

# MONASTICISM AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

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“The East differs from the West even in matters in which it does not differ at all.” This famous saying of Mgr A. Szeptycky seems to hold eminently true of monasticism.<sup>1</sup>

True, one could argue that, though the tensions between East and West have been many, they have not seldom been healed by monks whose names have come to symbolize mediation. Such is the case with St John Chrysostom (ca. 347-407), for whose sake Rome, acting on the information of Cassian, was willing to break off with Constantinople. Such is St Maximus the Confessor (ca 580-662), one of the greatest theologians of the Byzantine Church, who gave Rome, and received there, the strongest backing. Such were, too, Sts Cyril (827-869) and Methodius (ca 825-885), recently made patrons of Europe because of their excellent contacts, at a time of incipient schism, with both pope and patriarch, and who have been aptly described as “Orientals by birth, Byzantines by citizenship, Greeks by nationality, Romans by their mission, Slavs by the fruits of their apostolate...”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, one might even argue that

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## Abbreviations employed in this study:

DIP = G. Pelliccia and G. Rocca (ed.), *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione*. V. (Edizioni Paoline; Roma 1978).

HAUSHERR = I. Hausherr, *Études de spiritualité orientale*. (Gregorian University Press; Rome 1969).

ORDENSREGELN = H.U. von Balthasar (Hg.), *Die großen Ordensregeln*. (Benzinger Verlag; Einsiedeln 1961).

1. Quoted in G. Tsébricov, *L'esprit de l'Orthodoxie*. (Collection no.7; Irénikon 1927) 9.
2. These are the words of Pius XI in an Apostolic Letter of 13 February 1927; see M. Lacko, *I santi*

what East and West have doubtlessly in common is monasticism: sprung suddenly as if by miracle in late third-century Egypt, it spread just as quickly through St Athanasius' *Life of St Antony* and the Alexandrian patriarch's own sojourns in the West, Cassian's travels and writings and St Jerome, who made available a translation of the first rules.<sup>3</sup>

Precisely on this point, once we start delving deeper into history for an answer, we find ourselves before the age-long dilemma: what came first — the hen or the egg? Monasticism in the classical form which would subsequently characterize it or the partition of the religious world in an Eastern and a Western half? The separation of Christianity into a Western and an Eastern Church may be largely traced back to the division of the Roman Empire into West and East, but it is notoriously hard to say when this division really started to exist. First attempts to latinize the Roman Church appear under Pope St Victor I (189-ca 199), but Greek was still in use in the liturgy at Rome under Pope St Damasus (366-389). The definite political division of the Roman Empire in East and West took place in 395 when Emperor Theodosius died, but this had been heralded through the administrative division of the empire under Diocletian in 286.<sup>4</sup>

*Cirillo e Metodio: vincolo tra Costantinopoli e Roma,* in *Pontifical Lateran University/Catholic University of Lublin (ed.), The Common Christian Roots of the Eastern Nations, II*, (Le Monnier, Florence 1982) 37-42.

3. How cautious one has to be with these generalizations may be gathered from recent scholarship. Doubtlessly, there was a pre-monastic form of asceticism which, as in the case of virgins, already enjoyed a measure of official recognition by the Church. As far as the exact origins of monasticism as an institution are concerned we are still in the dark on account of the dearth of documents. See R. Solzbacher, *Mönche, Pilger und Sarazenen*. (Telos-Verlag; Altenberge 1989) 85; also: P. du Bourguet, "Pierres d'attente dans l'Égypte antique pour le monachisme chrétien," in R.-G. Coquin (ed.), *Mélanges Antoine Guillaumont: Contributions à l'Étude des Christianismes Orientaux*, (Patrick Cramer; Genève 1988) 45; L. Abramowski, "Vertritt die Syrische Fassung die ursprüngliche Gestalt der Vita Antonii? Eine Auseinandersetzung mit der These Draguets," in R.-G. Coquin (ed.) *Ibid.*, pp.55-56; According to J. Gribomont, the primacy of Egypt and of Mesopotamian Syria refers in the main to the chronological priority with which certain models respected for their discernment of spirits, such as St Antony and St Pachomius (+ca. 346), were able to assert themselves; see J. Gribomont, "Monachismo Orientale," *DIP*, 1684. As far as the origin of monasticism in the West is concerned, it is all shrouded in darkness. G.M. Columbás, in *El monacado primitivo, I*. (La Editorial Católica; Madrid 1974) 211-212, suggests that it was probably an indigenous product, a re-organization of the life of virginity many led in the West, even if one should not ignore the great influence exercised by the spiritual writings on monasticism coming from the East; see also *Ibid.*, 211-215. For later influences see: B. Hamilton and P.A. McNulty, "*Oriente lumen et magistra latinitas*: Greek influences on Western Monasticism (900-1100)," in *Le Millénaire du Mont Athos, 963-1963. Études et Mélanges, I*, (Chevetogne 1963) 181-216.
4. See W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, (Longman and Todd; London 1984) 452-53.

Therefore, during the first part of St Antony's long life (ca 251-356), when he was drawing crowds of hermits around him, thus giving rise to a new tangible form of the absolute search for God, Emperor Diocletian made his famous re-organization of the Roman Empire, on the basis of which Constantine the Great was soon to create Constantinople, and from which the Byzantine Church would ultimately arise. And so one might as well ask whether the first organization of monasticism which caught the eye of the historians did not correspond to the general movement of drifting apart of two blocks known as East and West — whether, in other words, the rise and diffusion of monasticism in the East was not a symptom of breakdown and separation, a movement soon to find enthusiastic adepts in the West, but also bound to develop on considerably independent lines, thus deepening the gulf of separation.

History can help us further here only if we see it in its depth dimension, that is, as the history of concrete beings in their all-emanating relationships, and not as an abstract record of politically isolated events. For this we may have recourse to one of the basic insights of Eastern theology, according to which dogma and spirituality form a unity. Spirituality is lived dogma.<sup>5</sup> Then since dogma reflects God's revelation and his design for all humanity throughout history, it encompasses the depth of life in its entirety and gives us a clue to discover what has been essential in the factual historical process. Consequently, in trying to figure out the role of mediation monasticism has to play we may follow just this lead: the point where dogma as the living doctrine of the Church and spirituality as the life of this teaching are seen as parallels which together form a unity.

Our reflections will thus concentrate on theology, taking this itself to be a prime medium through which monasticism creates bridges. [1] In the first section of this paper we shall try to reach the *theological* starting-point of monasticism in order to recuperate its original image, which is truly unitive in scope. [2] The further trans-cultural role which monasticism has to play in order to mediate between East and West presupposes a confrontation between the unitive vision underlying monasticism and the respective contemporary cultures, the theme of the second part of the paper. This contraposition seems at first to lead to insoluble divisions, but turns out to be a beneficent theological clash which may be called the "iconoclasm of the icon." [3] Failure to live up to this shock understood as opening oneself to the God who may be symbolized but is beyond images accounts for crisis, understood precisely as loss of the primordial image and, more generally, of the theology of image or symbol, the

5. "Dogme et spiritualité orientale," HAUSHERR, 145.176.

theme of the third part. [4] Finally, in the last section, the recuperation of the original image of monasticism is seen in line with retrieving the monastic dimension of theology, whereby the underlying unitive vision of monasticism inevitably finds expression in the pluralism of its concrete forms.<sup>6</sup>

A word about our way of proceeding is here in order. The scope of the present paper could be narrowed down by restricting it to a comparison between Eastern and Western monasticism, thus excluding from the latter those religious institutes which are not strictly monastic, since there are no non-monastic religious in Orthodoxy. When Dom Lambert Beauduin, in 1925, founded the monastery of Amay-sur-Meuse, later transferred to Chevetogne, he had precisely in mind the proximity of Western monks in the strict sense of the word to their Eastern colleagues. It is to be noted, however, that in Modern Greek the word for monk is used in a more inclusive sense, no distinction being made, for example, between Western monks and religious. This, in turn, suggests an analogously inclusive approach on our part, and not only by adopting this use. Then by further avoiding to discuss monasticism exclusively from the viewpoint of the three classical vows, we hope to exploit some patristic insights into monasticism as a universal model of the quest for unity, and thus useful also for the East-West dialogue. That the call to the religious life, as distinguished from that to perfection, is a special vocation with a specific identity, and one indispensable for the Church withal, is not thereby called into question, but it is not the theme of this paper.

