* of spiritual life. The old Adam was the father of

²³ Hence the fundamental incompatibility of evolutionism and the proper Christian understanding of man. That evolutionism in some form or other is accepted by almost all Christian scholars and thinkers proves nothing as to the truth of the theory. The fact of such credence, however, may tell us something of those who so believe, as well as about the health of Christian intellectuality.

the human race according to the flesh; the new Adam is the father of a transformed²⁴ humanity, “Father of the world to come”. The first Adam, though but man, sought to make himself like God; the second Adam, Who though “subsisting in the form of God deemed it not rapacious to be equal with God; but emptied himself, and assuming the condition of a slave was made in the likeness of men; he was humbler yet, even to the acceptance of death, death on a cross. But God raised him on high and gave him the name which is above every other name. So that all beings in the heavens, on the earth, and in the underworld,²⁵ should bow at the name of Jesus, and that every tongue should acclaim Jesus Christ as Lord to the glory of God the Father” (Php. ii, 6-11). “For he made known to us the mystery of his will, the free design which he had determined to carry out in the fullness of time, namely to bring back all things both in the heavens and on the earth under the headship of Christ” (Eph. i, 9 & 10). In the words of St. Ireneus (*Against Heresies*), “...His only begotten Word, Who is always present with the human race,²⁶ united to and mingled with His own creation...[Who] became flesh, is Himself Jesus Christ our Lord...There is one God the Father and one Christ Jesus Who came by means of the whole dispensational arrangements...and gathered together all things in Himself...He passed through every stage of life, restoring to all communion with God...everyone will allow that we are...a body taken from the earth and a soul receiving Spirit from God. This, therefore, the Word of God was made, recapitulating in Himself His own handiwork; and on this account does He confess Himself the Son of Man...hence also was Adam termed...‘the figure of Him that was to come’; because the Word, the Maker of all things, had formed before hand for Himself the future dispensation of the human race, connected with the Son of God; God having pre-destined that the first [i.e., outer] man should be of an animal nature, with this view, that he might be saved by the spiritual one. For inasmuch as He had a preexistence as a saving Being, it was necessary that what might be saved should also be called into existence [“that the works of God might be made manifest”]...the Lord coming to the lost sheep and making recapitulation of so comprehensive a dispensation and seeking after His own handiwork...saving that very man created after His image and likeness, that is, Adam... God recapitulated in Himself the ancient formation of man that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify man...”.

“So...the two Greek letters, the first and the last, the Lord assumes to Himself, as figures of the beginning and end which concur in Himself; so that just as Alpha rolls on till it reaches Omega, and again Omega rolls back till it reaches Alpha, in the same way He might show that in Himself is both the downward course of the beginning on to the end, and the backward course of the end up to the beginning; so that every economy ending in Him through whom it began—

²⁴ Transformed, i.e., carried beyond form, the primary determinant of individuality; changed into something substantially different.

²⁵ *I.e.*, the three worlds of universal traditional doctrine.

²⁶ Again, cf Jn. i, 4: *In ipso vita erat, et vita erat lux hominum.*

through the Word of God, that is, who was made flesh—may have an end correspondent to its beginning” (Tertullian, *On Monogamy*, v).

In manifold senses, then, man is inseparably joined to the Word of God in Whom, indeed, “we live and move and have our being” (Acts xvii, 28). Mankind is absolutely God’s creation. And God became man that man might become God, as so many of the Fathers answered the question, prompted by our wonder at the incarnation, “*cur Deus homo?*” Or as Eckhart put it, “God became my second self that I might become His second self”. Human nature is assumed in its completeness by Christ, “for what is not assumed is not healed”. Jesus Christ is a divine message from the Kingdom of the Heavens, and His grace bearing and redemptive Life is an exemplary itinerary every disciple ultimately must accomplish if he is to make the divine promises his own. “If a man keep my word, he shall never see death’ [Jn. viii, 51]; therefore the word of Christ bestows immortality, and by immortality bestows divinity” (Novation, *On the Trinity* xv). Jesus Christ is the Gospel, the Gospel is Christ. King and Kingdom are in principle identical; “before Abraham was, I AM” (Jn. viii, 58). The stations of the Way are demonstrated in true human form and substance in the events of the Life: Nativity, Teaching, Rejection by His own, Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension. Ascension implies descent: “‘He has ascended’; what is this to say but that He also descended to the inferior regions of the earth”,²⁷ where “earth” is the nether term of the cosmic scale. In this, too, we are potentially one with Christ, for “He has chosen us in Himself from the foundation of the world” (Eph. i, 4). In and through Christ the cosmos comes forth from the uncreated; in and through Christ the cosmos returns to the uncreated, ourselves included.

“Before Abraham was, I AM”. But He is also the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”²⁸ (Ap. xiii, 8), and there is an aspect of injustice inherent in the creative act which, though a willing sacrifice, is also a deicide, reverberating throughout the universe and colouring all within it. The Crucifixion at Jerusalem repeats in a specific instance and within a specific dispensation the sacrifice of the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”. *In divinis*, however, redemption is anterior to creation as being the more interior. “In His death is our life”; this ancient liturgical text obviously admits of interpretation on differing levels. But with equal obviousness, an inescapable element of the significance of this statement is that an effective Atonement entails our death. Thanks to the “grain of wheat” who willed to die and be multiplied (Jn. xii, 24), thanks to Jesus Christ Who disdained not to undergo our death in order that He might make us worthy of His life, man has the potentiality of becoming what Christ is. For the

²⁷ Eph. iv, 9, 10: the descent into Hell of orthodox Catholic doctrine.

