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# THE ECONOMY OF MERCY:

## The Liturgical Preaching of Saint Leo the Great


### Abstract

*The Economy of Mercy* is an analysis of the Christology, soteriology and spirituality of St Leo the Great.

Chapters 1 & 2 - *Leo the Preacher* and *Why Do Christology?* - discuss the background to the Latin sermon, Leo's own understanding of the function of the sermon, and the basic theme of the universal salvific will which lies at the heart of all Leo's preaching.

Chapters 3 & 4 - *The Sanctifying Sermon* and *The "Two Forms" Christology* - examine Leo's Christological teaching, and argue that it is informed not by an interest in technical terminology but purely by pastoral and spiritual concerns.

Chapters 5 & 6 - *A Theology of Glory* and *The Mystery of Faith* - develop this last point, and argue that Christology is ordered towards a spiritual "ascension" of the mind through contemplation first of the humanity and then of the divinity of Christ.

Chapters 7 & 8 - *Redemptive Revelation* and *The Logic of Redemption* - reinterpret the patristic "rights of the devil" soteriology in terms of a liberation from ignorance concerning that divine mercy which renders true contemplation possible, and in doing so offer a less "mythological" interpretation of this particular model of atonement.

Chapters 9 & 10 - *The Christian Combat* and *The Economy of Mercy* - describe the extension of Christ's conquest of the devil into the ascetic lifestyle which is demanded of the Christian, and explain that the practice of almsgiving represents a concrete imitation of that divine mercy which constitutes man in the image of God and which is the corollary of the contemplative life.

Finally, Chapter 11 - *Preaching and Contemplation* - summarises all that has been said, offers a modern perspective on the controversial "conquest of Satan" soteriology, and draws some comparisons between Leo's spiritual teaching and that of some of the leading schools of spirituality of the Middle Ages.

# THE ECONOMY OF MERCY

## The Liturgical Preaching of Saint Leo the Great

by

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Durham

(Department of Theology)

1997

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# INTRODUCTION

What relevance do the Christological debates of the fathers of the Church have for Christians today? What message does a fifth century pope have to offer the modern world? Is it not the case that the patristic disputes as to the the person and natures of Christ are just a lot of intricate word-games which have little or no significance for contemporary man, and that bishops like St Leo the Great inhabited a mind-set so completely different to our own that they cannot possibly have anything to contribute to our understanding of the kinds of things that concern modern-day Christians? Do they not, as Hans Küng argues in *The Incarnation of God*, merely provide a point of departure for a theology which has constantly to be restated and redefined in line with the perceptions and concerns of modern men and women? And are they not in themselves radically incapable of speaking to our own age, conditioned as they are by historical and cultural factors which appear alien and incomprehensible in our current situation - as Vico and Derrida respectively would argue?

It is true that ways of perceiving the Christian life have altered over the course of fifteen centuries, and that fathers such as Leo can often seem impossibly remote, but human nature remains constant, and any theology which deals with the fundamental question of what it is to be a human being is of permanent relevance (provided that it has not allowed itself to become unduly conditioned by its own time in a way that Derrida would regard as inevitable). The two great themes that underlie Leo the Great's preaching are "what does it mean to be human?" and "what does it mean to say that the eternal Word became a human being?" Leo asked these questions because he was a bishop with a responsibility (as he saw it) to the universal Church, which in his own age was threatened by those who challenged the traditional answers. Leo wants to make sense of a world in which the experience of

mankind is one of what a modern existentialist might call "alienation", and he seeks to explain how Christ is the solution to that sense of alienation if only we will accept the truth about his incarnation and his saving work. In doing so he demonstrates - in contradistinction to the counter-arguments put forward by Hans Küng and Edward Schillebeeckx - that it is possible to retain the traditional Greek-style "Christology from above" while at the same time taking full account of anthropological and humanistic considerations, and it is this rare ability to combine the "hellenistic" with the "biblical" (as Küng would designate it) that renders his Christology perennially valuable.