### *1 Recuperating the Original Image of Monasticism*

In our attempt to reach the beginning of monasticism theologically, that is, its original form or image, we are at once faced with a number of difficulties. There is, for example, the difficulty of circumscribing in a definition the essence of Christian monasticism. We may, however, easily understand why: shot through and through by the Spirit, whose victory over matter it proclaims, monasticism is hardly amenable to a neat juridical definition, without the accompanying temptation of introducing surreptitiously the victory of the letter over the spirit.<sup>7</sup>

6. See F.-E. Morard, "Monachos, Moine: Histoire du terme grec jusqu'au 4e siècle. Influences bibliques et gnostiques," *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 20 (1973) 323-411; also: T. Fry (ed.), *The Rule of St Benedict*, (The Liturgy Press; Collegeville, Minnesota 1980) 301-321. For the problem of the pluralism of monastic forms see R. Hostie, *Vie et mort des ordres religieux*, (Desclée de Brouwer, Paris 1972).

7. See P. Miquel, "Signification et motivations du monachisme," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*,

From the viewpoint, then, of an observer who wants to take stock of all the pertinent phenomena, the continuum between forms of pre-Christian, non-Christian and Christian monasticism proves baffling. Among the constants may be mentioned, in the case of solitaries, the withdrawal from normal social intercourse, sexual abstinence, prayer and specific ascetical practices. For those living in communion may be added a rule, written or at least transmitted orally and whose observance implies the master-disciple relationship, a formal initiation to the particular life-style of complete dedication, profession as a sign of incorporation within the community, and possessing things in common. In a hierarchy of importance poverty, chastity and obedience seem to form the basis of every monasticism, and not just of related phenomena.<sup>8</sup> All the more provoking becomes, in view of this, the question: in which sense can we say that Christian monasticism has to do with Christ at all, let alone assert that He is the ultimate founder of Christian monasticism?

It has been claimed that, by identity (or near-identity) of structures, it is the motivation which makes Christian monasticism specifically Christian.<sup>9</sup> Since Christians become monks for the love of Christ, there would be no Christian monasticism without the Christ-event.<sup>10</sup> This answer cannot satisfy entirely. True, without Christ's coming Christian monasticism would not exist, but the motivation alone does not render justice to what Christ did "for our sake and for our salvation." After Christ, the reality itself has been, from a Christian viewpoint, changed. Or to speak with the Eastern Fathers, Christ has restored the tarnished image according to which God had created human beings.<sup>11</sup> The Christian monk as such embodies Christ's own life-style at its deepest, in the mode of the restoration of the image accomplished by Jesus Christ. Since spirituality lives dogma as it is, in its fullness, the monastic call re-enacts the whole of Christian dogma. So though Christian monasticism is very similar to non-Christian types in structure, it is at the same time also very different from them in content.

(Beauchesne; Paris 1980) 1547-1548. Schmemmann describes in eschatological language the incapacity of the world to "absorb" (and this surely includes neat definitions) monasticism, which is precisely the salt for the world; see A. Schmemmann, *The Historical road to Eastern Orthodoxy*, (Harvill Press; London 1963) 108-109.

8. See J. Leclercq, "Fenomenologia del monachesimo," *DIP*, 1674-1675.

9. See *Ibid*, *DIP*, 1677.

10. See *Ibid*, *DIP*, 1678-1679.

11. See J. Gross, *La divinisation du chrétien d'après les Pères grecs*, (Gabalda; Paris 1938) 207-210, for St Athanasius.

We may now look for possible hints concerning the initial design of monasticism in a beginning known to us through faith and elaborated by theology. God created the first human pair in His own image and likeness (Gen 1,26-27) and placed them in paradise where they enjoyed personal integrity. There existed for them no such thing as separation of *eros*, or sexual attraction, and *agape*, or attraction for divine matters, because everything was transparent. In this sense, to distinguish between the secular and the religious state would have been meaningless.<sup>12</sup> The prohibition to eat from the fruit of the tree was only an exclamation-mark meant to draw attention to the inner hierarchy of love, which made of every eating a "Eucharist" of divine love.<sup>13</sup> Through sin the inner unity was destroyed, and — to speak with St Irenaeus — the likeness to God in grace was lost, even if the inborn image was retained.<sup>14</sup> In paradise, submission to God meant that man and woman were set to rule over creation in God's name, but after sin Adam and Eve were embarrassed by their own presence, because they realized, in an inchoate way, what a difference there now came into being between fertility and virginity. Like Mary, Eve's fertility prior to sin would not have impaired her virginity.<sup>15</sup>

But in order to form an idea of what God really had in mind in creating us we should turn to those who have best fulfilled His plan. This Mary, the Mother of God, accepted without any reserve. Her yes pronounced in the Spirit reflects, while at the same time surpasses, both states in life, motherhood and virginity.<sup>16</sup> In Mary we simply encounter a touch of paradise of the first among the redeemed. When we come to the Redeemer Himself, His concrete mode of existence becomes itself the definitive revelation of His Father's project of love for humanity. Christ was not simply obedient, but by His very nature he was

12. H.U. von Balthasar, "Vom Ordensstand," ORDENSREGELN, 11-12.

13. See *Ibid.*, 12. Here is the beautiful comment of J. Zizioulas: "The eucharistic experience implies that life is imparted and actualized only in an event of communion, and thus creation and existence in general can be founded only upon this living God of communion. Thus, the divine act that brings about creation implies *simultaneously*, the Father, the Son and the Spirit (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* V, 28:4; cf. IV, *Praef.* 4);" in: J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, (Darton Longman and Todd; London 1985) 82.

14. See H.U. von Balthasar, *Ibid.*, ORDENSREGELN, 12-13.

15. See *Idem*, *Christlicher Stand*, (Johannes Verlag; Einsiedeln 1977) 71-75. In the famous icon of the dormition of St Ephrem in the monastery of St Nicholas at the Meteora, we see, among other vignettes from the monastic life, a monk who comes to the burial on a lion's back, an illustration of paraisaical lack of fear. See E.N. Trubetskoi, *Icons: Theology in Color*, (St Vladimir's Press; N. York 1973) 29-30.

16. See H.U. von Balthasar, "Vom Ordensstand," ORDENSREGELN, 14.

obedience in person: His special truth consisted in making Himself the Word of another, that of His Father.<sup>17</sup> Christ was not simply poor, but showed how little possessive He was of His divine rank that He divested Himself of it. To give status to the pariahs of existence and make them partake of His riches He embraced poverty as His new position in being (Phil 2,5-11; 2Cor 8,9).

It is in this new form of existence Jesus lived out for us that monasticism finds its justification. By monasticism we understand, to begin with, the single-minded endeavour to pursue the call to perfection. The New Testament knows of several occasions when Christ called upon people to follow Him. It is well conversant with special vocations, not meant for everybody, such as the call of the Apostles. Nor did Jesus accept just anyone in His retinue, even when they entreated Him to do so, but only whomsoever it pleased Him to choose (see Mark 5,18-20; 10, 29-30).<sup>18</sup> In contrast to this, the call to perfection is incumbent on all without exception (see Mt 5,48; Luke 6,36; 14,25-27; Lev 19,2). Thus we see that, whereas there are special vocations reserved for some, the call to perfection is not one of them.

Indeed, the sacrament of the religious life is baptism. It coincides with the way in which the Christian comes to share in Christ's life, death and resurrection. In this sense the religious life has sometimes been called a second baptism. Since the sacrament of baptism cannot be administered validly more than once, only sectarians like the Messalians could take this comparison literally and draw themselves away from the Great Church pretending to be beings apart on the basis of a second baptism.<sup>19</sup> So when we say that the sacrament of monks with vows is baptism, the means instituted by Christ for admission into His Kingdom, this is another way of inculcating that the duty to become perfect is addressed to everyone.

In turn, if we have to move on and describe what distinguishes the monk from others without vows, we have to be in the first place careful not to identify him simply with the perfect man.<sup>20</sup> Perfection consists in possessing to a high

17. See Idem, "Vom Ordensstand," 9.10.

18. See Ibid, 18-21.

19. See "Vocation chrétienne et vocation monastique selon les Pères," HAUSHERR, 458-459; H. Rahner, *Symbole der Kirche: Die Ekklesiologie der Väter*, (Otto Müller Verlag; Salzburg 1964) 557-558.