²⁸ The metaphysical sense of the doctrine of the two natures. It has been questioned whether the text bears this sense, for grammatically “from the foundation...” can modify either *Lamb* or the clause “written in the book of life”, in Ap. xiii, 8. Both senses are implied, however; see Eph. i, 4 for the latter sense; and, among others, Jn. i, 29, the Baptist’s exclamation: “Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world”, for the implied anteriority of the Redemption and the sacrifice it entails.

Word, one of the divine hypostases, is wholly united with the entire nature of humanity. “To the whole of human nature, the whole essence of the Godhead is united...God the Word omitted none of the things which He implanted in our nature when He formed us in the beginning, but took them all upon Himself...He in His fullness took upon Himself me in my fullness, and was united whole to whole that He might in His grace bestow salvation on the whole man...our nature has been raised from the dead and has ascended to the heavens and taken its seat at the right hand of the Father...this has happened to the whole of our nature in the person of Christ” (St. John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa* vi).

It remains for the sheep to follow the Shepherd and to make effectively their own what is already theirs potentially, thanks to Him Who said, *in domo Patris mei mansiones multae sunt...quia vado parare vobis locum* (Jn. xiv, 2)...[ibi] *praecursor pro nobis introivit Jesus, secundum ordinem Melchisedech pontifex factus in aeternum* (Heb. vi, 20). And, “whosoever desires to follow Me, let him deny himself...”, where the Greek verb as elsewhere in the New Testament has the sense of disown, renounce, disregard; and which thus implies, at the very least, a duality in man—an inner, essential, and universal Man who knows and acts, and another outer man enmeshed in the “storm of the world’s flow”, who knows not and who rather “reacts, and “who” must be renounced for the Kingdom of Heaven’s sake. It is a question of personal identity, of who and what we are, and of what we are not. “...And let him take up his cross daily and follow Me”, for “the business of the Christian is nothing else than to be ever preparing for death. The bride cannot be said to wed, but to be wedded, when the bridegroom comes and takes her; so also the flesh cannot by itself possess the Kingdom of God by inheritance, but it can be taken up for an inheritance into the Kingdom of God” (St. Irenaeus). *Veni sponsa Christi, accipe coronam quam tibi Dominus praeparavit in aeternum*, where the bride of Christ is perfected humanity or the Church triumphant. *Dilexisti justiciam, et odisti iniquitatem; propterea unxit te Deus, Deus tuus, oleo laetitiae prae consortibus tuis. Specie tua, et pulchritudine tua intende, prospere precede et regna* (Ps. xlv, 8 & 5; cf Mt. xxv, 1-13, the parable of the wise and foolish virgins).

Veni, sponsa Christi...brings us to the question of love, *caritas*. Where is love in all this? Is not Christianity the religion of love? The answer to the latter question is undoubtedly affirmative, even as every orthodox revelation derives from the Divine Love. Redemption under whatever guise it may appear, has to do with love; “we love Him because He first loved us” (I Jn. iv, 19), for “...while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rm. v, 8). Christianity has by its very nature given greater emphasis to love than have any of the other extant religions. Yet no word in the Christian vocabulary has been more debased than the word “love”. It has been misused to justify every relaxation, every compromise, every “refusal of the labour of thinking” (the phrase is from Origen); even—were that possible—to justify vice. A mere benignity of disposition, of a purely natural order, may now pass as “love”. In fact nothing in the Christian tradition provides any sanction for separating love from intelligence; “be ye wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Mt. x, 16). Love, *caritas*, is assumed in all that has been said; we are bidden

to seek first the Kingdom of God and His justice, even as we are bidden to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength; and to love our neighbour as ourselves. The two commandments are distinguishable chiefly in form of expression and point of view; in substance, they come to the same thing. Love is a command, and therefore a work and a responsibility. Certainly, no one could possibly seek first the Kingdom of God and His justice without love. To paraphrase the expression of a great Muslim sage, love is the sextant of the mysteries of the Kingdom of the Heavens. If our love is a genuine theological virtue, it is a divine initiative from the Holy Spirit.

Videte, vigilate, et orate; nescitis enim quando tempus sit. Sicut homo qui pelegre profectus reliquit domum suam, et dedit servus suis potestatem cujusque opens, et janitori praecepit et vigilet. Vigilate, ergo (nescitis enim quando dminus domus veniat; sero an medio nocte, an galli cantu, an mane), ne cum venerit repente inveniat vos dormientes. Quod autem vobis dito, omnibus dico: Vigilate. (Mk. xiii, 34-37).

III

In the preceding pages we have traced the idea of the Kingdom of God from its first glimmerings in ancient Judaism, through its significance in Christian theology, up to and even into the meta-physical realm. In the pages that follow, we propose *Deo adjuvante* —to set forth the properly metaphysical implications of the idea. In doing so we shall follow substantially but not exclusively Meister Eckhart, and in particular his incomparable tractate “The Kingdom of God” (in C. de B. Evans’ *Meister Eckhart*, vol. I). We shall refer to other sources, especially but not solely Christian,²⁹ in order to demonstrate at least partially the principlial plenitude of Christian metaphysical doctrine; and in particular that the doctrine of the unique Divine Essence, with all that this implies, is natively Christian.³⁰ Citations are from Evans’ *Meister Eckhart*, vol. I, except where otherwise indicated.

