

symbolize the four times of Christian life. Every allegory is concentrated within the pascal mystery; but we must still say, with Saint Ambrose: "Every year the pasch of Jesus Christ, i.e., the crossing of souls, is celebrated. . . ."57 In other words, if it is true that nothing is superior to the Mystery of Christ, one ought not forget that this Mystery, which was prefigured in the Old Testament, is realized again, is being actualized, is being completed within the Christian soul. *It is truly being fulfilled within us.*58 In saying these things, we neither dilute nor misconstrue the unique singularity of the Mystery: we unfold its own internal logic, we make the most of its depth and fruitfulness. We point out, with Saint Bernard, that it reaches right up to us today.59 Typology, without ever denying it, sometimes leaves this mystery in the shade when it is not entirely faithful to the thought of Saint Paul on the *typoi*.60 One modern has understood it well: "The public, 'objective' revelation of God in history is also a revelation of his ways with regard to each of us"; borrowing an image from Plato in the *Republic*, "we can say that the Bible depicts the ways of God to man in the 'big letters' of the history of the community."61 Thereby not everything is said, but, as we shall see, something essential has been. To stop at the objective datum of the mystery would be to mutilate it, to betray it. "The mind understands God's words more truly when it searches for itself within them."62

2. Quotidie ["Daily"]

The two great masters of the tropological sense are Origen and Saint Gregory. Following their teaching, which was spread everywhere, everything in Scripture that is susceptible of being allegorized also can and ought to be moralized. We pass from history to tropology through allegory. The latter consisting entirely in the Mystery of Christ, this mystery finds itself interiorized within tropology. "What has preceded historically in the head is consequently also revealed to come about morally in its body."1 It can sometimes happen (and it is even a matter of some frequency) that the intermediate step is not always explicitly traversed; the mystery, taken in itself, is not expressed; it is nonetheless always presupposed. Thus it is that one author, calling up the events of Israel's captivity in Egypt, writes: "Though those deeds were corporeally performed in Egypt, they are nevertheless now being performed spiritually in us";2 and another: "that which Scripture commemorates historically about the earth seems to belong morally to hearts."3 This is evidently possible only by the mediation of the mystery — "in virtue of the cross of Christ"4 —

and every believer knows this quite well. This "we" at issue, or this "soul," or this "inner man," is therefore not any one human being or the soul in general, or human nature abstractly considered: it is a question of the Christian people; concrete souls are at stake, Christian souls. Thus the Tabernacle of Moses or the Temple of Solomon, which allegorically is Christ, is also by necessary consequence "our heart."⁵ It is "the very mind and consciousness of the faithful":⁶ it is Saint Gregory who tells us this. Adam Scotus will explain at length that there are three tabernacles, the third being this little secret of the Holy Spirit, the pure soul.⁷

The pure soul, the holy soul, the faithful soul is such only "within the Church": it is "the soul in the Church," "the ecclesiastical soul," or again "the ecclesiastical person."⁸ It is such only by being part of this great Body of which the Christ is the Head. The tropological sense therefore does not only presuppose the Mystery of the Christ, but also that of the Church, which is, as we have seen, inseparable from it. The tropological sense presupposes, or rather, expresses the mystery: for if the souls are Christian only within the Church, the reverse holds: "it is within the souls that the Church is beautiful."⁹ The whole life of the Christian flows from the "mystical fecundity of the Church."¹⁰ Everything that the Gospel history contains, says Saint Bernard, can therefore be interpreted "according to tropology, so that what has preceded in the head may consequently also be believed to come about morally in its body."¹¹ In its body, that is to say: both in the entire Church as well as in each of her members, following this great principle that commands all of Christian life and that we find admirably formulated by Saint Gregory:

Almighty God, who is neither stretched out in big things nor squeezed in very small ones, speaks about the whole Church all at once just as if he is speaking about just one soul; and it is often the case that nothing prevents what has been said by him of one soul from being understood of the whole Church at once.¹²

. . . So once these matters have been gone through by means of figurative exposition, their moral senses can now be inferred, so that, once the figure of the Church is known, which we believe to have been expressed in general fashion, we may also hear what we may specifically gather from these words in single instances.¹³

This is what Pascal had to recall one day to Mlle de Roannez: "Everything that happens to the Church also happens to each Christian in particular."¹⁴