20. Already A.v. Harnack reports that when he defined the monk as the perfect Christian he received many protests from Catholics; see A.v. Harnack, *Das Mönchtum. Seine Ideale und seine Geschichte*, (Verlag A. Töpelmann; Giessen 1921) 6.

degree the theological virtues, i.e. those virtues which have God as their direct object, namely, faith, hope and charity, of which the greatest is charity (see John 2,5; 4,12; 1Cor 13,8-13; Col 3,12-17). Or better: perfection consists in being possessed by God, when we believe, hope and love. Everybody can attain that and should try to. Well says St John Chrysostom that "Christ did not make a difference [between those living in the world and monks]. He has not invented the expressions 'layperson' and 'monk'. It is our human way of thinking which has made us draw this distinction, but it is not to be found in Scripture."<sup>21</sup>

It is now possible to distinguish between that perfection which is everybody's concern and the life or state of perfection which characterizes the life of the monk with vows. The difference between both consists not so much in the goal (that of perfection), as in the means to reach that goal. Monks have chosen for themselves the best means to attain a perfection which is everybody's duty to pursue.<sup>22</sup> With the fathers of the Church we may distinguish between "virtues" (ἀρεταί or ἔργα) and the "instruments of virtues" (ἐργαλεία ἀρετῶν). The virtues are the same (see 1Tim 6,8-9; 1Cor 7,29), the difference lies only in the instruments, and even this is relative. That there are means superior to those of the monk in the strict sense of the word is shown by martyrdom, for which monasticism is considered to be a substitute, not the other way round.<sup>23</sup>

We are now in a position to see how unitive the very idea of monasticism is. It is meant to reenact God's original project of a humanity at peace, i.e. at one, with itself, an integrated humanity. It reflects anything but a two-level morality, one for laity without vows and one for religious. On the contrary, the monastic ideal nurtures itself on the one goal which is unity on all levels, and especially unity between God and man, a unity expressed best of all in

21. St John Chrysostom, *Adversus oppugnatores vitae monasticae* 3, PG 47, 37-38. Compare this with: K. Rahner, "Über die evangelischen Räte," *Schriften zur Theologie VII*, (Benzinger Verlag; Einsiedeln 1971) 430.
22. See "Vocation chrétienne et vocation monastique selon les Pères," HAUSHERR, 425.459-462. See also St John Chrysostom, "Adv. oppugn. vitae monasticae," I.III, 15 (PG 47, 372-373); A. Theodorou, "Das Mönchtum der orthodoxen Ostkirche," in P. Brastotis (Hg.), *Die orthodoxe Kirche in griechischer Sicht, II*, (Evangelisches Verlagwerk; Stuttgart 1960) 83ff.
23. E.g. St John Damascene, *De Virtute et Vitio*, PG 95, 85-98; see "Vocation chrétienne et vocation monastique selon les Pères," HAUSHERR, 408; T. Špidlik, "Das östliche Mönchtum und das östliche Frömmigkeitsleben," in F.v. Ivánka/J. Tyciak/P. Wiertz (Hg.), *Handbuch der Ostkirchenkunde*, (Patmos Verlag; Düsseldorf 1971) 559-60; E. Sauser, *So nahe steht uns die Ostkirche*, (Verlag Josef Knecht; Frankfurt a.M. 1980) 112-118.

mysticism.<sup>24</sup> This holds even more so in view of Christ's redemptive refurbishing of the image, in which He mediated between all divisions running through humanity.<sup>25</sup> If already the original state of man and woman consisted in unity and integrity, one would be led to expect that the monk's mission cannot consist in divisiveness, but rather, especially after Christ's restoration, in healing wounds and promoting unity.

## 2. *Shock of the Past*

At once we find ourselves before a paradox. When monasticism organized itself in a way that society at large had to take notice of it, it manifested itself as a mass-movement that separated itself from society and moved into the desert. There was an element of protest right from the start.<sup>26</sup> And throughout its history monasticism was thoroughly capable of protesting. Sometimes it was against emperors who thought they could tamper freely with the faith, as in the age of iconoclasm; at other times it was monks themselves who fomented discord.<sup>27</sup> Protest even has its place in the rule of Pseudo-Basil in what is called the practice of "reproving the heretic".<sup>28</sup> Indeed, if we consider the prime analogate of perfection, that is to say, martyrdom, it seems as if perfection, far

24. See O. Clément, *Questions sur l'homme*, (Éd. Stock; Paris 1972) 96: "Martyrdom... is the mystic state par excellence;" also: S. Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, (Centenary Press; London 1935) 177-178: "Orthodoxy knows no different standards of morality; it applies the same standard to all the situations in life. Neither does it recognize any distinction between two moralities, one secular and the other monastic; these are only differences of quantity, of degree, and not of nature. ... Each one should be a monk and ascetic in his heart." As I. Hausherr points out in his *Direction spirituelle en Orient autrefois*, (OCA 144; Roma 1955) 291-292, the division of Christians in the perfect and the good, such as it is found, for example, in the *Liber Graduum*, is heretical.
25. See L. Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of St Maximus The Confessor*, (St Vladimir's Press; New York 1985) 80-91, where Christ's fivefold mediation to heal a divided universe are discussed.
26. It would be mistaken, however, to reduce the origin of monasticism to a matter of (sociological) protest only. See G.M. Columbás, *El monacado primitivo*, I, 36-39; H. Bacht, *Neue Erkenntnisse über den Ursprung des Mönchtums*, "in A. Rauch u. P. Imhof (Hg.), *Basilius: Heiliger der Einen Kirche*, (Verlagsgesellschaft Gerhard Kaffke mbH; München 1981) 137-142.
27. Eutyches in the East and Pelagius in the West were both monks; see H. Bacht, *Die Rolle des orientalischen Mönchtums in den kirchenpolitischen Auseinandersetzungen um Chalkedon (431-519)*, "in H. Bacht und A. Grillmeier (Hg.), *Das Konzil von Chalkedon, II*, (Echter Verlag; Würzburg 1953) 193-314.
28. See PG 31, 649-650; "Spiritualité monacale et unité chrétienne," HAUSHERR, 322-323.329. The text in Scripture to which this refers is the *Epistle to Titus* 3,10: "Warn a heretic once or twice; after that have nothing to do with him." It is to be noted that Pseudo-Basil left out the mitigating circumstances and used a harsher word than the original.

from contributing to idyllic peace, is on a collision course with society.

No wonder, then, that the appeals to perfection the New Testament enunciates are not seldom couched, even when they are addressed to all Christians without reserve, in the language of conflict and contrast. In what has been called the first letter of the East to the West St Paul writes:

And now, brothers, I beg you through the mercy of God to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, so that you may judge what is God's will, what is good, pleasing and perfect.<sup>29</sup>

The word used to relay "non-conformity," μη σνσχηματιζεσθε, is derivative of "schema," a monastic word which brings to mind monks' habits: *mikroschemes* and *megaloschemes*. But for all its symbolic value, the habit, unless accompanied by a greater progress in union with God, in *deification*, here suggested in the word for radical transformation, μεταμορραονσθε, does not make the monk and remains superficial.<sup>30</sup>

Since non-conformity accrues content from the object on which it refuses to pattern itself, we would be well-advised at this juncture to reflect non-conformity as a form of counter-culture. A counter-culture usually holds up as values factors which go counter to those of the established society. But even these deviations or alternative values need not be destructive, but may thoroughly be worthy of the name of culture.

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action.<sup>31</sup>

29. Rom 12,1-2; translation of: *The New Testament of The New American Bible*, (Image Books; New York 1970) 350.
30. See I. Hausherr, *Renouveau de vie dans le Christ Jésus*, (Éd. P. Lethielleux; Paris 1969) 29-34.
31. A.I. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, (Mass., University Press; Cambridge 1952) 357.