We may note in passing that some of the more recent scholarship has cast doubt on the Eckhartian authenticity of “The Kingdom of God” tractate. Small matter from our point of view, for it is the idea and not the pen that is of compelling interest; ideas are quite independent of their human articulation, and the human element is of interest only when shaped by the idea. In any case, the language of this tractate (certainly rather difficult) has the Eckhartian ring, the boldness of expression, the verve, and even the peculiarly Eckhartian sense of God, which to some may indeed seem excessively audacious; all of which make it difficult not to associate the text with Meister Eckhart. The text, in the most magisterial manner treats of the highest metaphysical doctrine with a candor and sureness unknown (to us at least) in any other Christian work. “The Kingdom of God”, more than any other single element in the Eckhartian corpus, would justify the apt comparison, “an Upanishad of Europe”. Others of the tractates, particularly, have a less

²⁹ For in the metaphysical realm the jurisdiction of forms is of a quite different character from that prevailing in, say, theology.

³⁰ Which is by no means to say that the doctrine in question is only to be found in a Christian context.

sure grasp of the doctrine of the Godhead, the unique Divine Essence, or the Self; and in them one sometimes gets the impression that the author(s) or transcribers were, whether by intent or theoretical lack, limited to the ontological order.

It may be noted, too, that we use *metaphysic* in a somewhat different sense than this has normally been conceived by Christian theologians for whom metaphysics was a sector of philosophy, though clearly the most noble thereof. We also distinguish between *meta-physic* and *metaphysics*, the singular being the more apt; for this science above all others leads beyond all pluralities, even as the Reality of which it treats (inasmuch as it can be discursively treated) extends ultimately beyond the ontological Trinity and even beyond Unity. Yet this science, or the object thereof, answers to something perennial in man (again, cf Jn. i, 4). For Christian theologians metaphysics has been subordinate to sacred theology based on revelation—legitimately so from the perspective in question when the latter was still viable. But from the point of view to which we adhere (*Deo adjuvante*), sacred theology is a particularization albeit a quite necessary one—of metaphysic. This is demonstrable from the more universal character of metaphysic, from its greater profundity, and from the fact that metaphysic alone is capable of synthesizing and authenticating the positive content of particular theologies. All this does not imply a secret and loftier revelation; but it does imply the role of faith, hope, and charity in opening the under-standing to nobler hypotheses. We believe that Eckhart would have agreed, for as much is implicit if not explicit in his works that have come down to us.

For the moment, let us turn to two rather lengthy but needful citations from a recent work of Frithjof Schuon, *Forme et substance dans les religions*:

This relationship of identity [between the relative and the Absolute] quintessential Christianity expresses in the most direct manner possible: the Son is united to the Father, Christ is God. That man, who is relative, can be identified with God, who is Absolute, presupposes that relativity has an aspect of absoluteness, and that by this fact it is found to be prefigured *in divinis*; whence the doctrine of the Word.

“God became man that man might become God”. The Absolute includes relativity, and by this fact the relative may be reintegrated into the Absolute. The Patristic formula which we paraphrased therefore signifies, for the one part, that the human Logos directly manifests the Absolute; and for the other part that man can be reintegrated into the Absolute by uniting himself to the human Logos, in and by whom he identifies himself virtually with that Absolute.

The objection that Paradise is not the Absolute and that in no religion is man thought to become God literally, in no way invalidates what we have expounded; for it is in fact a question *not* of the transmutation of the human individual as such into the divine Essence, but first of all an “adoption” of man by God. Man is then situated under the divine Axis, he is open in his most interior depth to the Infinite, he “bears a

crown of uncreated light”. There is no common measure between his spiritual secret, the mystery of identity or absoluteness, and the existence —or subsistence—of the individual form; but the one does not exclude the other. Man remains man in spite of the reality of absoluteness that penetrates him...Nirvâna does not destroy the Buddha, rather It immortalizes him; apart from which it would never be possible to speak of a human manifestation of the Logos. If God can “become man”, it means that there is no possible rivalry between the divine and the human (chapter, “La marge humain”).

Now if it is incontestable that the human ego normally desires happiness and survival in happiness, so much so that there cannot be any motive for desiring more, it is also quite as true that the pure Intelligence exists and that it is its nature to tend towards its own source. The entire question is to know, spiritually speaking, which of the two subjectivities predominate in a human being. One may with good reason deny that the choice of the supra-individual has any meaning for the individual as such, but one cannot deny that there is something in man which surpasses the individuality and which may take precedence over the aspirations of the latter, in order to tend towards the plenitude of its own transcendent nature.

To take precedence over the aspirations of this latter, and not to totally abolish them; we touch here another aspect of the problem, and not the least. ‘When one speaks traditionally of a “dissolution” or of an “extinction”, one has in view the privative limitations of the ego and not its very existence...Christ “is God”, which in no way inhibits Him from saying: “today you shall be with Me in Paradise”, nor from predicting His return at the end of the cycle.

...Two subjectivities, two languages: all the enigma of esoterism is there. A doctrine is esoteric in the measure that it appeals to the “interior subjectivity” and that, by his fact, it puts aside the “exterior subjectivity”; on the contrary, it is exoteric in the measure that it accepts the empirical ego as a closed system and an absolute reality....

The exterior ego by definition is nourished by phenomena and is consequently fundamentally dualist; to it corresponds objective and revealed religion, of which the Messenger is a particular historic personage. The interior ego looks towards its own Source at once transcendent and immanent; to it corresponds innate and subjective religion, of which the *Avatara* is the heart; wisdom in fact inaccessible without the concurrence of objective and revealed religion just as the interior ego is inaccessible without the concurrence of the sanctified exterior ego.