We shall argue that the answer to the question "what does it mean to be human?" is that we were created in order to reflect the *imago Dei*- the "image of God", so clearly is it important for Leo to establish what it is that life in the image of God consists in. This leads him in turn to an investigation of the divine attributes, amongst which he sees mercy and love as being pre-eminent. In this he is very much at one with modern writers such as Küng, who elevates the highly "personal" God of the Old Testament over and above the static and impassible God of Greek philosophy, and with Hans Urs von Balthasar, who deals specifically with the kenotic revelation of self-communicative love of God. According to Leo, the nature of God is to be merciful and loving, and the goal of human life is both to contemplate God as merciful and loving and to imitate God as merciful and loving in order to reflect the *imago Dei*. The questions "what does it mean to be human?" and "what does it mean to be God" merge together in so far as the answer to both is "to be merciful and loving", and they merge most especially in the incarnation in which the God-man reveals both the truth concerning his divine mercy for our contemplation and, at the same time, the prototypical human reflection of that mercy which he offers for our imitation.

In order to expound Leo's answers to the fundamental questions concerning what it means for human beings to live in the image of God, we shall attempt to outline as systematically as possible Leo's teaching on Christology and soteriology in such a way as to emphasise their relation to his spirituality - which is nothing other than his vision of what it means to be truly human. Our investigation will concentrate throughout on the ways in which Leo explores the various aspects which the question

of the divine mercy exposes to view, and will be especially concerned with the Christological, soteriological, ascetical and socio-ethical dimensions of Leo's theology of the mercy of God and of the universal salvific will, though occasional reference will be made to Leo's predecessors and contemporaries among the Latin fathers in order to locate his teaching within its historical context.

We shall also draw attention to more modern writers of the Catholic tradition - notably St Thomas Aquinas from the thirteenth century and Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx, Hans Küng and Hans Urs von Balthasar from the twentieth. We shall do this partly because we believe that these writers sometimes express in explicit and more developed form ideas that exist implicitly and embryonically in Leo's sermons, and partly because we believe that Leo himself helps to clarify certain points that are of relevance to modern debate and which theologians of our own time have tended to obscure. We see no methodological difficulty in using Aquinas or von Balthasar to illuminate Leo (or *vice versa*), as long as we recognise that we are dealing with patterns of thought that recur across the centuries rather than with direct influence or exact anticipations of future developments.

For the most part we shall be quoting Leo from the translations cited in the bibliography, though often in a form adapted for purposes either of greater accuracy or improved style. The references to Leo which occur in the footnotes are to the Chavasse edition of the Sermons and to the Ballerini edition of the Letters (the latter published by Migne). It is inevitable that in setting Leo's preaching in context one is drawn into risking generalising comments about his predecessors and contemporaries, and this represents a particular difficulty in the case of St Augustine whose corpus is so vast, whose thought so subtle, and whose interpreters so varied and numerous. For that reason we shall avoid making too many of the direct comparisons between Augustine and Leo which a study of the latter might seem to demand, restricting ourselves instead to broader statements about *Augustinianism* as perceived by both its friends and its foes.

Taken as a whole, this study is intended to constitute a more or less complete survey of the relation of Christology to spirituality in the writings of St Leo the Great, and our hope is that it will demonstrate that Leo's theology of the divine

mercy and his message about what it is to be human and what it is for Christ to be human (as well as divine) are as relevant today as they were in the middle of the fifth century. Leo, it might be argued, anticipates von Balthasar's call to "raze the bastions" and attempts to break down the barriers that "academic" theology and monastic spirituality had erected between the gospel and the faithful, and to make both theology and spirituality accessible to the "ordinary" Christian. This service, so far as Leo concerned, constitutes the true vocation of the Bishop of Rome, and we are firmly of the belief that, hermeneutical problems notwithstanding, Leo's preaching of the mysteries of the life of the incarnate Word and of the spiritual life which is their corollary remains as valuable and as necessary today as it was when he formulated it in the remoteness of the fifth century.