This well-rounded definition of culture underlines the force engendered by patterns which establish themselves as traditions, but somehow it does not mention the motivation — the reason why people spend their lives writing books, planning buildings and what not. Revealing, in this regard, is S. Freud's study, *Culture and Its Discontents*.<sup>32</sup> The leitmotiv recurs in one form or another: human beings oft undertake arduous enterprises spurred on by their inferiority complex (A. Adler). The point is however, that culture, to a large extent, is a negative concept because one's drive to cultivate oneself and one's environment depends in part on one's attitude towards death and life. And in this respect culture, left to its own devices, can only grope in the dark, letting down the seeker completely.

In spite of the sociological and psychological deviation of some of these categories, which are thus incapable of doing justice to what monasticism is in the last analysis, they can help order the phenomenon of the religious life within the ambit of its social relevance. In this respect, monasticism would be useless, if it simply were in complete harmony with the prevailing norms of society at large. Rather, it was meant to stand out some distance from them and point out to the Christian alternative. If it lives to its ideal, monasticism functions as a corrective against false models and as an aspiration which others who cannot join the ranks may nonetheless seek to realize at least in part.<sup>33</sup> In this sense monasticism is a counter-culture: it shows the complete relativity of culture in comparison with spirituality. This relativity, however, does not mean that culture and spirituality need to be opposed to each other in principle.

To illustrate the counter-cultural role of monasticism: St Benedict, patriarch of Western monasticism, faced a society in which the old Roman *ordo* was crumbling down leaving the barbarians free to play with a people now prostrate because of war and scarcity. St Benedict is well-known for having imprinted *stabilitas loci* on his monks. But, in his warnings against the "gyrovagus" or wandering monk it was the uprooting of whole peoples and the insecurity it engendered that he tried to curb. To oncoming hordes he did not say "Go ahead!" but rather offered a halting-place in the monasteries, which quickly became a stabilizing force of society. The halting-places

32. The same idea is well relayed in the original German title: *Das Unbehagen mit der Kultur*.

33. J. Leclercq has shown that, while the first impulse of monasticism is a bit savage, or, we might say, centrifugal with regard to established culture, it tends to be integrated within the ambit of the official Church and becomes in turn a foyer of general and especially Church culture. See Idem, "Fenomenologia del monachesimo," 1675.1681; also his *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, (Fordham University Press; New York 1977) 45-46.

Benedictine monasteries developed into were places where the masses, fleeing in disarray, or the individual, caught in his own inner struggle, could tarry, enthralled by the cadences of liturgy, to catch glimpse of a social order impregnated by Christianity. The monks did not seek to create a counter-Church, but they held forth the ideal of an alternative society, based on more social justice in the spirit of the early Church.<sup>34</sup>

The same holds true of any other founder of a religious order, who knew how to seize the occasion God sent him his way through the crying need of the hour. Thus, St Francis did not so much preach justice for the poor, he did not found an order of charity, but he rather preached poverty to the rich, peace of mind through evangelical renunciation among the rising bourgeois classes.<sup>35</sup> Both saints exemplify what monasticism is: to curb humanity's evil tendencies by healing spiritual illness in its roots.

In Eastern theology especially, this counter-cultural way of living has been expressed in a far better way theologically by speaking of "fools for Christ's sake." In the Greek tradition this type of fool is known as *salos*, among the Russians as *yurodivy*. There is a close connection between folly for Christ's sake and monasticism; one may venture to say that, while it is incumbent on every Christian to reject reliance on his own resources and worldly wisdom (1 Cor 3,18), monasticism as such represents the institutionalization of folly as the ultimate criterion for judging human endeavour. There is an element of jest in this folly, not completely dissimilar to that of the court-jester, and there is an element of shock in it, too, the consternation people feel before the irruption of something radically novel in time.

But most of all: the fool for Christ's sake has his centre in Christ, not in himself; his action is inspired throughout by the Spirit, so that this folly is as once a criticism of his contemporaries and an anticipation of God's judgement, which will upset human wisdom and compromises. Precisely folly for Christ's sake shows the difference between mere protest for the sake of protest and the eschatological dimension of monastic culture. Far from being ego-centred, it points to the conflict, as a matter of principle, between the present world and the world to come, whose resultant is the cross, which is the way the God of

34. See W. Dirks, *La réponse des moines*, (Éditions du Seuil; Paris 1955) 97.103-104; also: L. Hunkeler, "Der heilige Benedict und seine Regel," *ORDENSREGELN*, 178-182. For a relativization of social rank through St Benedict's rule see, e.g., chapters 2, 21, 34, 63 and 64.

35. See W. Dirks, *Ibid*, 138.142.

glory manifests himself to human beings in need of purification.<sup>36</sup>

And now, for our purposes, it is important to see that folly characterizes true theology, too. Indeed, we have spoken of Christian dogma and spirituality as being parallels. Parallels can be like two poles: they can also have, besides the fact of being parallel, something else in common, e.g. they may be both painted in the same colour. Spirituality is lived dogma, dogma is spirituality become articulate, but what they have in common is this folly, which is the wisdom of the cross.

This becomes all the more poignant when we speak of monasticism as a bridge between two cultures. Then: how do cultures communicate among themselves? We are perhaps more convinced of the difficulty of such communication: in fact we speak of "cultural shock". We may here think of the difficulties an emigrant encounters in trying to adapt to his adopted country. Confronted with a new life-style, a spontaneous reaction may very well be to recoil from it in horror. But he may also succumb to an opposite temptation, namely to consider the culture of his home-country as a "negative identity" and, in a bid to adapt quickly, might as an immigrant in the USA try to be more American than the Americans, and perhaps find it advantageous to cast off his religion. These two temptations become writ large when we are dealing with the contact of cultures on a mass-scale. The cultural shock at this level may mean rioting or war, but it usually expresses itself as the concupiscence of the dominant culture, its greed to subserve all as far as it can in the less dominant cultures.<sup>37</sup>

This analysis may be applied to any religious association, be it a monastery of a religious order. The identity established at the time of its foundation may be lost and thus become a negative identity. This in turn may be due to the fact that a religious institution has outlived its purpose, once meaningful within a specific cultural setting. Judged from the vantage-point of the cross the history of the Church cannot be reduced to victors and victims in the sense of profane history nor is real success tantamount to having asserted oneself. Participating in Christ's redemptive suffering may mean here casting off elements, once

36. See J. Saward, *Perfect Fools: Folly for Christ's sake in Catholic and Orthodox Spirituality*, (University Press; Oxford 1980) 12-16; G. Spiteri, "Francesco d'Assisi: Profeta dell'incontro tra Occidente e Oriente," *Extractum ex Commentario LAURENTIANUM* 26-2-3 (Roma 1985) 673-674. For the ambivalence of the laughter of holy fools ("laughter through tears"), who laugh at what they love, see Jostein Bortnes, *Visions of Glory: Studies in Early Russian Hagiography*, (Humanities Press; New Jersey 1988) 276.

37. See E.H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, (W.W. Norton; New York 1968); B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, (Darton, Longmann & Todd; London 1973) 3-4.

effective, and now become dead lumber and it may also mean to collectively cease to exist as a group in what J.B. Metz has termed a “charismatic *ars moriendi*.” The contrary, however, is also true: re-discovering the original purpose of the order may shake a complacent Church from its ecclesiastically lethal slumbers.<sup>38</sup>

Consequently, to act as a bridgehead between various cultures monks must never become completely welded to their culture. Now this is no easy task, not only because it presupposes detachment, but also because detachment in turn makes people sensitive to cultural values. The only educated members of society were sometimes drawn from the ranks of the clergy and monks (although the opposite is also true: the education of both these groups left at times more than something to be desired). Nonetheless, the spiritually motivated opposition which again and again came to the fore against the predominance of certain cultural elements reveals that monasticism and the dominant culture, not infrequently, relate like two competing cultures. So, by his very religious constitution, the monk may be more prepared to face foreign cultures and feel more at home away from home, for example when on the missions with all the sacrifices this entailed. If monks are counter-cultural they are likely to be cross-cultural. Folly for Christ’s sake may make them feel closer to other similarly inspired monks outside their cultural, and even religious, sphere. If historical reality does not always bear up to this, it is because the concrete Church is not a pure society, but has all sorts of deficiencies to it.