...The “life” of the “soul” to sacrifice...is the ego as a nucleus of passion and not simply as a particular subjectivity; also the criterion of a spiritual degree is, not the absence of a sense of the “me”, which cannot be habitual—otherwise Christ

would not have been able to move about in the world—but the abolition of the passionate nexus founded on desire, ostentation, and “optical illusion”. (chapter, “Les deux Paradise”).

“‘Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you’. Since Christ bids us seek the Kingdom of God, it is our duty to know what this Kingdom is. Know then that God’s Kingdom is Himself and His perfect nature. Secondly, there is God’s Kingdom in the soul. He Himself says: ‘The Kingdom of God is within you’”, as indeed “the whole truth is native within you”. Note that Eckhart’s use of the word *soul* is far from being limited to the psychic substance of the human composite. The *anima et spiritus* of the familiar *corpus, anima et spiritus* are implied, and more: in Eckhart’s usage, soul also extends to the uncreated prototype in the Logos and ultimately to the supra-ontological order, the highest Principle, the Self, the Divine Essence, the Godhead—of which, in Eckhart’s words, “nothing can be said”.

But for the moment, let us turn to more familiar considerations of the Triune God. “And for this reason, He, although beyond comprehension, and boundless and invisible, rendered Himself visible and comprehensible, and within the capacity of those who believe, that He might vivify those who receive and behold Him through faith. For as His greatness is past finding out, so also His goodness is beyond expression, by which having seen, He bestows life on those who see Him. It is not possible to live apart from life, and the means of life is found in fellowship with God; but fellowship with God is to know God... Men therefore shall see God that they may live, being made immortal by that sight and attaining unto God” (St. Ireneus, *Against Heresies* iv, 20). Origen is more specific: “Then those who have been brought to God by the Word, Who is with Him, will have only one activity: knowing God, in order that all may become perfectly one Son, being transformed in knowing the Father as now only the Son knows the Father” (*Commentary on John*, i, 16; cf Mt. xi, 27). Again, this is the *apokatastasis* or re-integration at which point the creative and redemptive function of the Word is accomplished, though this is not the final destiny of the soul (bearing in mind Eckhart’s sense as above), nor the ultimate *apokatastasis*. Elsewhere, too (*Contra Celsus* vi, 20), Origen speaks of true metaphysical realization: “...Jesus the Son of God, who has promised to all that have truly learned divine things, and lived lives in harmony with them, to go before them to the things that are supramundane; for His words are: ‘That where I go, ye may be also’. And therefore we hope, after the struggles and hopes that we suffer here, to reach the highest heavens, and receiving agreeably to the teaching of Jesus, the fountains of water that spring up into eternal life, and being filled with the rivers of knowledge,³¹ shall be united with those waters which are said to be above the heavens”, i.e., unmanifested possibilities.

³¹ Cf Ps. xlvi, 4: “There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of our God, the holy place of the Most High”.

Some may be tempted to see “pantheism” in such expressions, even in spite of the citations, e.g., from Schuon above. Not so, for there is no reciprocity of relationship between the created and the Creator, between the principial and the manifested, “no possible rivalry” in Schuon’s words. Eckhart encountered this problem, for in his defense he states that his accusers (how “modern” they were!) could not accept the thought that creatures (and, indeed, all creation) are nothing in and of themselves, apart from God; and he quotes Jn. i, 3, “all things were made by him, and without him nothing was made”. He points out that it is blasphemous to hold that the world is any least thing of itself, for this is to deny the First Cause and to deny that all created being³² is such only by participation in God’s primal being. “Our Lord says, ‘Moses, to Me no man comes as himself’. Now according to St. Chrysostom, ‘to be other than I am, I must abandon that I am’...He [God] made many kinds of creatures for each one to show forth a modicum of God,³³ albeit no more of Him than one drop of water reveals about the sea. Not but what a drop of water tells us more about the sea, and indeed the universe, than any creature can reveal of God. For out of drops of water we might get a sea, but not by means of any [or all] creatures could we succeed in getting God”. Indeed, there would appear to be substance to the jibe that men fear pantheism not so much because they fear losing God as because they dread losing themselves.

Before proceeding let us digress to a few closely related points. In Hebrews iv, 3-5 & 9-10, St. Paul³⁴ says: “For we who have believed enter that [Sabbath] rest, as He said, ‘As I swore in My wrath, they [the Hebrews of the Exodus] shall never enter My rest’, although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way, ‘And God rested on the seventh day from all His works’. So then there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God; for whoever enters God’s rest also ceases from his labors as God did from His”. These passages involve the symbolism of the Sabbath, the seventh and last day of the Jewish week and the ritual day of rest instituted to recall the *creatio ex nihilo* and thereby the Creator (cf Gn. ii, 3). The seventh day, as the “seventh dimension”, i.e., the unmanifested Centre, represents the return of manifestation to its Principle, of creation to its Creator. This is the true Lord’s Day, the Day of Eternal Rest, of full accomplishment, of plenitude of being. The “repose of the Sabbath day” implies reintegration into the creative-redemptive Logos (cf Jn. v, 17; and especially Ap. xxii, 3, where the curse of work is removed).

It may be helpful, too, to touch briefly on the questions of “union” and “beatific vision” as these doctrines have been commonly, i.e., exoterically, held in western Christianity, particularly in the Roman Catholic Church. “Union” normally meant union of wills, a perfect unanimity of the human with the divine, the will in a saint or holy person being fully conformed to the divine

³² More accurately, *existence*, i.e., to appear, to stand forth (from), as a noun of action.