The scheme is universal. As it applies to the whole configuration of Christian life, so it applies to all of Scripture. To the six days of creation, for example, there correspond the six days or ages of the Church, which will also be followed by a seventh, the day of definitive great repose; but, as Saint Augustine remarks, "each of us has those distinct six days in our good works and right life, too, and after them he ought to hope for rest."¹⁵ There is not one of the symbols of the Church which is not also a symbol of the soul. Nevertheless, it is in the commentary on the Canticle of Canticles that the tradition has pursued this scheme in the most systematic manner and in the manner that speaks to us most immediately. This little book is in fact taken from one end to the other as expressing the heart of the revelation everywhere diffused in the Scriptures: it symbolically celebrates the great mystery of love, the union of God and man prefigured in Israel and realized by the incarnation of the Word; in other words, the wedding of Christ and his Church. There under divine inspiration Solomon, says Saint Bernard, has sung "the praises of Christ and the Church, the grace of holy love, and the sacraments of the eternal marriage."¹⁶ This view of the Christian tradition does not exclude that of the ancient commentators of Israel: it presupposes it, it integrates it by deepening it. It is sometimes said that the Christian tradition presents two different lines of interpretation for this subject: the one ecclesial and the other spiritual; and that the first is readily assigned to Saint Hippolytus, the second to Origen. In fact, the "mystical preaching" of this "divine book"¹⁷ is understood by everyone, in its essentials, in the same manner. According to the needs, the circumstances, the interests of the commentator, the accent can be put on one aspect or another; but there are not two parallel — still less, divergent — lines. Notably for Origen, the Bride of the Canticle is simply the Church. He does not cease repeating: "I the Church, I the bride"; "the Church, which is speaking"; "the Church seems to be described by Christ"; "the Bride, that is, the Church," etc.¹⁸ But at the same time she is "the individual soul," she is each believing soul, that "microcosm of the perfect Church"; just as the City of God, Jerusalem, is at the same time the Church of which Christ is the architect and this city remains what is being built in each of our hearts.¹⁹ More exactly, if the soul can effectively be united to the Word of God, this is because the Church is united to Christ.²⁰ The like obtains in the case of Aponius, who passes constantly from the Church to the soul regenerated by baptism, to the just soul, to the perfect soul, to the soul united to the Word of God.²¹ Likewise for the Middle Ages. One of the tableaux of the *Hortus deliciarum* has as its legend: "Solomon is resting in bed, i.e., in the Church"; and when Adam Scotus undertakes to celebrate the "internal,

joyful, pure" union of the soul and God, he makes it quite clear that this union can be realized only by depending on the "profound mystery" into which his Fathers and teachers have been initiated.²² It is in "the home of the present Church," says Potho of Prüm, a home "created in the image of God," that souls acquire the divine likeness.²³ It is therefore not appropriate to harden the duality that can be observed between the "Christian Socratism" of certain texts commenting on Scripture in an apparently entirely interior sense and the "ecclesiastical" doctrine of certain others.²⁴ They complete each other without excluding each other and are inscribed in a general framework of interpretation which constitutes part of common knowledge. Neither do the Marian commentaries on the Canticle, beginning from the twelfth century, introduce a third, absolutely new line; they always put the same principle into practice. The application that they will make of it will be, properly speaking, in no way different: it will only be, in the precise sense in which they understand it, "special":²⁵ "These things are said specifically of blessed Mary, and generally of the perfect Church of the saints." Some, in the wake of Odorannus²⁶ and Rupert, will attach themselves entirely to the first period of the mystery: to the union of the Word and human nature effected within the womb of the Virgin "in the incarnation of the Word"; upon the "foundation" of the Canticle they will construct an edifice "of the incarnation of the Lord."²⁷ Others, more and more, will rather celebrate, at the interior of the mystery of the Church or at its summit, the Virgin Mary as realizing the perfection of the Christian soul.²⁸ To be sure, this is merely a schematic view, intended simply to show that the basic interpretation remains everywhere the same, and that it constitutes simply a case of this mystic tropology in which the third sense of Scripture consists.

"The Church, or any faithful soul";²⁹ "the universal Church as well as each beloved soul";³⁰ "the whole Church and each holy soul";³¹ "the Church, or the soul loving God":³² the same sort of remark is encountered in each instance, among extremely diverse authors, regarding scriptural passages that are themselves most diverse. "We can relate this to the Church or to the soul of the holy man," says Saint Jerome commenting on Isaiah;³³ "Each one of us can relate the things that have been said of the Church to himself," Letbert of Saint Ruf will say in commenting on the Psalms;³⁴ and Saint Gregory again, in Claudius's redaction, commenting on the Canticle, says, "What we have said in general about the Church as a whole, let us now feel specifically about each and every soul";³⁵ etc.³⁶ In the one case and in the other, declares Saint Bernard, it is basically a question of the same reality, "except that what is designated by the name 'Church' is