Well has it been pointed out: there is nothing more similar to an Eastern saint than a Western saint; St Francis of Assisi and St Seraphim of Sarov may here be cited as an example. Such were the few to whom it was given, each in his own different cultural milieu, to take the pressure off society by taking it upon themselves, like Christ, and start realizing God’s future for humanity in the here and now. So they shocked a stagnant society into opening up to progress and so be forged ever closer to the original project God had in mind for society at large.<sup>39</sup> Progress, in turn, means shock, not so much because one has to face up to a brave new world, but rather because one has lost the contact

38. See J.B. Metz, *Zeit der Orden?* (Herder, Freiburg i.Br. 1977) who sees the current crisis of vocations as functional, e.g. due to the inability of religious to release a shock within the Church by criticism of a prophetic kind.

39. In his *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, H. Bergson has shown how it is the great saints who help open up society, closed through its own force of adhesion, to the inspirations of greater justice. Mysticism redounds inevitably to the benefit of society. See *Ibid*, in A. Robinet (ed.), *Henri Bergson: Oeuvres*, (Presses Universitaires de France; Paris 1970) 1024-1029.1201-1206.

via God's constituted symbols (sacraments, saints, icons) with His blueprint.

The enthusiasm attendant on the early Church was not simply yet another instance of the joy of beginnings — new car, new job, but on the contrary, the vitality concomitant on real progress is a sharing in the Spirit of the dynamism of Pentecost — the new life in Jesus Christ.<sup>40</sup> Far from being an ideal society in a romantic sense, the early Church had perhaps harder crises to meet, was more torn by inner and outward dangers than subsequent times — which is why its discernment, recorded first of all in Scripture, has become normative for subsequent times. It is this return to the early Church which makes saints everywhere so similar. But every time the effects of tradition as a living past are loosened, the dialogue with the dead is interrupted, the dead become more dead, and, as a consequence, the living become less living, because they too must undergo *this* additional death. This is but one instance of the loss of symbol, and in general, of the weakening of the theology of the image.<sup>41</sup>

### 3 Crisis in Theology

Just as monastic non-conformism becomes vibrant in a note of protest against established mediocrity, theologians bequeath the high standards set by the Fathers by keeping alive the flame of protest which inspired them to promote conversion rather than revisionism and spiritual freedom rather than modernism.<sup>42</sup> Instead of raising their voice in protest against the idols of theological rancour, quite a number of theologians seem at a loss how to translate the unity of argument and spirituality into theological method. At times this very unity seems to constitute for some a negative identity. Already St Basil the Great complained that, instead of theology, many were indulging in “technology”,<sup>43</sup> an excessive reliance on one's own dialectical abilities

40. Note the tendentious way in which the past is evoked by R.L. Wilken in his provocative book, *The Myth of Christian Beginnings*, (Doubleday Anchor, New York 1971) 158: “The apostolic age is a creation of the Christian imagination; the very early history of Christianity appears ideal to later generations, just as anything new seems more perfect...”

41. The original meaning of “symbol,” in Greek, was “thrown together,” one thing evoked another seemingly unrelated to it, and thus brought out the underlying unity. See P. Evdokimov, *L'amour fou de Dieu*, (Éd. du Seuil; Paris 1973) 27.

42. See C.M. Martini, “La Chiesa primitiva di fronte alla conversione dei pagani: Legittimazione di un nuovo metodo missionario,” in Z. Alszeghy et alii, *Ortodossia e Revisionismo*, (Gregorian University Press; Rome 1974) 58-71.

43. See *PG* 32, 473; and: G. Galitas, “Schrift und Tradition beim hl. Basilus,” in A. Rauch and P. Imhof, *Ibid* 155-156. See also B. Sesboué, *St Basil, Contre Eunome*, I, 9, (Éd. du Cerf; Paris 1982) 200-203.

accompanied by a disrespectful way of treating the divine matters. Modern rationalism fits this description. When somebody concentrates more on form than on substance, then he easily loses sight of real priorities as well as of a unitive vision.

The crisis which affects theology is characterized by a loss of unity, of which the millennial inability to solve the East-West dilemma is only a consequence. Thus, before giving some attention to the problem of bridging Eastern and Western theologies, and the role monasticism can play in that, we have to understand that the prototypical unity to reach is that of theology itself: bridging the gaps which divide the many parts of theology which, like so many *membra disjecta*, threaten to lead an independent life on their own, independent, that is, of the life of the whole. In the wake of this we may compare Eastern and Western theology to a boat with two oars which goes forward only if both row together, but goes in circles once one seeks to go ahead without the other.

This said, it is important not to think of the cross-cultural dimension, of the bridge-function of monasticism, primarily in practical terms like travel and contacts. According to Eastern theology, praxis is not simply an application of theory, but rather both theory and praxis form a unity. Suffice it to say here that theological theory cannot but reflect on the Church's praxis and that, as an intellectual activity, it is carried out in the context of the Church's life and is thus itself a praxis. From this viewpoint, one may naturally distinguish between various activities, but only in retrospect, and precisely because these activities were already present in the original synthesis.

For the Greek Father, for example, theology does not designate in the first place a discursive knowledge of articles of faith, but an illumination of the Spirit enabling heart and mind to grasp spiritually the mystery of the Trinity and foster participation in the Trinity's life. In other words, theology was considered, even if not necessarily in formal reflection, to be both theoretical and practical in a differentiated synthesis with its fulcrum in the primacy of the spiritual. Therefore, the first function which monasticism has to exercise in bridging East and West is likewise theological, but then not theology reduced simply to an intellectual activity and discursive argument. The first service for unity monasticism can render is to make us grasp the unitive vision of theology which underlies it.<sup>44</sup>

44. See J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, (Fordham University Press; New York 1979) 8-9; J.J. Allen, "The 'Being in Act' of Theology," in J.J. Allen (ed.), *Orthodox Synthesis. The Unity of*

The failure to grasp the “Eastern connection” of its crisis in general, and the monastic dimension which contains the elements for its solution is particular, is at the root of the crisis of theology in the West. True, the last few decades have seen there an intense debate on method, ranging from exegetical and hermeneutical issues to a search for new ways of doing theology, of which *nouvelle théologie* is already an indicative name. The need for a “return to the Fathers” was thus a potential bridge between East and West, if we think of *Sources Chrétiennes* on the Catholic side and of G. Florovsky’s appeal launched at the Panorthodox Conference of Athens in 1936 on the Orthodox side.<sup>45</sup> Typically enough, however, some felt, after so many patristic texts had been published, that the aura of mystery surrounding the Fathers was gone and that it was unlikely that they would present any additional surprises. Plans for the reform of theological studies were thus often couched without much reference to the East, as if the crisis in the West were of purely local vintage.

Precisely this goes to show that the return to the Fathers does not end with the publishing of texts, but requires more than anything else a change of perspective to better appreciate the kind of theology the Fathers had. Names like J. Daniélou, H. de Lubac and H.U. von Balthasar come immediately to mind. One of the most outstanding theologians in the West who came to grips with the contemporary crisis in theology, while at the same time making of the return to the Fathers a decisive part of his answer, incorporating it in his very way of doing theology, was Karl Rahner.<sup>46</sup>

A key-word Rahner used to diagnose the crisis is pluralism. Applied to method in theology pluralism means that there is no way in which one could possibly master all the theological disciplines nowadays, because the special methodologies necessary to assimilate their conclusions are too many and too complicated. Consequently, a detailed knowledge of the scientifically ascertained conclusions of historico-positive theology in all its branches is no

*Theological Thought*, (St Vladimir’s Press; New York 1981) 99. For the presence in the West of a monastic theology, which was more a theology of the heart, alongside the more dominant theology of the school, which was more discursive, see J. Leclercq, *The Love of Learning*, 111ff and 223ff. Nonetheless, this distinction should not be overdrawn.

45. G. Florovskij, “Patristics and Modern Theology,” *Procès-Verbaux du Premier Congrès de Théologie Orthodoxe à Athènes*, (29 novembre - 6 décembre 1936), (H.S. Alivisatos; Athens 1939) 238-242.
46. One could try to show, in this context, that Rahner adopted Ignatian spirituality. St Ignatius of Loyola familiarized himself with the rule of St Basil (as well as with other Eastern rules) before writing the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus; see T. Špidlík, “Die geistliche Dimension der Kirche bei Basilius,” in A. Rauch und P. Imhof, *Ibid*, 82; H.U. von Balthasar, “Basilius,” *ORDENSREGELN*, 58-59. All this, however, requires a study of its own.

longer possible for any one person. From this Rahner concluded that we must draw a line between a first level of reflection, which he called pre-scientific, and the second, properly scientific, level. On the first level one would seek insight at a point where dogma and spirituality, theory and practice are one. Having once gained from the context of Church life pertinent questions and elaborated them somewhat as a lead to further investigation, one can then proceed to tackle the insight, obtained at the first level, in full historical perspective, developing a systematic theology at the second. In this highly specialized area each investigator would have to restrict himself to a closely delimited field which he could — relatively — master.