# Chapter One

# LEO THE PREACHER

## Who is Leo the Great?

In spite of the existence of a Greek *vita*,[1] little is known of Leo's life, especially in the period before his pontificate, though he seems to have been born in either Rome or Tuscany at around the end of the fourth century.[2] He was influential in Rome even before his accession to the papacy as is clear from the fact that John Cassian claims that he is writing his *de Incarnatione* at Leo's request. In 431 Leo was asked by Cyril of Alexandria[3] to enlist Rome's support against Juvenal of Jerusalem, and Prosper of Aquitaine tells us that he was instrumental in securing the decision of Sixtus III against the Pelagian Julian of Eclanum.[4] Leo received notification that he had been elected pope while on a diplomatic mission to reconcile Aetius and Arbinus (the Praetorian Prefect), and all in all appears to have been a figure of considerable importance in the decade before the commencement of his occupancy of the see of Rome. The earliest modern biography is that of A. Regnier,[5] while the principal study in English remains that of T. Jalland.[6]

During the course of the present investigation we shall be concerned primarily with Leo's way of thought, and, in particular with the manner in which he develops a theology of the divine mercy and universal salvific will - and then sets out to preach it through the media of a Christology and a spiritual asceticism which are designed

to be accessible to those under his pastoral care who would normally find the Christological sophistication of a Cyril of Alexandria or the ascetical prescriptions of a John Cassian utterly beyond them. However, this intensely pastoral programme is enacted against the background of great ecclesiastical and political events in which Leo played a prominent part - even if his preaching remains less overtly "political" than that of Ambrose - and we need to take a brief look at this background before drawing our final conclusions concerning Leo's place in the long line of famous Italian preachers.

As regards his policy in the west, Leo was preoccupied with the stamping out of persisting heresies of Pelagianism and Manichaeism. He deals with Pelagianism in Letters 1 and 2 without saying anything very original, although attempts have been made to attribute to him the *Indiculus de Gratia* . This, however, is more likely to be the work of Prosper of Aquitaine, whose relation to Leo is well-documented.[7] Prosper assisted Leo in the composition of his famous Tome (Letter 28), and it seems plausible that it was through Prosper that the ideas of Augustine were mediated to Leo. It was Prosper more than anyone else who through his collections of Augustine's sayings and his softening of the apparent harshness of some of Augustine's teaching made possible the triumph of Augustinianism at the Council of Orange in 529,[8] and who facilitated the transmission of that teaching to the mediaeval Church.[9] Moreover, his concern with the universal salvific will as expounded in the *de Vocatione Omnium Gentium* reflects a theological emphasis which Leo takes up and develops in his own particular fashion.[10] One could argue that Leo's preaching provides the Christology, soteriology, and spirituality to accompany Prosper's theology of history and theory of grace, so it is fitting that Prosper should have assisted in the writing of the Tome and that Leo should be thought to have made some contribution to the *Indiculus.*

In respect of Manichaeism, Leo was energetic in his attempts to extirpate the heresy within the city of Rome (where it appears to have survived all previous attempts at destroying it), while in Spain he intervened at the request of a bishop Turibius to produce a lengthy letter (Letter 15) in condemnation of the Priscillianists, who seem to have held a more sophisticated version of the Manichaean religion.[11] However, Leo's activity within Rome extended far beyond the rooting out of heresy,

for he took very seriously his responsibilities towards the city in which his see was situated,[12] and he was heavily involved in monastic renewal, liturgical organization, and the restoration and adornment of the city's great basilicas.[13]