not one soul [*anima*] but a unity or rather a unanimity of many."³⁷ With a professor's precision Adam Scotus insists on: "the Holy Church, or, with respect to the moral sense, the devoted soul."³⁸ That remark doubles with another, no less frequent, which completes it: in this Christian soul, it is *each day*, it is *today*, that the mystery, by being interiorized, is accomplished. "It existed historically then; today it exists spiritually."³⁹ *Moraliter, intrinsecus* and *quotidie* are three adverbs that go together.⁴⁰ "The present reading," says Hervaeus of Bourg Dieu in a homily, "has been completed historically once in fact, but with respect to the spiritual sense it is being fulfilled every day."⁴¹ Each day, deep within ourselves, Israel departs from Egypt; each day, it is nourished with manna; each day it fulfills the Law; each day it must engage in combat . . . ;⁴² each day the promises that had been made to this people under a bodily form are realized spiritually in us.⁴³ Each day also the Gentiles give themselves over to the worship of their idols; each day the Israelites themselves are unfaithful; each day, in this interior region, the land devours the impious. . . .⁴⁴ Each day again, there is the Lord's visit; each day he approaches Jerusalem, coming from Bethphagê.⁴⁵ Each day is his advent: "The Lord coming in the flesh has visited us: and, morally, we also discern this come about every day."⁴⁶ "Within those who are devoted, he comes every day."⁴⁷

Now everything that came about for the first time in history had no other end than that. All that is accomplished in the Church herself had no other end. Everything is consummated in the inner man.⁴⁸ This ought to be said of all the external facts related in the books of the two Testaments; it ought equally to be said of the Mystery of the Christ. History, allegory, tropology, draw an unbroken line from the unique redemptive action: "Whatever is taught either under history or under allegory or else under tropology, is thoroughly taught for the sake of this covenant, namely, our restoration."⁴⁹ The mystery is always unique:

In the blood of Christ the circumcision of all is celebrated, and in his cross all have been crucified, . . . and buried together in his tomb.⁵⁰

Therefore whatever has been done on Christ's cross, in his tomb, in his resurrection on the third day, in his ascension into heaven, and in his seat at the right of the Father, has been done in such a way that the Christian life that is being lived here would be configured to these things not merely as having mystically been said but also as having been done.⁵¹

This is, as we see, pure Pauline mystical doctrine, and one can in fact understand the exegesis of the Apostle himself only in relation with his mystical doctrine. Everything is done to conduct us “to the inner parts,”⁵² to make us observe the Law “according to the inner man.”⁵³ The soul is “the temple of God, in which the divine mysteries are celebrated.”⁵⁴ Everything ought to lead to this intimate wedding: “But what is the preparation of the marriage except the exposition of the holy Scriptures?”⁵⁵ To the extent that this term is not attained, even though everything be done, nothing, so to speak, has yet been done, because the mystery has not produced its fruit. As Angelus Silesius will put it in a bold but, in intention, we believe, perfectly orthodox distich:

Scripture is only scripture. My consolation is the Essence,
And may God speak within me his Word of eternity.⁵⁶

To understand it properly, it is first necessary to read its title: “Scripture without the Spirit is nothing.” Jean Baruzi has indeed seen that here the poet “above all intends to combat the Protestant point of view,”⁵⁷ which would refuse the spiritual interpretation of the Scriptures. Nevertheless it is not entirely a “doctrine of interior illumination” in general that these two verses express; it is the doctrine of the interiorization of the biblical datum: its history and its mystery. Neither this history nor this mystery is denied or forsaken, as it would at least be possible to believe among those who speak of a birth of the *Word* only within the contemplative soul. Angelus Silesius speaks of Jesus Christ. Only after “the coming of our Savior in the flesh” — it is still Angelus Silesius who is speaking — is there his coming “in spirit.”⁵⁸ After his earthly birth and thanks to it, there must finally be his birth within the soul. Fundamentally, nothing is more traditional. Let us only recall that our Silesian friend expresses himself in the already habitual language of mystical thought — overmuch cut off from the roots that it had in ancient exegesis — and without taking it in a lesser sense than that which his master, the Jesuit Sandaeus, did. “Each day,” said Saint Jerome, “the divine Word is born of the virginal soul.”⁵⁹ The theme, along with its overtones, is common in medieval spirituality. Hélinand of Froidmont, for example, distinguishes the three births of Christ: “the nativity of eternity,” “the temporal nativity,” “the mystical nativity”; this third birth, he adds, is to last right up to the end of the world: “for Christ is born as often as anyone is becoming a Christian,”⁶⁰ and one is never finished with becoming Christian. It is, moreover, not only a question of birth; just as he is born in us and was con-