In effect, Rahner hoped to obvert the crisis of irreducible pluralism and attain some unity in present-day theology by doing a theology which had always been possible to do, when modern specialization did not exist. If the Church, in times gone by, could produce a theology which is still useful — and this holds eminently true of the Fathers, who remain an abiding source of inspiration and orientation in theology — we too must be able to come up with a good theology without necessarily resorting at once to the highly refined methods of positive theology. In his scientific studies on penance in the early Church Rahner had argued that, if the sacrament of penance belongs to what is essential to the Church, then it must have been present in early times too, although maybe in a form different from our own. Over a number of historical investigations he worked out what that continuum was, now and then, which he identified with the need of reconciling oneself with the Church after having been excommunicated from it as a result of one's sins. "Excommunication" does not correspond exactly to our modern canonical term, but to the Christian community's reaction to sin, as a consequence of which one is excluded from participating in the Eucharist.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, this historical interest concentrated on the pre-Nicene period, when East and West were, especially in comparison with the troubled times to come, still relatively a differentiated unity. Rahner traced some developments in the theology of penance within this period. Both Tertullian (ca 160-ca 220) and St Cyprian (+ca 258) tried to grapple with the possibility of reconciliation with the Church and re-admittance to communion. Both of them reflected on the acts of the penitent and of the Church in attaining this goal. But lacking a theology of non-conventional symbol capable of showing the interrelatedness of exterior acts and interior effects, they did not explain adequately the intrinsic

47. See K. Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie, XI, Frühe Bußgeschichte in Einzeluntersuchungen*, (Benzinger, Einsiedeln 1973) 140.

link between the actions of the penitent and the forgiveness of sins. On the contrary, Origen (+ca 254) interpreted penance in terms of what K. Rahner calls real symbol, better suited to account for the causal link between both. He thus came close to anticipating a theology of the sacraments, expressive of the fact that peace with the Church is not only the sign of the peace with God but also its cause.<sup>48</sup>

Rahner's own theology has been described by his own brother Hugo as "theology of the [real] symbol," which we may paraphrase as the "theology of the icon." For K. Rahner, between symbol and the symbolized there should prevail a unity-in-difference, harking back to the fact that the Logos is the icon or real symbol of the Father. Both symbol and symbolized should be inseparable, to avoid extrinsicism or a purely conventional theory of symbol, but neither symbol nor symbolized should be confused with each other, to avoid pantheistic immanentism.<sup>49</sup>

This alone, coupled with the ecclesiological dimension of penance as being reconciliation with the Church, *pax cum ecclesia*, would bring the recent theological revival in Roman Catholicism associated with K. Rahner very close to Orthodox thinking, and even to some modern trends in it. One need only recall N. Afanasiev's "Eucharistic ecclesiology" and J. Zizioulas' contribution to "being as communion".<sup>50</sup>

Many students of Rahner failed to grasp the capital importance he assigned to penance as method, i.e. the possible exploitation of penance as a model for doing theology.<sup>51</sup> He often begins his essays with a criticism of "current

48. See Ibid, 74-89.360-370.

49. See K. Rahner, "Zur Theologie des Symbols," in *Schriften zur Theologie, V*, (Benzinger, Einsiedeln 1967) 278ff. On p.302 he points out the general convergence between the Greek theology of the icon and his theology of symbol.

50. St Augustine formulates "pax Ecclesiae dimittit peccata," (*De bapt. contra Donatistas* III 18, 23; *PL* 43, 150). St Cyprian comes very close to the formulation (see *Epist* 57,4), and, most of all, holds practically the same thesis; see K. Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie, VIII*, (Benzinger, Einsiedeln 1967) 459-462. *Schriften zur Theologie XI*, 84ff, 233ff. See G. Russo, "Rahner and Palamas: A Unity of Grace," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 32 (1988) 157-180. Naturally, not everything in Rahner's thought, especially in his post-Vatican II production, corresponds to a theology of symbol. On Orthodox side, J. Zizioulas understands his own work as a "contribution to a 'neopatristic synthesis' capable of leading the West and the East nearer to their common roots," *Being and Communion*, 26. This point of contact over penance and eucharistic communion has not thus far been exploited in the official Orthodox-Roman Catholic dialogue.

51. Many of those who have misinterpreted Rahner have concentrated onesidedly on his philosophy, without much reference to its patristic background. For example, Rahner's insistence that there is no area of human endeavour debarred from grace is couched in the same words of the dying

positions," tantamount to a theological protest against mediocrity in thinking. The treatment of penance, then, includes both the virtue of the subject and the objective structures of the sacrament. Thus Rahner hoped to bypass the subjectivity which wreaks havoc on the objective contents of faith, while allowing at the same time full scope for the spirituality of the subject, the penitent. If the term penance naturally belongs to the monastic vocabulary, Rahner's further articulation of his theology develops the monastic dimension of theology. His insistence on apophaticism,<sup>52</sup> that God is mystery above comprehension and even naming, who in every effort to know Him grasps us rather than we Him, who opens the door of our hearts from inside; that theological statements find their verification in mysticism as the experienced union of the subject with God; and that the Christian of the future has to be a mystic, because he can rely less than was the case until recently on societal mediation of Christian symbol: all this makes Rahner's theology profoundly (though not exclusively) monastic.<sup>53</sup> It is, to a large extent, his antidote to overcome the current theological crisis.

#### 4. Monastic Analogy and Discernment

The crisis is a fact and manifests itself in a cleft that runs throughout Christendom. The East-West division is the first instance of this predicament, whereas the crisis in Western theology is, in the main, but a resonance of this greater global dilemma and an example of how things go to pieces when they separate themselves from the whole. Naturally, the East has problems of its own, also related to a lack of unity, and which Eastern theologians like J.

Paphnutius in K. Rahner/M. Viller, *Azese und Mystik in der Väterzeit*, (Herder, Freiburg i.B. 1939) 278-279; compare with "Über künftige Wege der Theologie," in *Schriften zur Theologie*, X, (Benzinger, Einsiedeln 1972) 47. Paphnutius the hermit wanted to know what degree of holiness he had reached, and was shown the way to people living in the world; so he reached the conclusion God may be hiddenly at work even where we least suspect it; see Rufinus of Aquileia, *Historia Monachorum*, PL 21, 439; for the similar story of Eucharistius in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* see PG 65, 168-169. For the ecumenical significance of this criticism in dialogue with M. Luther's criticism of monasticism see O. Clément, "Función icónica del monacato oriental," *Vida Religiosa* 66/3 (1989) 183. Finally, see also E. Farrugia, *Aussage und Zusage. Zur Indirektheit der Methode Karl Rahners veranschaulicht an seiner Christologie*, (Gregorian University Press; Rome 1985) 152ff.

52. For the relationship of apophaticism to folly and its possibility of bridging East-West differences see T. Goritcheva, "Le fou chrétien au siècle de l'apophatisme," *Contacts* 141 (1988) 37-49; J. Hochstaffl, *Negative Theologie*, (Kösel; München 1976) 157ff.
53. Here Rahner's idea meets that of V. Lossky, *La teologia mistica della Chiesa d'Oriente*, (Il Mulino; Bologna 1967) 6-7.

Meyendorff have described so well;<sup>54</sup> but we concentrate here on a criticism of the West. At any rate, crisis should not be interpreted only or even primarily in its negative moments, but rather offers the occasion to take a decision which will forestall progressive deterioration. Once we accept critical moments as privileged occasions to hear the Spirit of God, then we are well on our way towards overcoming them. Crisis as a time for decision presupposes discernment.