More dramatically, Leo was a member of the imperial embassy sent by Valentinian III to deal with Attila the Hun (being credited with much of the success of the mission),[14] and three years later he was instrumental in persuading Gaiseric not to burn the city of Rome or massacre its inhabitants.[15] Further afield, he intervened to help resolve the difficulties occasioned by the Vandal invasion of Mauretania in Africa.[16] More controversially, he prevented Hilary bishop of Arles from exercising the right to intervene in the province of Vienne that had been accorded to him by Pope Zosimus, though the attempts by some later historians to read back into this episode a fifth century conflict between an embryonic Gallicanism and an embryonic Ultramontanism are almost certainly mistaken.[17]

Leo was also heavily involved with the Church in the east,[18] where the question of the Apostolic Vicariate of Thessalonica posed problems of jurisdiction not entirely dissimilar to those pertaining to the Arles affair. More significant, though, was the Christological dispute occasioned by the teaching of the monk Eutyches, who proposed an understanding of the incarnation which at least on the surface favoured the docetic position that Christ's humanity was more apparent than real.[19] The debate dragged on as a result of the various political machinations that surrounded it - machinations in the fields of both imperial and ecclesiastical politics - and even, after the Council of Chalcedon in 451 which vindicated Leo and adopted his Tome as the classic testament of the Church's Christology,[20] Leo found himself having to defend the Council against its many zealous opponents such as the Palestinian monks, while at the same time opposing Canon 28 which elevated the see of Constantinople to the second rank within the Church behind Rome (paving the way for the eastern idea of the "Ecumenical Patriarchate").[21]

So far as the preaching of Leo is concerned, the critical edition prepared by A. Chavasse contains ninety-seven sermons and *tractatus*.[22] These are divided in accordance with the Roman liturgical year, and cover Christmas, Epiphany, Holy

Week, Easter, the Ascension, Pentecost, Lent, the Pentecost ember days, the September ember days, the December ember days, and the "Collects" which were devoted to almsgiving. These sermons for feasts and fasts are supplemented by sermons on the occasion of anniversaries personal to Leo, and of saints such as Peter and Paul, St Lawrence, and the Maccabees. Within each sub-division the sermons are arranged in chronological succession, so that, for example, the Christmas sermons which number 21 to 30 in the critical edition cover the years from 440 until 454 in that order (with certain years missed out).

This form of arrangement goes back to the earliest collection, and is not a device of modern editors. In the present century, the *Sources Chrétiennes* edition somewhat perversely altered the traditional numbering of the sermons found in Migne in the *Patrologia Latina* and retained by Chavasse in the *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*, though the individual sub-sets remained intact. Leo's sermons were collected for doctrinal and polemical reasons, with the first collection covering the period from 440-445 and the second covering 452-454 in response to the crisis occasioned by the monks of Palestine. A third compilation combining the two earlier ones seems to have been put together some time in the seventh century, possibly with a view to defending the Council of Chalcedon and the Three Chapters against the supporters of the second Council of Constantinople (553) and its condemnation of figures such as Theodoret of Cyrus whom Leo and Chalcedon had backed.[23] The sermons were subsequently preserved and circulated for liturgical purposes, as in the case of the eighth century homiliaries of Agimund and of Paul the Deacon, and in canonical collections, where they appeared alongside Leo's letters.

A comparison with earlier Italian preachers such as Zeno of Verona, Gaudentius of Brescia, Ambrose of Milan, Chromatius of Aquileia, Maximus of Turin and Peter Chrysologus suggests that Leo completes the shift of emphasis from exposition of scripture to interpretation of the calendar which has been gradually taking place from Zeno onwards. Leo is above all a liturgical thinker, and we know that Leo composed liturgical texts,[24] though few if any of those attributed to him by Migne are authentic, and this liturgical concern permeates his preaching. His language is often sacramental in tone,[25] and he appears to have employed liturgical

sources in his preaching.[26] He seems to have composed a Mass for the feast of the Ascension,[27] which is especially interesting in view of the fact that the theology of the ascension dominates much of his preaching.[28] Leo's entire theology is liturgical and salvation-historical in emphasis, and he perceives the Christian calendar as making sacramentally present the historical events that it commemorates.[29]