ceived by us, so, says Aelred of Rivaulx, ought the Lord Jesus to grow in us and to find nourishment in us, "until we all meet the perfect man, the measure of the age of the fullness of Christ."⁶¹ From another point of view, Saint Augustine meant nothing else than this in saying that all that the Christ accomplishes in the life, death, and resurrection of his flesh is "a sacrament of the interior man," all of Christian life being a "configuration" to the mystery of Christ.⁶² But Origen had already more precisely called up "the daily birth of our Savior," "the continual coming of the Logos";⁶³ he had already said in a question that contained even the fine points of the thought picked up by Angelus Silesius: "What good does it do me for the Logos to have come into the world if I myself do not have him?"⁶⁴ Again, he already said: after his coming on earth, Jesus must also come into each soul, so as to overturn the idols within it, to conquer Babylon within, the city of the devil: "but if the city of confusion has not fallen within the heart of anyone, to him also Christ has not yet come."⁶⁵ Christ must once again be conceived and formed in each soul, so that the "great joy" may be renewed as many times as the angels have announced it of old.⁶⁶ Saint Bernard seems to want to comment on these texts when he says in his turn: "for there are those to whom Christ has not yet been born."⁶⁷ Speaking more directly of the very words of Scripture, which, in their essence, are the selfsame Word, Paul Claudel will rediscover this great theme of the tradition at the end of a development in which he will show how we must read these words, meditate upon them, make them our own:

Now . . . it is no longer we who are acting; it is these words, once having been introduced, which act within us, releasing the spirit of which they have been made, the meaning and sonority included within them, and which veritably become spirit and life, and action-producing words. They belong to a place beyond our mental control; there is a certain irresistible force of authority and order in them. But they have ceased to be exterior; they have become ourselves. *And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us: one must understand the whole captivating, appropriating power of these two words: in nobis.*⁶⁸

It is by the tropological sense thus understood that Scripture is fully *for us* the Word of God, this Word which is addressed to each person, *hic et nunc* ["here and now"] as well as to the whole Church, and telling each "that which is of interest to his life."⁶⁹ God has spoken but once, and yet

his Word, at first extended in duration, remains continuous and does not entirely cease to reach us.⁷⁰ It is not only "our prophecy":⁷¹ it is our day-to-day guide; it is such not only by the moral teaching of its letter, but in every respect. There is not a page, not a word "of the Old or of the New Testament" that is not the most perfectly straight ruler of human life so as to guide it to the heights of perfection.⁷² In this precise sense, Scripture is "for us a complete whole."⁷³ "In the shadows of the present life, it is the light of the path."⁷⁴ For every thing, on every occasion, it indicates to us not only what we should believe and hope for, but also what we have to love or flee.⁷⁵ It is our daily nourishment, and if we grasp anything in it today that we did not know yesterday, tomorrow holds something equally surprising in store for us.⁷⁶ Upon this abundantly supplied table, the Lord "restores us each day, at his side, in spiritual science,"⁷⁷ and we always find on it what belongs to every condition we find ourselves in.⁷⁸ In everything, Scripture invites us to conversion of heart.⁷⁹ All the wars that it recounts are the wars of the Lord;⁸⁰ all the migrations, all the travels it traces are the wanderings and travels of the soul:⁸¹ it is thus from one end to the other the book of spiritual combat⁸² at the same time as it is the book of departure and of mystical ascent. With Abraham we abandon our home and we arrive at the oak of Mamre, where God goes to visit us.⁸³ With the children of Israel we flee "the furnace of Egyptian servitude," we cross the Red Sea, we wander in the desert, our forces are refreshed by a miraculous nourishment, we enter at last into the promised land.⁸⁴ With them we again collide with the surrounding peoples; with them we return from the captivity of Babylon and rebuild the temple and the city. . . . Finally, whatever page I meditate upon, I find in it a means that God offers me, right now, to restore the divine image within me. Thus I myself become Jerusalem, the holy city; I become or become again the temple of the Lord; for me the promise is realized: "I shall dwell in their midst." "God walks with me in the garden, when I read the divine Scriptures. . . ." ⁸⁵

