

CHAPTER SIX

Mission of the Word



IN contemplating the Trinitary life we have mentioned the radiance of the life of the Trinity, of the three Persons in Creation. Now we shall contemplate more specifically the mission of the Word, relating it to the mystery of the priesthood. Christ is essentially the High Priest of all Creation. "It is through Him, with Him, and in Him" that "all honor and all glory in the unity of the Holy Spirit" are rendered to the Father. This passage from the Mass perfectly expresses the mission of the Word, which is to draw the whole universe up in the movement that carries Him toward the Father. The Son is eternally turned toward the Father. And He enters Creation to take hold of the whole universe, in order to draw it up in the movement that bears Him eternally toward the Father.

THE TRINITY *and* THE TEMPLE

THROUGH HIM

First of all, Creation proceeds from the Father through the Son, the life-giving Word. Through Him the great design of salvation, which lays bare the ultimate meaning of the world and of human existence, is accomplished. As the beginning of Saint John's Prologue says: "All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:2). Thus the Word is above all else the life-giving Word from which all existence must come. When we contemplate the mystery of the Word, we must always acknowledge its cosmic vastness. It encompasses the whole of Creation in its action. As the Epistle to the Colossians (1:16) says: "For in Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth... all things were created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together." This means first of all that all things have their substance in Him, and that therefore all reality is a participation in the very being of the Word, since all existence flows from His life-giving strength. This is the underlying meaning of Saint Paul's phrase, "In Him all things hold together." All things, but especially our own beings, are sustained by the power of the life-giving Word. We exist in Him; we are in existence only because He sustains us and nourishes us with His life-giving power. In this sense, the whole of Creation is a

kind of participation in the being of the Word.

But—and this is an admirable thing—He makes us in His image. In fact, the beginning of the Bible tells us that man was created in the image of God. But the Word is the eternal image of the Father, the only authentic image of the Father and of the Son. Thus we are merely the image of the image, as Saint Irenaeus said—*eikon eikonos*, the icon of the icon. We are but an image of the image because the Word is the perfect image. Thus it is by modeling ourselves on the Word that we become an image of the Father. The Word made man in His image. This is why, when this image is distorted by sin, the Word will remold it so that it may resemble Him once more. Creation owes its being to Him, and for this reason belongs to Him in the very deepest sense. It belongs to Him totally, since it owes everything it has to Him. This is why Saint John says that “He is come among His own,” that is, among those that belonged to Him by right of creation even before He redeemed them with His blood. For He cannot redeem what already belonged to Him through that primordial act of possession embodied in the Creation.

This intimate connection between the Creation and the Word is already apparent in the remote origins of all things. We might say that in this sense Creation is merely the radiance of eternal begetting. The Father eternally begets the Son who is His perfect image. This eternal

begetting is reflected in the whole of Creation which is a sort of free prolongation of eternal begetting in which it lies buried. This is why Creation truly rediscovers itself in its deepest meaning and value when it rediscovers its origins in the Word. Thus it is “through Him” that “all honor and all glory” are rendered to the Father.

WITH HIM

Next comes “with Him.” Creation, created in His own image by the Word (Himself the image of the Father), has cut itself off from the Word through sin. It has been shut off from life-giving energy, and has come under the sway of death. For Creation, and man in particular, lives only when it is grafted onto the source of all life. “In Him was life, and life was the light of men” (John 1:4). But once Creation cuts itself off from the light of life, it becomes dead. This dead life, if I may call it that, this dead existence cut off from the sources of life, constitutes the abode of sin in all its forms: inertia, heaviness, lack of response to divine things, everything that still represents the burden of sin within us, everything—even when sin itself is destroyed—that still separates us from the source of life.

This is why the Word seeks out this creature who belongs to Him but has cut himself off from Him, like the

heavenly shepherd who leaves his ninety-nine sheep to find the lost sheep. This mission is the Incarnation. But when we contemplate its mystery we must always realize that it is the reassumption by the Word of what the Word had already created in the beginning. It is that same Adam, created by Him and living in Him, that the Word seeks in Mary, in order to restore him to his original life—and, having found him, bears him up again in the eternal movement that carries Him toward the Father.

This is the mystery of the Ascension—*gloriosa Ascensio*—in which Christ's mysteries are accomplished. Having seized hold of mankind, the Word raises it up "with Him" and carries it toward the Father "with Him." In other words, it is with Him that the whole design is accomplished. But redeemed mankind is also a mankind that has been wounded by sin. This is why the Word of God restores mankind in God's designs with His blood. With Him mankind is once more consecrated; and here, once again, we touch on the mystery of the priesthood.

Thus mankind which is holy in origin and belongs to the Word of God; mankind which has profaned itself, is once more given access to holiness by the Word, through the intercession of the humanity the Word has assumed. We must not forget, as the great writers of the French school have noted, that mankind is already wholly sanctified by the act of Incarnation, because the Word has

assumed human flesh. This corroborates what we have already said about the state of perfect consecration of Christ's humanity. Thus mankind is once more wholly sanctified with Him, wholly turned toward the Father, wholly dedicated to His adoration. This is why the Word incarnate is the High Priest of Creation, the One through whom Creation is once more consecrated and turned toward the Father, and through whom all glory—*omnis honor et gloria*—is rendered to the Father.