³³ I.e., “that the works of God might be made manifest...” (Jn. ix, 3).

³⁴ We are aware that the Pauline authorship of this Epistle, one of the most profound in the New Testament, has been questioned.

will. The human subject in every case was rightly conceived as preserved, though usually “after the manner of things in this life”. ‘While from a meta-physical point of view union of wills is certainly not to be despised, nevertheless it is not such a union that satisfies the highest possibilities and aspirations of our nature, themselves God-given. Union of wills is in fact the final goal only from an ascetical point of view. Even from a theological perspective (always an orthodox theology is implied, not a contemporary “process” theology or some other bastard perspective which so often is more sociology than anything else, if indeed not something worse)—from an orthodox theological perspective, man’s final goal is the beatific vision in which God is seen in His Essence. But when theologians, or the greater theologians have turned their attention to this concept they have not been able to remain within an exclusively theological perspective. “This is eternal life that they shall know Thee, the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent”³⁵ (Jn. xvii, 3). Who can doubt that the *gnosis*³⁶ of which the Gospel here speaks is a fully actual knowledge? And who can doubt that “knowledge in act is the same as the thing”, i.e., as the object of knowledge, as St. Thomas approvingly cites Aristotle in ST I, 79, 4, 2). And further, “...the divine substance cannot be seen by the intellect by means of any created species...the intellect sees it through the divine essence itself; so that in this vision the divine essence is both the object and the medium of vision” (SCG li). While in the first instance, the created intellect is in question, nevertheless intellect *per se* bestrides both the created and uncreated orders. Theologians have habitually had resort to the doctrine of the *lumen gloriae*, which is given to the blessed and by which God is seen in His Essence. Obviously an identity is implied, even though the doctrine sought to escape this apparent difficulty. In the words of Plotinus it is a question not so much of a vision encompassed as of a unity apprehended; a *gnosis* in which God is both Subject and Object. For “no *man* hath seen God at any time” (Jn. i, 18); and *nemo ascendit in caelum, nisi qui descendit de caelo, Filius hominis, qui est in caelo* (Jn. iii, 13), i.e., the true Man in every man. Only God can know Himself in “...that *gnosis* which is God Himself”.

What is involved, then, is a substantial purification, resurrection, and ascension, “when the image shall have ascended to the archetype” (St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration* 28); and equally, an imprescriptible identity of essence. As Frithjof Schuon so well expressed it:

...man can speak to the Lord, but not realize Him, and he can realize the Essence or Self [Eckhart’s Godhead], but not speak to it. With regard to the Self there is no opposite or interlocutor, for the Self or Essence, let it be repeated, is entirely outside the axis “Creator creature”, or “Principle—manifestation”, although in this relationship It is present within the Creator; but it does not concern us as creatures or servants and we are unable to attain It on the plane of this polarity, apart from the

³⁵ Which statement implies full cosmological and metaphysical realization.

³⁶ For *gnosis* is what is in question—the profound reality signified by the word, not the opprobrium which incidentally and often irrelevantly attaches to the expression.

possibility of conceiving it, a possibility accorded by the Lord by virtue of the universal nature of our intelligence, and also by virtue of the universality of the Self. In other words, if we are able to attain the Self outside the said polarity, it is solely by the will of the Lord and with His help; the Self cannot be realised in defiance of the “Lord—servant” relationship. To put it in another way: although the object of unitive realization is the super-ontological Essence and not the Lord, it cannot be effected without the Lord’s blessing; and though the true subject of that union is the supra-personal intellect, and not the servant, it cannot be brought about without the servant’s participation. (*Logic and Transcendence*, translated by Peter Townsend, pp. 211 & 212).

In the closing lines of the *Paradiso*, Dante, too, states the doctrine of union by *gnosis*:

Eternal light, that in Thyself alone
Dwelling, alone dost know Thyself, and smile
On Thy self-love, so knowing and so known!

.

Thither my own wings could not carry me,
But that a flash my understanding clove,
Whence its desire came to it suddenly.

Magnificent consummation of a magnificent journey! Yet, we might almost say that Eckhart begins where Dante leaves off. The great Florentine’s is the most illustrious voice, and his *Commedia* the greatest statement of cosmological realization in Christendom. Meister Eckhart is the greatest voice of Christian metaphysic; and while all his works are highly valuable in this regard, none is more so than the tractate “The Kingdom of God”, to which we return.

In principio erat verbum (Jn. i, 1); “In the beginning was the Word”. The beginning in question is the Father.³⁷ At the outset, Eckhart notes distinctions and principal multiplicity in God, the first being a Trinity of Persons in an ontological Unity. In the words of St. Thomas, “relations really exist in God...the processions are realized in identity of nature...[therefore] the relations considered from the fact of these processions are real relations” (ST I, 28, 2). Following St. Augustine, Eckhart asks: “has the Father a beginning?” “Isness”, being, is our first intuition of God. The Godhead is superior to being and, in Eckhart’s phrase, “the source of all emanations”. God’s being is preeminently one; true being and true unity are equivalent; yet both are already a procession from “...the hidden Godhead of pure gnosis whereof no man durst

³⁷ “God is the supreme identity of Being and Non-Being, Essence and Nature; from Non-Being there arises Being as a first assumption, and from Being come forth all existences” (Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, “The Sea”, in *India Antiqua*, p. 92).