All this teaching of the Scripture, all this strength which shapes me to the divine likeness, is summarized in a single word: charity. Many things in the letter itself already recommend it to us; by means of tropology everything tends to it. It is in charity that tropology shows itself to allegory in interior perfection: for the perfection of the Law is charity and it is at the same time the Christ. Saint Augustine took this from Saint Ambrose,⁸⁶ who himself got it from Saint Paul. "Charity manifests itself in what you understand in the Scriptures; charity hides itself in what you do not understand."⁸⁷ So many books, endowed with such great author-

ity and such great sanctity, "act with us only so that we may love . . .";⁸⁸ when we do not see it clearly, this is because the passage that occupies us, whatever be its apparent clarity, is still obscure to our eyes.⁸⁹ Saint Gregory draws the consequence, in a formula parallel to that which he employed for allegory: tropology tends "to the upbuilding of charity."⁹⁰ In this respect, remarks Rabanus Maurus, it constitutes "the superior understanding."⁹¹ Let us therefore say with Saint Gregory once more: "The astonishing and unspeakable power of sacred eloquence is recognized when the mind is penetrated by the highest love."⁹²

But if charity is fulfillment and end, then, to guide us thither, Scripture first presents itself to us as a mirror. Vaguely sketched out in the Epistle of Saint James,⁹³ the comparison was found developed in Philo's treatise on the contemplative life.⁹⁴ Saint Augustine made it his own on several occasions⁹⁵ and Saint Gregory exploited it after him.⁹⁶ The whole Middle Ages comments upon it. In this mirror we learn to know our nature and our destiny; in it we also see the different stages through which we have passed since creation, the beautiful and the ugly features of our internal face.⁹⁷ It shows us the truth of our being by pointing it out in its relation to the Creator.⁹⁸ It is a living mirror, a living and efficacious Word, a sword penetrating at the juncture of soul and spirit, which makes our secret thoughts appear and reveals to us our heart.⁹⁹ It teaches us to read in the book of experience¹⁰⁰ and makes us, so to speak, our own exegesis. "Here it is not man who explicates Scripture, but rather man uses Scripture to explain himself to himself, so as to surpass himself."¹⁰¹ "The souls that stick close to the heavenly bridegroom ought to perceive themselves in the mirror of the Scriptures."¹⁰² In return, once acquired by meditation on Scripture, experience permits one to deepen this meditation, though it could never free itself of it. It becomes the path that leads to genuine spiritual understanding.¹⁰³ Interior experience and meditation on Scripture accordingly tend to merge in a unique "experience of the Word."¹⁰⁴ Without it, the wisest can indeed explain certain things; but what is essential is still missing to them, because *per experientiam nondum intelligunt*.¹⁰⁵ In this reciprocity, Scripture, which is always primary, is always also last. The superior experience that it communicates to the one who questions it can only be acquired within faith.¹⁰⁶ It is the Scripture that measures us,¹⁰⁷ and which scrutinizes us, and which makes the fountains of living water spring forth in us,¹⁰⁸ and which ends by saying to us, not to deny it to us but showing us the unity of the first Source: "Drink the water from your vessels and from your wells."¹⁰⁹

This fountain is the pious mind meditating upon heavenly things:
Living rivers of doctrine it does not cease to bring forth within
itself.

Hence the living fountain of flowing, dancing water, says
Scripture,

will be unto life for anyone [coming] from out of those [rivers].¹¹⁰

3. Monastic Exegesis

Nevertheless, the conditions of Christian life do evolve. Medieval society is no longer ancient society. Christianity no longer knew exactly the same problems as did the age of the Fathers. He who wishes to follow the Gospel is no longer in the same situation in relation to the world as the Christian of the first centuries. This evolution results more from a change of perspective in an exegesis whose principles remain unchanged but which do not cease to search in Scripture for the light for the present life. A breach is being produced, enlarging tropology in relation to allegory, and tropology itself takes on certain new aspects. While the spiritual understanding consisted first and foremost in the passage from the Old Testament to the New, that is to say, in the entry to the Christian faith, it more and more came to consist, in the midst of a believing society, but one where faith coexists with secular manners, in throwing light on the "conversio morum," the passage from the sinful life to the virtuous life, from the mediocre life to the spiritual life, or more precisely, in many cases, from the "world" to "religion"; then it will describe the progress of the monastic life, and the steps of contemplation traversed by the monk faithful to his cell will emphasize the progress realized in the science of the Scriptures. *Nova et vetera*. It is difficult to assign a *terminus a quo* for such an evolution. In the course of a homily on Ezekiel, Origen had distinguished three types of just men, represented by Noah, Daniel, and Job.¹ With more precision and persistence, Saint Augustine had recognized in these three holy personages the figure of three categories of Christians: the chiefs who govern the Church well (Noah), the continent with their holy desires (Daniel), the married folk living in the midst of the trials of this world (Job).² Saint Gregory had likewise distinguished the "three orders of the faithful" both under grace and under the law: "the order of preachers is one thing, that of the continent another, and that of good married persons still another."³ These "three professions" had been described at length by Isidore of Seville.⁴ Noah, builder and patron of the