Discernment of spirits is something we eminently associate with the monastic life. St John Climacus has insightfully described obedience as putting an end to discernment through an abundance of discernment.<sup>55</sup> This naturally excludes its manipulation on the part of the monk or his superior. On a more general level, discernment of spirits is not the monopoly of any exclusive elite, but belongs to all who seek perfection without conforming to the patterns of this world, i.e. without giving in unduly to pressure-groups.

Then why speak of monastic analogy at all? Analogy obtains when two things are similar and dissimilar in the same respect. The element of protest we have associated with monks, the counter-cultural element or monastic recalcitrance, their folly for Christ's sake, may aptly underly here both the similarity and the dissimilarity even with regard to East-West relations. What Eastern and Western monks ought to have in common is their non-conformity to the ways of this world. But precisely this non-conformity should enable them to withstand any attempt at enforced uniformity between East and West. If St Alexios, of whom it is said that he spent seventeen years as a fool in Syria and seventeen in Rome, stands for similarity of tasks in quite different contexts, monastic counter-culture gives us reason to hope that never will anybody succeed in imposing just one cultural pattern on all monks, but that a variety of forms is necessary and even desirable within the one Christian spirituality. Thus monastic analogy means that monks, precisely because they are a bond reaching back to common Christian origins, represent a Christianity that is at the same time one and irreducibly pluralistic.

It remains to articulate somewhat monastic analogy in theology. This refers to a role, at once similar and dissimilar, which monastic theology is called to play. Generally speaking, monastic theology is in many respects the

54. See J. Meyendorff, *Catholicity and the Church*, (St Vladimir's Press, New York 1983), p.12.

55. See St John Climacus, *The Ladder of Paradise*, Step 4 (PG 88, 680); P. Evdokimov, "La direzione spirituale nella tradizione delle chiese I. La Chiesa orientale: L'arte dei Padri spirituali," in E. Ancilli (ed.), *Mistagogia e direzione spirituale*, (Edizioni O.R.; Roma/Milano 1985) 533.

continuation of the unitive theology of the Fathers. Monastic and scholastic theologies were sometimes at odds, but sometimes they co-existed peacefully, or were found united in the same person. At its best, monastic theology defends, against any monopolizing tendencies on the part of the school, the monastery as a suitable milieu for theology, style other than scholastic as a viable alternative, and contemplation as the source of vital theology. Mysticism as its inspiration is perhaps the hallmark of monastic theology.<sup>56</sup> Obviously, although monastic theology may be associated with some of its more eminent practitioners from among the monks, like St Bernard (1090-1153), it is as little exclusive as the biblical and patristic call to universal perfection.

More specifically, monastic theology remains, to a large extent, a desideratum in contemporary theology. A theology of monastic inspiration ought to exploit the unitive vision of monasticism, which heralds the recuperation of the original image of God-willed humanity, and seek a correspondingly unitive vision in theology. Now, if we look around us in the early Church, what we see primarily is the theology of Churches or of local Churches even. We have thus got to distinguish between these theologies and another, which would be the theology of the Great Church and from which every theology ought to live. This theology is not one in the sense that it excludes a plurality of theological expressions. And, of course, it is not one as if it pretended to be a *norma normans non normata*, for only the Word of God can serve as the last criterion against which all theology has to be measured.<sup>57</sup> Rather, the unitive theology we have in mind is one in the sense of some general orientations, which, in spite of so many differences in the local Churches of the time, served as a common frame of reference. For the sake of simplicity, we may call this interpretative framework the theology of the Fathers.

Precisely in the light of a unitive theology we see that the theology of the Fathers was different from what we might be led to think it was nowadays, because we are tempted to read into the past subsequent divisions. The more East and West were a differentiated unity, the more nuanced was the difference between Greek and Latin Fathers. The Latins were by and large the followers or the continuators of the Greeks. Tensions there were, but it is interesting that in spite of repeated ruptures of communication, the first great permanent schisms took place in the East and not between East and West. Unity was safeguarded more along some common lines of orientation: the theology of the Fathers was biblical, liturgical and monastic, so long as we do not draw too

56. See J. Leclercq, *The Love of Learning*, 233-286.

57. See W. Kasper, *Glaube und Geschichte*, (Matthias-Grünewald Verlag; Mainz 1970) 188-189.

sharp a distinction between these dimensions.

Thus we may paraphrase what has just been said by saying that the Fathers were the first interpreters of Scripture, whose message they summarized in God's incarnation and our deification (= perfection) by the Spirit who dwells in our heart. They aimed at interpreting the Word of God, using such cultural means as were necessary to answer its cultured despisers. It was liturgical, because the truth could be celebrated and the essentials of faith inculcated during and by means of Church worship. It was monastic because it put the experience of God as the central point of reference for faith assertions, an experience which required nothing less than the quest, on the part of every baptized, to be perfect like God. No wonder that the choice of the monastic life, in the early Church, not infrequently coincided with the reception of baptism, and that many postponed their baptism till late in life, when they would be mature enough to meet in full the requirements of Christian living.<sup>58</sup>

So a penitential spirit was not to be thought away from serious Christian living — and we cannot think of a unitive theology without penance. Penance means change: not only the change of contents, but also of the way of thinking them. Not only new wine, but also new wine-skins! Therefore, if we cannot think of the way of doing theology without the monastic dimension, we cannot think of the monk without method. One of the main characteristics of method, indeed, is the capacity to change radically. In spite of so much talk about penance we should not be misled into thinking that all is dull. On the contrary, penance is the one indispensable condition for the deepest joy. Christ preached the kingdom at the price of full conversion. *Penthos*, a Greek word which literally means compunction of heart but which we perhaps could translate as "matured joy," holds the key to *apatheia* or learning to undo suffering and deepen serenity through union with God.<sup>59</sup>

58. See L. Bouyer, *Dictionnaire théologique*, (Tournai; Belgium <sup>2</sup>1963) 466-470. See also H.U. von Balthasar, "Basilius," in *ORDENSREGELN*, 38; I. Gobry, *De saint Antoine à saint Basile: Les origines orientales*, (Fayard; Paris 1985) 414. We agree with Gobry's thesis that nothing resembles a Western monk so closely as an Oriental monk, see *Ibid* p.22, but only under the analogical reserve: the Western monk resembles his Eastern colleague, Oriental monasticism serves as the first link of Western monasticism's to the early Church only according to the way in which the early Church existed: namely as a *differentiated* unity. One is tempted to invert Mgr Szepticky's saying and affirm: the Western monk resembles his Oriental colleague even where they differ, precisely because they have preserved the same pluralism in unity of the early Church.

59. See I. Hausherr, *Penthos. La doctrine de la componction dans l'Orient chrétien*, (Gregorian University Press; Rome 1944) 153-158. It was the great expert on method B. Lonergan who said: "As conversion is basic to Christian living, so an objectification of conversion provides theology with its foundations. By conversion is understood a transformation of the subject and his world.

Union in theology is likewise reached in this spirit of *penthos*. Recurrent talk in theology of a need of a return to the Fathers is itself an expression of this promising sorrow: sorrow with the promise of integration. On the one hand, it furthers union through a radical transformation which changes both content and form. On the other hand, this transformation amounts to a non-conformism to the pattern of this world. Here are some illustrations, of necessity somewhat disparate.

Philosophy as it is taught in places is a problematic discipline, not only a discipline to teach how to find out problems. The truth it seeks (if it seeks it at all) is not something that can be celebrated, it is at best an abstractive truth, often a cheerless truth, presupposing human beings as a complicated mechanism rather than a whole entity, capable of reaching integrity and unity. Such truth in the abstract cannot be celebrated because it has too little joy to it. Far from being integrated with a Christian viewpoint it is often the pulse of the contemporary pagan world. This kind of philosophy is at best justifiable methodically, that is, as a phase which may be necessary as a preliminary step but which has to be superseded and incorporated in a more wholistic approach.<sup>60</sup>

In effect, much has been written on the critical dimension of theology, which ought to derive from its openness to philosophy, and less on its *sobriety*, a word taken from the *Philocalia*, an Eastern anthology which was put together at the time of the Enlightenment. If by the dimension of sobriety we mean the assimilation of the best of this intellectual movement so as not to dissipate the heart but rather guard it, then we have yet another example of the unity of discursive argument and spirituality. That sobriety does not kill joy is shown by the fact that Christian truth is to be celebrated without reserve, which is why the liturgy, for Eastern theology, is the first among the *loci theologici* or sources whence theology derives its content.<sup>61</sup> Liturgy is just the right place where we can hear the Church expound the Word of God as the norm for our lives and gratefully rejoice over Christ's salvific presence among us — in or out of tune with the world!