speak”. Eckhart, referring to the Absolute, and in an area where language is all too inadequate, speaks of a “passive welling up of being, the first formal assumption in the Godhead...God is being, but being is not God”, i.e., Godhead is not limited by being, Godhead transcends being. This is absolute plenary Non-Being, Beyond-Being; non-duality, to use a Hindu expression. “...The deity being in itself intelligence...the divine nature steps forth into relation of otherness; other but not another...What is the Person of the Father?...it is *being* in the Godhead, not according to essence but according to paternity, which is the formal notion specifically determining the Father . . . The Father alone is the active origin of the Son”. “Word used of God...is used personally and is the proper name of the person of the Son; for it signifies an emanation of intellect” (St. Thomas, ST I, 34, 2). The Father, looking into Himself, conceives His own perfect image which is the only begotten Son. “His Word is His clear perception and that is His Son. God’s speaking is His begetting... His entire God-nature He utters in this Word, and the whole of creatures. This Word lies hidden in the soul unnoticed and beyond our ken, and were it not for rumours in the ground of hearing we should never heed it... That the Word should come forth and still remain within is very wonderful; that all creatures should come forth and remain within is very wonderful...”

Et verbum erat apud Deum, i.e., with the Father, but as distinct Person. “Theologians teach that the Father, pouring Himself out as love into the Son, there His love is as it were reflected, the Son pouring Himself back into the Father. This mutual outpouring of love is the common spiration of the Father and Son...according to its formal origin this spirative force is different in Father and Son... this spiration...is the formal notion and property that distinguishes the Person of the Holy Ghost...We love God with His own love; awareness of it deifies us...The Holy Spirit proceeded forth as love to make our spirits one with Him”. We not only love but we know through and by the Holy Spirit. The third Person of the Holy Trinity is not only *caritas* but also *intellectus*, both created and uncreated.

Et Deus erat verbum signifies unity of nature. “Up noble soul, arise in divine wonder at this exalted fellowship: the three Persons united in one impartible nature!...‘The Lord shall reign forever and beyond’. God reigns forever in distinction of Persons, but His reign in the beyond is in unity of nature. There God is the Kingdom of Himself, being superessential”.

Can the divine bliss and the blessedness of creatures lie in the Divine Essence as essence, apart from the formal distinctions perceived in the Deity? No, for essence in itself is absolute and unique and is the same in God and in creatures. The bliss of God and creatures lies in the self-subsistent divine nature [Being] with all its perfections. The soul’s beatitude consists in apprehending synthetically and undividedly the perfections which are perceived distinctively in the divine nature. But “there is no [actual] division; God is the superessential one; [He is] His own beatitude and that of creatures in the actuality of His Godhead. Be sure that in this unity God knows distinctions, but as one impartible property. In this unity God is idle. The Godhead effects neither this nor that; it is God Who effects all things. God in activity is manifold and

knows multiplicity. God as one is absolutely free from activity. In this [highest] unity God knows nothing save that He super-essentially is His own Self”.

By Kingdom of God, Eckhart also understands the soul, for “the soul is of like nature with the Godhead” and, again, “essence is the same in God and creatures”. “The soul is all that she knows, and in this she is an image of God...and as such she is also the Kingdom of God; as God is essentially in Himself without beginning, so in the Kingdom of the soul He is, as Essence, without end...God, when He broke out and wrought the soul, so far maintained His ground in her as to conceal in her His divine treasure, His heavenly Kingdom. Hence Christ says: ‘The Kingdom of God is like a treasure hidden in a field’. The field is the soul wherein lies hidden the treasure of the divine Kingdom...What we say of the soul applies to her as being an image of God”.

Many Christian thinkers have speculated on the image of God in Man, or on man made in the image of God, in what this image consists. Eckhart observes that the image of God in the soul has been said to be in the soul’s faculties, and that this is true if understood correctly. But it is not ultimately true if one stops short at the mere diversity of powers of the soul, “...but if the powers are understood to be one at the summit of her activity, then it is true. In this divine activity the soul looks back immediately, intellectually, into the divine nature. In this divine act she conceives her own nature superessentially in God. In this act all is divine to the highest image...For gazing into itself it simultaneously conceives God in Himself, without means. Hence it is happy in Him formally and objectively owing to the divine nature...This supernal light flows immediately out of God and at the same instant by an act of intellection is gotten without means into God. Hence its going out and persistence in God are one intellectual conception, the impartible nature of the same intellectual act. In God...in its highest prototype...the soul has never known creature as creature...For in this image everything is God...[and] is no more changed by anything in time than the divine nature is changed by anything that is creature; for it apprehends and uses all things according to the law of Godhood”. Eckhart speaks from a rigorous metaphysical perspective in this difficult passage which may perhaps be rendered more accessible by reference to Jn. iii, 13: “And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man who is in heaven”, and Jn. x, 9: “I am the door; by me if any man enter in he shall be saved. And he shall go in and out and find pasture”, where the fully saved are subsumed in the New Adam, St. Paul’s “...the unity of faith...a perfect man...the measure of the stature of Christ in his plenitude” (Eph. iv, 13), Whose descent does not entail the abandonment of His plenary and eternal reality. This is also the significance of the knowledge of “...Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent” in Jn. xvii, 3.

