

The Incarnation, the fact that God became Man, is a revelation both of God and of Man. In order to understand, therefore, how fully man is revealed through the Incarnation, one must rediscover how fully God is revealed. The gods of antiquity, of philosophical discourse, were always images of the greatness of man or of the greatness which man could perceive or imagine in a superhuman being. What no religion, no philosophy, ever dared present was a god who becomes man, suffers and empties himself of his splendor in order to become fully and completely accessible to us. In the Incarnation we discover that our God, the Creator of the world, the Beauty that surpasses all beauty, the Truth and the only Reality of the world, — that this God chooses, in an act of love, so to identify himself with the destinies of mankind, so to take upon himself total and ultimate responsibility for his creative act, that all the beauty of the world is called forth, while at the same time he gives the world the freedom that destroys and distorts this beauty. This God who chooses to become frail, vulnerable, defenseless and contemptible in the eyes of all those who believe only in strength, in power and in visible temporal victory — such a god a devout, believing man could not have invented. To conceive of a god in such terms would have been blasphemy. And yet, God reveals himself as such: vulnerable, defenseless, frail and contemptible. This is the folly of the Cross of which St Paul speaks. And the folly is not only ours; it is the folly of God as well. A certain number of mystics speak of divine Love as being folly, because to offer love to creatures like us, who may be incapable of responding, who may reject it and trample it underfoot as the swine trample the pearl of great price in the parable, is folly. But then, as St Paul says, the folly of God is wiser than the wisdom of men. If we are to speak of the revelation of man in all his splendor through Christ, we must realize that this can only be accomplished by a God who accepts to become defenseless. Angelus Silesius, the German mystic, says: 'I am as great as God; he is as small as I'. We need to think about what this means. On the other hand, as I have said, the Incarnation is also a revelation of the greatness of man. It is a revelation of the fact that man was created by God in such a way that, not only in spirit, but also in soul and in body, he can be not only spirit-bearing, but God-bearing, He can not only see God face to face, be a friend to God, stand in the deepest possible relation of obedience and communion, but can also, in the daring and inspiring words of St Peter, become a partaker of the divine nature, can become, even while remaining man, what God is in his nature, just as God, being God by nature, becomes man by participation. The union is equally complete — and glorious — in both cases.

The Incarnation is not only a revelation of man in his greatness, in his divine potential; it is also a revelation in new terms of the potential of the created physical world. For if the divinity of Christ could unite itself to the body of the Incarnation, it means that the material body of the Incarnation was capable of such unity with God himself — not with the Divine as a notion, not with the Divine as simply a grace of God bestowed upon us — that, with God, it can be truly divinized. If this is true for the body of Christ, then it is true for all the material reality of this world. It means that the words of St Paul, when he says that a day will come when God shall be 'all in all,' must be taken in

the most realistic sense. God, the divine Presence, will pervade all things created — all humanity, and all the created world. The world will then become the glorious vesture of God, the body of God, the Incarnation of a God who will always be beyond his world, but who will become immanent to everything in this world, to all he has created.

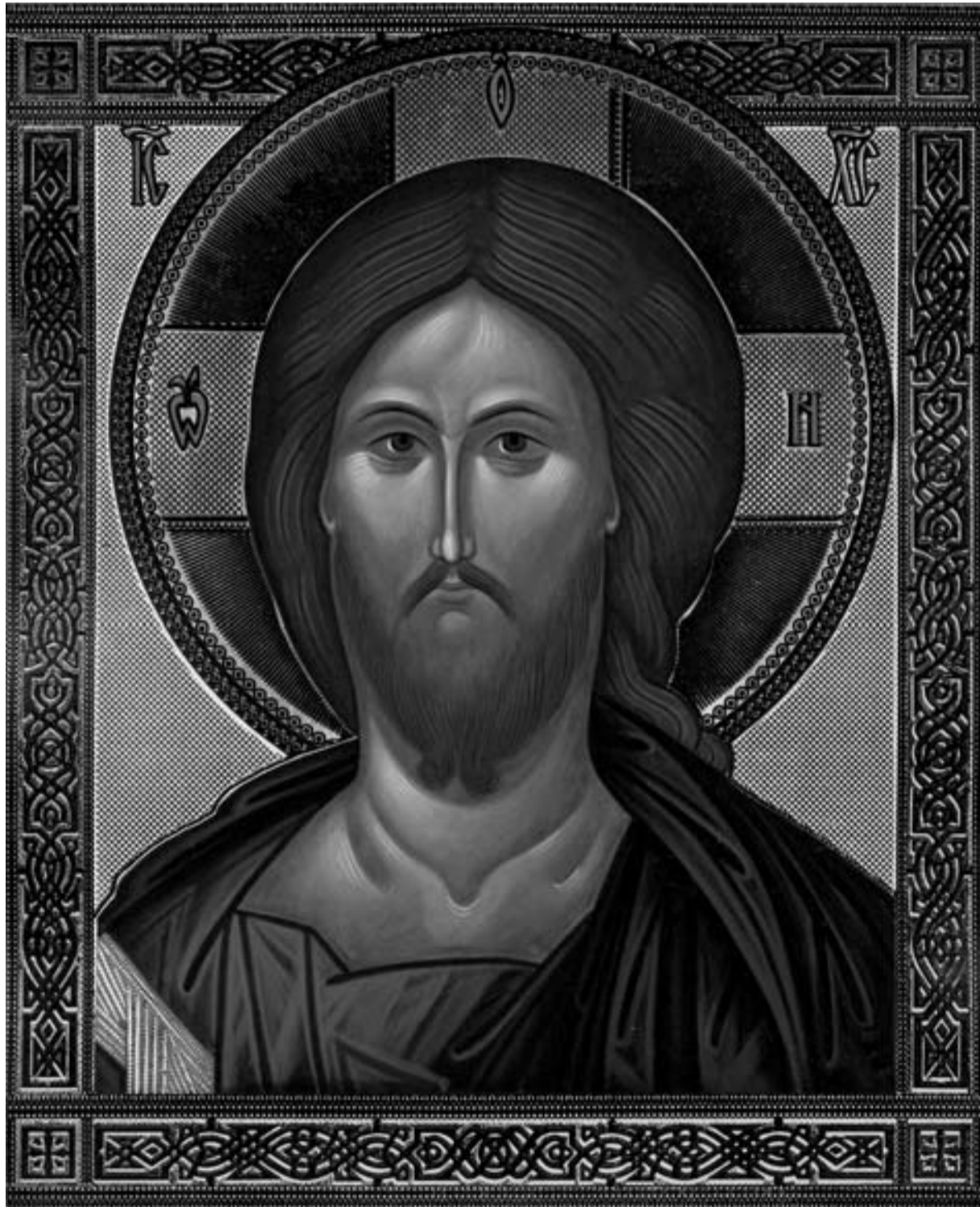
rate the one from the other.' This is the dogma of Chalcedon. Their unity is such that, to use St Maximus' own words, 'one can now burn with iron and cut with fire'. The image of fire and a created object leads us straight into the biblical imagery of God as fire, straight to the God who reveals himself in the burning bush. Father Lev Gillet writes that the fire of God burns only what