The major work on Leo's theology of the liturgy is that of M.B. de Soos, who argues strongly for what we might describe as a sacramental understanding of liturgy as re-presenting saving history for the faithful in the here and now.[30] A similar point is made by J. Gaillard,[31] while D.A. Piloni discusses the rôle of faith in the appropriation by Christians of the benefits of the liturgical celebration.[32] An important revisionist study exists in the form of an unpublished dissertation by T.W. Guzie,[33] but most scholars (including the present writer) would incline to the view that liturgy constitutes a kind of "anamnesis" of certain key moments in the life of Christ in such a way that individuals are able in a sense to pass through those events themselves. Thus when Leo says that we are born with Christ, or that we die and are raised with Christ, what he really means is that we undergo liturgically what the incarnate Word went through literally and historically. It is almost as if we are transferred out of linear history and enter into a new circular history which is calendrical and liturgical, and which is a perpetual "anamnesis" of the history of Jesus Christ.

Within the context of this understanding of the meaning of liturgy Leo appears to have revived the practice of liturgical preaching which had fallen into desuetude in fifth century Rome. In earlier centuries the sermon had formed an integral part of the eucharistic celebration.[34] It was usually performed by the bishops, but priests were also allowed to preach as we know from the numerous homilies of Origen and Jerome. In the east in the fourth century when several priests were present they preached in turn after the reading with the bishop having the last word. In many places, though, it was forbidden for priests to preach at public gatherings, and the ban was not rescinded in North Africa until the time of Augustine who was allowed to preach while not yet a bishop. Pope Celestine criticises the bishops of Provence for

allowing priests to preach, and Sozomen suggests that no preaching of any kind was done in Rome during his own time.[35] There is no provision made for preaching in the Roman *ordines* of the period, and preaching popes such as Leo and Gregory the Great appear to have been the exception rather than the rule during the centuries before the early middle ages.

We have no way of knowing whether preachers like Maximus and Chromatius were exceptions because it is plausible that other Italian bishops could have preached sermons which have been lost. As we suggested earlier, it is entirely possible that for a variety of reasons the sermons of Leo's predecessors in the see of Rome might not have been recorded, but equally it remains relatively likely that Leo's preaching activity marks a radical departure from Roman custom, and that if previous popes did engage in preaching they did so in a way which failed to leave the sort of significant mark on contemporary doctrinal debates such as the Nestorian and Pelagian crises which would have guaranteed their collection and preservation. It is not clear what weight should be given to Sozomen's statement that there was no preaching at Rome during his time. His *Ecclesiastical History* covers the period from 323 to 423, and if he is referring to this time span then his testimony supports the view that Leo was an innovator in this regard. However, the last book was completed in 443 or 444, by which time Leo was already preaching in Rome, so Sozomen's evidence may be suspect if he is including these years in his judgment.

Be that as it may, and quite apart from any liturgical compositions for which he may have been responsible, Leo can be credited with having invested preaching with a liturgical significance, and for having reinterpreted the function of the sermon so as to understand it as a commentary upon the liturgical year rather than on the occurring text of scripture. The very fashion in which the sermons are organised within the various collections - quite possibly at Leo's own behest in the first instance, though this cannot be proved either way - indicates a sense of the Christian year as logically and theo-logically structured which is absent from earlier Italian preachers, and the earliest of Leo's compilers quite clearly perceived the sermons as intimately bound up with the shape of the liturgical year as no previous compilers had done.