Again, if the Kingdom of God is thus within us, why do we not have more of an inkling of it? Because of our centrifugal nature and bias towards creatures, for in the words of the *Katha Upanishad* (ii, 1, 1) “The Self-existent pierced the openings of the senses outward...” “This treasure of God’s Kingdom is hidden by time and multiplicity, by the soul’s own activity and by her creaturehood. The more the soul departs from all this multiplicity, the more God’s Kingdom

is revealed in her. But the soul is not able for this without the help of grace. And she find it, it is grace that has aided her thereto, for grace is innate in her highest prototype...Owing to the soul's natural disposition towards creatures, all her acts are bound to originate in creaturely images...", which has led some to think that the image of God in the soul consists of these acts. Whereas in fact the soul's "...activity in her ordinary understanding originates in an intelligible image in highest thought (or, memory) [i.e., in recollection] begotten there as to form by phantasmal images [received through the several sense faculties] and as to essence by the supernal, God beholding image whence the soul receives power to understand all truth". But no one can actually reach the threshold of this Kingdom unless "...he withdraws his mind entirely from things. And it requires main force to drive back all the senses and inhibit them. Violence must be offered to them one and all or this cannot be done. As Christ said: 'The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence and the violent take it by force'".

Man, and indeed all creatures through man, even though exteriorized and centrifugal, are ever looking back to Him from Whom they issued forth. "...When we talk of man we are talking of all creatures; Christ Himself exhorted His disciples, 'Go forth and preach the Gospel to all creatures', for creatures all culminate in man". In these words Eckhart states the universal doctrine of the centrality of the human state and the inestimable opportunity of human birth, a doctrine found in one way or another in all traditions.

In man's highest image wherein image and prototype are identical, "...the instant it glanced out from God this highest image looked back again with countenance unveiled, conceiving the divine nature without means. From this act is gotten its whole existence. In this act this prototype is God and is called the image of God; in its breaking forth it is a creature and is...the image of the soul. Consider then thyself, O noble soul, and the nobility within thee, for thou art honored above all creatures in that thou art an image of God; and dispise what is mean for thou art destined to greatness!" This is the Kingdom of God which *intra vos est*, and which we are bidden to seek before all else.

This seeking entails not only the soul's search for her own ultimate identity, the truth of who and what she is, and her innate nobility and beauty; but it entails also a threefold going forth from her threefold nature, a threefold dying to herself. This invitation to find her true Self is an integral element in the soul's nature. On the one hand it is an invitation to an inward advancement to the highest spiritual liberty of the Kingdom of God; and on the other a continuing danger (*corruptio optima pessima*), for one neglects or rejects a divine vocation at one's peril; "spirits are not finely touched but to fine issues".

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mt. xvi, 24), which at the very least implies the familiar *duo sunt in homine*. Once more, however, a threefold denying of oneself, a threefold dying or going forth is necessary for plenary entry into the Kingdom of Heaven. The soul must die to or go forth from her creaturely nature, which must not be understood of her temporary corporeality alone nor of her psychic substance; she must die to her angelic nature as well, i.e., to her existence in the formless order. And

subsequently she must die to her archetypal nature, and ultimately to the nature she has in the all-prolific activity of the Father. Eckhart indicates the exigency of this first death of the soul when he says, “as surely as God lives, no man will ever go forth into the negation of himself until he is as free from his own self as he was when he was not”. And he reminds us in passing that this extends even to the virtues, for “we are to practice virtue, not possess it”. *Visio Dei super virtute*, though virtues are integral elements of the Way and there is no way in which one can seek the Kingdom of God without seeking the justice of the Kingdom. “To die is, properly speaking, to lose everything. I do not say that the soul is brought so utterly to naught as it was before it was created; this naughting applies to holding and possessing. In this respect the soul suffers total loss—God as well as creatures”, an exponent as it were of Christ’s words to His disciples: “It is expedient for you that I depart from you” (Jn. xvi, 7). “It is the full intention of God that the soul shall lose her God, for as long as the soul possesses God, is aware of God, knows God, she is aloof [i.e., distinct] from God. God desires to annihilate Himself in the soul in order that the soul may lose herself...When the soul became a creature she obtained a God. When she lets slip her creaturehood, God remains to Himself that He is, and the soul honours God most in being quit of God and leaving Him to Himself...So much for the first exodus in which the soul goes out of her creaturely nature seeking the Kingdom of God”.

The soul has to go forth from the nature she has in her uncreated Prototype. “If we say that all things are in God, we understand by this that, just as He is without distinction in His nature yet absolutely distinct from all things, so all things are in Him in the greatest distinction and yet not distinct, and first of all because man is God in God...”, an idea not peculiar to Eckhart. The soul’s reintegration or *apokatastasis* in her eternal Prototype which is the unique Word uttered by the Father, the *locus possibilium* or Principle of all possibilities of manifestation, this reintegration is not the final goal of the soul’s journey. Christ Himself says: “No man cometh to the Father but by Me” (Jn. xiv, 6), clearly implying that He Himself as Personal Word of the Father is not the final goal. “The divine understanding is the Person of the Son. Hence the Son is the exemplar of all creatures and the image of the Father in which nature broods the image of all creatures. Now when the soul strips off her created nature there flashes out its uncreated prototype wherein the soul discovers herself in uncreatedness, for things are all one in this Prototype according to the property of the eternal image...But the soul knows that what she is seeking is neither her exemplar nor its nature wherein she perceives herself to be in multiplicity and separation [though in divine mode]”. “...The eternal nature wherein the soul now finds herself in her exemplar is characterized by multiplicity—the Persons being in separation—therefore the soul breaks through her eternal exemplar to get to where God is a kingdom in unity...Though the soul’s abiding place is not in [the Word] yet she must, as He says, go through Him. This breaking through is the second death of the soul and is far more momentous than the first. Of it St. John says: ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord’ (Ap. xiv, 13). O surpassing wonder! How can there be death in Him Who says of Himself that He is the Life?...In the selfsame ground wherein the Father bears His Son in His own nature therein am I born... In the very ground wherein the Father gets His Son therein does He get me and all whom the Father

draws to Him by grace...In the birth of the Son all creatures went forth receiving life and being, hence all things are lively imaged in the Son...when the Son returns to unity of nature He is neither Person nor its property...[but] is lost in unity of essence. Now when the soul returns again within she loses the Son...” When the soul loses herself in the Word, her eternal prototype, this is her first death metaphysically speaking, her death to her creaturely nature. Then she becomes the only begotten Son³⁸ and is equal to the Father; but equality implies distinction and separation, albeit principial and not actual; and the soul seeking the absolute unity of God and His Kingdom”...must lose the equality she has in her eternal exemplar...This is the second death and second exodus, the soul going forth out of the nature which is hers in her eternal prototype to seek the Kingdom of God”.