Normally it is a prolonged process... Still it is not just a development or even a series of developments. Rather it is a resultant change of course and direction," *Method in Theology*, 130.

60. See V. Solov'ev, *La crise de la philosophie occidentale*, (Aubier, Paris 1947) 161.

61. It is sometimes objected that there is a liturgical narrowness about Eastern theology; see E. Sauser, *Ibid*, 130-181. This danger exists if the liturgy is taken in isolation. The counter-cultural role of monasticism (which includes the monastic protest against social injustice) coupled with the decisive role played by the monks in the formation of the liturgy should throw a light on this kind of objection. The very promoters of right worship are entrusted with a prime social role, as already evidenced in St Basil's rules.

The same kind of dichotomy which characterizes modern living and the philosophy which reflects it is met with also in style, which ought to be sober but not by placing the discussion at several reaches away from reality. For the ancients, museums hardly existed because beauty was to be found in greater continuity with daily life. However, even where the monopoly of a scholastic method is deplored, the style which predominates is oft rather scholastic or at least academic. The capacity of creating the *Sitz-im-Leben* as one goes along, as we see in Plato's early *Dialogues*, which are nonetheless rigorously philosophical, is a rarity, accounting for much of the abstractedness of modern theology. A notable exception is the genre of the *sermon*, but it is the exception which proves the rule.

Naturally, theology has a certain relationship to schools because it has to be taught and because it finds expression in concrete historical forms and associations. The connected problem of the relationship between history and faith has been discussed from many angles, less so from that of a unitive theology. With a view to the reform of theological programme in schools W. Pannenberg suggested that theology is possible only as *Religionswissenschaft*, or the science of God in a positivistic key. While the idea is brilliant as far as it goes, it has the drawback of factually leaving out what is specific to theology as the science of mystery.<sup>62</sup> Against any attempt to reduce the core of theology to a positivistic approach the theology of the image will always protest strongly. One could perhaps here rephrase a thought of Archimandrite Vasileios: if theology amounted primarily to historical accuracy above all, then it would be all the worse for us, we were not lucky to be there when the event occurred!<sup>63</sup>

One of the ways to resolve the issue in the basic course of theology, especially in view of ecumenism, is to teach the first seven ecumenical councils as a history of the discernment the Church had to make in the first thousand years when East and West were still united. History, at its best and deepest, is the history of discernment or guidance of the Spirit, in turn reflected in liturgical developments. Unfortunately the kind of facts often presented in manuals are rather abstract, because they leave out the first theological *Sitz-in-Leben* from a viewpoint of a unitive theology: the liturgy. A much-used textbook like Neuner-Roos contains, for instance, texts about the sacraments, but does not really confront the student with basic liturgical texts, indispensable for dogma

62. See W. Pannenberg, *Wissenschaftstheorie und Theologie*, (Suhrkamp Verlag; Frankfurt am Main 1977) 303-329.

63. See Vasileios Gondikakis, *Hymn of Entry. Liturgy and Life in the Orthodox Church*, (St Vladimir's Press; New York 1984) 84.

in its comprehensive context.<sup>64</sup>

A final word has to be said about the reserve monks have often shown with regards to ecumenism. So long as this reserve is not lacking in self-criticism, it serves an important function against a facile ecumenism. This may be seen in the light of what Plato said: the best way to learn to hate is to love artlessly.<sup>65</sup> We might add: The best way to learn to hate the truth is to seek it superficially. Truth, full orthodoxy, require penance and a conversion of heart in preparation for the exquisite joy of having found the great treasure. St John Climacus comments: "In any conflict with unbelievers or heretics, we should stop after we have twice reproved them (cf. Titus 3,10). But where we are dealing with those who are eager to learn the truth, we should never grow tired of doing the right thing (cf. Gal 6,9). And we should use both situations to test our own steadfastness."<sup>66</sup> Therefore, one way in which monks may exercise their countercultural role and vocation to folly is by a Christian polemic, that is, by joining the dialogue of love with that of the truth. This is already the case in the official Roman Catholic-Orthodox Dialogue. In a time when internecine quarrels rend Church unity, this Christian polemic counsels irenic mediation; when ecumenical slogans are in vogue it promotes a certain critical distance.

### *Conclusion*

Partly because of the rise of the ecumenical movement, we have been accustomed to speak of East and West as the two lungs of the Church.<sup>67</sup> The image is useful, insofar as it calls to mind the like dignity of East and West, but needs to be supplemented. The two lungs stand for two great traditions, somewhat embarrassed by unfortunate polemics in the past, but now steadily rediscovering their affection. If there were not a common direction, the two lungs would not function in unison. This common direction is, in terms of Eastern theology, the heart. In this heart is encased, as in a treasure-box, the

64. See J. Neuner und M. Roos, *Der Glaube der Kirche in den Urkunden der Lehrverkündigung*, (F. Pustet; Regensburg 1975).

65. See *Phaedo*, 39D.

66. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, (trans. C. Luiheid and N. Russell) (Paulist Press; New York 1982) 246.

67. The image first used by W. Ivanov and popularized through John Paul II's pronouncements, can be traced on Western side, at least as far back as Y. Congar, "La personne et la liberté humaines dans l'anthropologie orientale," (=Texte d'un exposé fait le 4 mars 1952 au Centre Catholiques des Intellectuels Français) *Recherches et Débats*, 1 (mai 1952) 99-111, here in Y. Congar, *Chrétiens en dialogue*, (Éd. du Cerf; Paris 1964) 287.

early theology of the Fathers.

One way of paraphrasing the heart of the Christian endeavour is monasticism, which has rightly been described as the most successful aspect thus far of Christianity. This may sound unacceptable to those denominations who only now are reintroducing forms of the consecrated life. The question, however, is quite different if we count those who have as a matter of fact best responded to Christ's call for perfection, whether they were monks only in spirit or factually came from the monastic ranks. Again, it may seem at times that monasticism is a stumbling-block to unity. But if monks were to open up to the unitive vision underlying their vocation, by readily identifying themselves with the faith of their Church and making charity their first norm, they would become privileged members of dialogue. So perhaps it is closer to the truth to say that only when partners enter dialogue with a true monastic spirit does it stand any chance of lasting success.

If first things first has any meaning the first dialogue to be made consists in putting the monk back into theology, and this is attained by restoring the original unity of theology. Otherwise we shall be seeking unity by divisive means. Besides fostering the unity of spirituality and dogma, the monastic dimension of theology has something peculiar to it. It is the counter-cultural element, which enables the monk to relativize his culture, however high, through spirituality. Monasticism as a counter-culture should not amount to ensconcing oneself in an adolescent moratorium, but rather means a sobering up for oneself and one's neighbour; it is self-criticism and folly for Christ's sake in one. It is the sobriety of μέθη νηφάλιος, *sobria ebrietas*, the sober drunkenness of the God-enthused, enabling them to transcend their limits precisely because they are all too well aware of them.<sup>68</sup> From the viewpoint of method, the monastic dimension implies *penthos* or suffused joy consequent on the integration of the heart in life and of a theology of the heart or unitive theology in thinking, and both imply the forced marches of conversion and change. If we thought about the implications of the *penthos* for method, we would have come long ways to forge unity, or rather to discover that there is somebody in our midst whom we often do not know, the Spirit of truth and love and unity.

A recluse on Mount Athos, upon being asked for what his austerity served, answered: Humanity has been at grips with Satan since the days of Adam and

68. Philo seems to have coined the Greek expression and Eusebius of Caesarea (+340) is the first known Christian author to use it. Cf. H.-J. Sieben, "Ivresse spirituelle," *DSP* VII,2, 2312-2322.

needs everybody at his post; victory, however, is guaranteed only through the perseverance and courage personified by the hermit. *In this sense, the true hermit is humanity's child and God's slave; he is neither Greek, nor gentile, nor Jew, he is ecumenical.*<sup>69</sup>

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69. B. Apreleff, "La Sainte Montagne de l'Athos," *Irenikon* 3 (1927) 397.