Here we might consider Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews on Christ's priesthood. Speaking to the Father of the inadequacy of sacrifices made under the Ancient Law, Christ said: "Thou has neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings." Then he added: "Lo, I have come to do Thy will" (Heb. 10:8-9). This was the perfect sacrifice—not the outward sacrifices demanded by the Law, but "Thy will, O Lord." Through this sacrifice we are sanctified once and for all by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ. It is as if we have rejoined the living, rediscovered the sources of our existence, by conforming once more to the life-giving Word. And this takes on its full meaning when we see how men feel that the ground they walk on is unstable and unsure and that the very meaning of existence is undermined.

Just as we found all that gives substance to our existence in the life-giving Word, so—stained as we are by

sin—we are once more totally renewed when we turn to the redeeming Word. We become consecrated beings; once more the image is remolded in us; once more we become the image of the Word, who is Himself the image of the Father. And just as He does the Father's will, we also love no other will but His, and acknowledge once more that we belong to Him. With Him, finally, we can once more render "all honor and all glory" to the Father, becoming priests in the one Priest, accomplishing the priestly act in which we render all things to God by offering up glory to Him, by glorifying Him through our very existence.

IN HIM

First of all, then, all things were made by Him. Next, all was remade by Him. And finally, all things were consummated in Him. That is to say, all things are already consummated in Him, in the sense that the meaning of all Creation is fully realized in Him. In Him, through the humanity He has assumed, God is perfectly glorified, man is perfectly sanctified, all things have returned to their origin, and the loving design of the Trinity is perfectly accomplished. From the point of eternity, as we have seen, all things are already fulfilled in perfect,

absolute self-sufficiency in the Trinity. We could also say, from the point of view of time, that there is an equally absolute self-sufficiency in Christ's humanity: in other words, there is nothing to be added to what is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

This is why we can find perfect rest in Him. We have no need to go out of Christ, since Christ encompasses all space visible and invisible. He coincides with the reality of the created being in its totality. And to withdraw ourselves from Christ is at the same time to withdraw ourselves from the real. We would not be going beyond Christ—we would be closing ourselves to life. For Christ exhausts all possibilities within Himself. There is no "beyond Christ," either in time or in space. He contains all things which are on earth and in heaven. As the Epistle to the Colossians says: "For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Col. 1:19). Thus He brings all things together within Himself. And this is why He is fixed as the center and the heart of all Creation. It is through Him, the eternal High Priest, that all Creation passes on its ascent toward the Father. And He Himself, caught up in the eternal movement that makes Him relate wholly to the Father, draws all things along with Him as if in triumphal procession—the whole of Creation that He had made only for the Father, and that He now restores to the Father after Creation has strayed out of Him. This is

the sense in which we should interpret the passage from the First Epistle to the Corinthians: "But when it says, 'All things are put in subjection under him,' it is plain that he is excepted who put all things under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son Himself will also be subjected to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be everything to everyone" (1 Cor. 15:27-28).

When the Word of God has once more put all things in subjection to Him, and restored His sovereignty over all things, He offers to the Father this Creation He put under Him. Obviously, the idea that the Son will subject Himself "to Him who put all things under Him" does not imply that the Word is inferior to the Father; for Christ in His divine nature is fully equal to the Father. It merely expresses the Son's need to relate everything to the Father in this eternal and total and intimate subjection—but subjection in perfect equality—that is His, and that simply defines their relationship in its origins.

And we will notice that the text from the Epistle to the Hebrews quoted above ("Lo, I have come to do Thy will") goes on to say: "But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sin, He sat down at the right hand of God, then to wait until His enemies should be made a stool for His feet" (Heb. 10:12-13). The passage from the First Epistle to the Corinthians began in this way: "For He must reign until He has put all his enemies

under His feet... But when it says, 'All things are put in subjection under Him,' it is plain..." (1 Cor. 15:25). Thus these two passages are both based on Psalm 110: "The Lord says to my lord, sit at my right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool" as total and eternal subjection of all Creation to the Word made Man, as the restoration of the Word's sovereignty over all Creation. This is one of the fascinating cases in which we come across an Old Testament Psalm interpreted in a Christological sense by Saint Paul.

This total restoration of consecration to God is already absolutely and completely fulfilled in Christ's humanity, so that Christ's humanity exhausts all its possibilities. Moreover, this restoration inevitably affects all the rest of Creation, since it is only fulfilled in Christ's personal humanity in order to make of humanity something in which all else will also be consecrated. This deployment, this extension to all Creation of God's sovereignty, which the Word has restored in His own humanity, represents the whole design of the Church, even to the point where "all its enemies will be its footstool." In other words, until all Creation is established in the continuity of the Word's humanity which will then become its center. For once all things are again grafted on to Christ's humanity and given new life, God's design will be wholly fulfilled.