is evil and does not feed itself on what it sets aflame. It transforms it into a flaming bush without reducing it to ashes. This is what happens in the Incarnation. God, the divine Fire, comes upon a human being, and it is this human entity which is made into a plenitude of Being, without any change in its nature. This takes place in exactly the same way as the bread becomes the Body of Christ and the wine becomes the Blood of Christ in the liturgy. They still remain themselves, because God does not annihilate his creature in the process in order to make it into something else, something essentially different. Incidentally, part of the temptation which the devil offered to Christ was just this. 'You have created stones,' he said, 'now undo your act of creation and make them into bread. You have created bread and wine, undo your act of creation, annihilate their very reality to make them something different'. No. God makes things different by raising them to an eschatological state. In the first prayer of the Canon of the Liturgy we say: 'Thou didst not cease to do all things, until thou hadst brought us up to heaven and bestowed on us thy Kingdom which is to come.' Logically this is absurd. How can we participate now in something which is ahead of us? And yet, this is eschatological reality: things final and decisive are already here, because God has come into the world, and because the world is no longer a world that stands face to face with God. It is a world in which God is immanent, even while he remains the transcendent God. And this is the God in whom we believe. At the end of the ninth chapter of the Book of Job, in verse 33, Job describes his despairing conflict with God and says: 'Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both'. There was indeed no one who could take a step that would bring him between the two conflicting parties, between God Almighty and man in his frailty — and simultaneously in his purity of intention and, therefore, in his righteousness. There was no one who could be the equal

of both, who could step into the conflict, put his hand on the Lord's shoulder and on man's shoulder, not to divide them, but to bring together what was severed. This is achieved in the Incarnation. In the Incarnation this conflict between God and man becomes a confrontation within one Person, a Person who is simultaneously, and equally, both man and God. In that Person there is a unity which is God and man, the hypostasis of Christ, in which all that is human is confronted with all that is God's so that the conflict is resolved from within by the inner tragedy and victory of the unity between these two. From within the perspective of the Incarnation one can see what the word intercession really signifies. The word intercede means 'take a step' that brings one to the heart of a conflict. That is what Christ does. But at the same time he unites, he brings all the conflict within himself and resolves it there. And this is why, having resolved it within himself, he can resolve it for the whole world, for men, for history and for the cosmos.

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Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh

CHRIST — TRUE AND PERFECT MAN



In the sacraments we already have a vision of this very act. When we say that this bread and this wine become the Body and Blood of Christ we see, in eschatological terms, what bread and wine, and all matter represented by them, are called to be: the Body of Christ and the Blood of Christ. Thus the Incarnation gives us not only a historical image of a relationship between God the Savior and us. It gives us a vast panorama, a vision of what the whole world is called to be in God: 'I in them and thou in me. I in thee, Father, and they in me.' Saint Paul says, our life is already 'hid with Christ in God'. When we think of the Incarnation and of Christ the Man, we must be careful not to fall into the heresy of dividing the Godhead from humanity, of looking at them separately instead of seeing them in their oneness. This oneness was beautifully expressed by St Maximus the Confessor, who says that the union between the humanity and divinity of Christ is like the union of fire and iron that takes place when you plunge a sword of iron into a furnace until it glows with fire. 'Fire and iron,' he says, 'are united now in an indistinguishable way. You can no longer sepa-