“The third nature out of which the soul goes is the exuberent divine nature energizing in the Father. According to some theologians the Father always perceived within Himself tokens of emanation before He brought forth the Word. They all agree that God the Father conceived His own nature in originating the eternal Word and all creatures. Doctors distinguish between nature and essence. Essence, in so far as it is active in the Father, is nature...From God in activity all creatures look forth potentially. But this is not the summit of divine union so it is not the soul’s abiding place. It must be clearly understood that the soul has got to die to all the activity connoted by the divine nature if she is to enter the divine essence where God is altogether idle; this highest prototype of soul beholds without means the essence of the Godhead absolutely free from activity”. Having gone “...out of her created nature and out of her uncreated nature wherein she discovers herself in her eternal prototype, and entering into the divine nature, [the soul] still fails to grasp the Kingdom of God, then recognizing that there-into no creature [even principally considered, nor any distinct quality] can ever get, she forfeits her very self and going her way seeks God no more; she thus dies her highest death”.

“‘The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His own way’ [Pr. viii, 22]. God possesses all things in His Godhead’s way, not in the soul’s way, for God never received creature nor can creature ever get to Him as creature...while it is the case with thee that thou lettest not go thine own self altogether to drown in the bottomless sea of the Godhead, verily thou canst not know this divine death...Now when the soul has lost herself in every way...she finds herself to be the very thing she had vainly sought. Herself the soul finds in the supernal image wherein God really is in all His Godhead, where He is the Kingdom in Himself. There the soul recognizes her own beauty. Thence she must go out to get into her very Self and realize that she and God are one felicity: the Kingdom which, without seeking, she has found”.

“It may be asked what discipline best enables the soul to reach this end? I answer: This, that the soul remain in death, not shrinking from death. St. Paul says: ‘Christ was obedient to the Father even unto the death of the cross. Therefore he hath exalted him and hath given him a

³⁸ Cf Origen, *Commentary on John* (i, 16), cited above; also Jn. iii, 13; x, 9; and xvii, 3; and Eph. iv, 13 (cited above).

name that is above every name'. And I say about the soul: if she remain obedient to God in death he will exalt her likewise and will give her a name above every name. For as the Godhead is apart from name and nameless so also the soul, like God, is nameless, for she is the very same as he is. Christ said: 'Henceforth I call you not servants but friends, for all that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you'...There [in the Kingdom of God] the soul is God, using and enjoying all things Godfashion. There the soul no more receives either from God or from creatures, for she is what she contains and takes all things from her own. Soul and Godhead are one [soul as supreme Self, in her ultimate identity]: there the soul finds that she is the Kingdom of God".

"...All creatures speak [of] God. And why do they not speak of the Godhead? Everything in the Godhead is one, and of that there is nothing to be said. God works, the Godhead does no work, there is nothing to do...God and Godhead are as different as earth is from heaven..." There the Kingdom of God is identical with the "...hidden Godhead of pure gnosis whereof no man durst speak...free as the Godhead in its non-existence".

This is the final *apokatastasis*, a full and complete reintegration in the highest Principle and an absolute universalisation and suppression of every limitation, the Kingdom of God which "...is for none but the thoroughly dead". And this is the ultimate appeal and sanction of the Gospel and the New Covenant; though to be sure, an appeal and sanction which in no way annual or vitiate any of the legitimate lesser vocations of the Christian tradition, but Which rather fill them with all the meaning they can possibly contain.

"Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and to men the perfection of the desire for God".

ABBREVIATIONS FOR SOURCES CITED IN THE TEXT

Ap.—Apocalypse; Chr.—Chronicles; Col.—Colossians; Cor.—Corinthians; Dt.—Deuteronomy; Eph.—Ephesians; Ez.—Ezekiel; Ex.—Exodus; Gn.—Genesis; Hos.—Hosea; Is.—Isaiah; Jg.—Judges; In.—Gospel according to St. John; Kg.—Kings; Lk. Gospel according to St. Luke; Mk.—Gospel according to St. Mark; Mt.—Gospel according to St. Matthew; Num.—Numbers; Php.—Philippians; Pr. Proverbs; Ps.—Psalms; Rm.—Romans; Sm.—Samuel; Zc. Zechariah; Zp.—Zephaniah.

SCG—Summa contra gentiles; ST—Summa theologica.

(Original editorial inclusion that followed the essay:)

On no account let anyone suppose that he is far from God because of his infirmities or faults or for any other reason. If at any time thy great shortcomings make an outcast of thee and thou canst not take thyself as being nigh to God, take it then at any rate that he is nigh to thee, for it is most mischievous to set God at a distance. Man goes far away or near but God never goes far off; he is always standing close at hand, and even if he cannot stay within he goes no further than the door.

Meister Eckhart.