Finally we should recall that, like many of these great Italian preachers, Leo

is something of a stylist.[36] He frequently writes in a rhythmical prose or *cursus*[37] - something that was typical of the official papal document of the period[38] - and is extraordinarily fond of antithesis, assonance, and alliteration. We might note in this regard Halliwell's study of Leo's literary style earlier in this chapter,[39] and should also mention Mueller's documentation of his use of vocabulary.[40] Of especial interest is his use of clausulae,[41] while his immersion in classical culture has been duly commented on.[42]

Leo is a creative figure who advances to its highest point the reinterpretation of the function of the patristic sermon. The sermon has metamorphosed from the collection of biblical exposition and general moralisation which characterises the preaching of Zeno and has become in Leo's hands a sophisticated theological tractate which combines solid theology and spiritual and moral exhortation in roughly equal measure, while at the same time becoming fully integrated into the liturgical celebration of which it forms a part and upon which it now comments and reflects.

The three key concepts that we shall be reiterating throughout this study are that Leo is a *preacher*, that he is a *liturgical* preacher, and that he is a preacher of the *divine mercy* and of the universal salvific will. These three points are clearly interrelated, for Leo understands the liturgy as the "locus" in which the events of salvation-history (which themselves express the divine mercy) are made liturgically present in a way which makes them assimilable by the faithful, and he understands the liturgical sermon as playing an important rôle in this process of what we might nowadays call "anamnesis". So far as Leo is concerned, the sermon is not a kind of between-the-acts interval between the liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the Sacrament, but is, together with Word and Sacrament, itself an instrument of the divine mercy for inserting the individual Christian into the process of salvation history which the liturgy makes efficaciously present; and, in holding to such a theology, Leo reveals himself as being a thinker who is both thoroughly traditional and impressively modern.

## What is a Sermon?

The Gospel according to St Mark begins (in the RSV translation) with the words "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God", where "gospel of Jesus Christ" could mean either "the gospel concerning Jesus Christ" or "the gospel consisting in Jesus Christ" - or even both. Maximus the Confessor is famous for teaching that the scriptures afford a kind of real presence of Christ, who as Logos is in a sense incarnated in the written word (logos) just as he is in human flesh, and with whom we enjoy "gnostic communion" in the scriptures.[43] Here again, the subject-matter of scripture is simply scripture, which is an incarnation or epiphany of the divine Word. What we shall be arguing in this present chapter is that the western fathers in general and Leo in particular understand the task of preaching (at least implicitly) in much the same light.

According to this theory, the *raison d'être* of the sermon is not mere moral or doctrinal instruction, but is the fact of preaching itself in which the Logos who became incarnate in the womb of Mary becomes in a sense "inverbate" again - present as God and man - in the word of the preacher. Moreover, so far as Leo and others are concerned, the message of the sermon is not simply what is contained within the sermon, but actually is the sermon, and, just as Mark's gospel is both the gospel about Jesus Christ and the gospel that consists in Jesus Christ, so also the sermon is both a preaching about the divine mercy as manifested in the life of the incarnate Christ, and is itself a manifestation of the divine mercy in Christ the Logos who is incarnated in the logos of the preacher.

Leo's sermons mark the high-point in a tradition of Italian preaching whose known corpus stretches from Zeno of Verona in the fourth century to Peter Chrysologus and Leo the Great in the fifth. Preaching was the duty of the bishop, and was normally attached to the celebration of the Eucharist, in such a way that the incarnational presence of Christ in the logos of the sermon was bound up with his incarnational presence in the actual sacrament and in the eucharistic synaxis. Other great Italian preachers whose sermons have been recorded include Gaudentius of Brescia, Chromatius of Aquileia, and Maximus of Turin - all of whom were bishops who, acting in the persona of Christ in the midst of the liturgical assembly, were

themselves "incarnational" figures as they exercised their priestly and preaching functions.[44] One might justify adding the name of Jerome who spent so much of his time within an Italian milieu, but the sermons that we possess were preached for a monastic audience in Bethlehem, so it is perhaps stretching a point to classify Jerome as an "Italian" preacher.

Taken together, these preachers represent a continuous tradition which provides the context for Leo's own work of preaching, and one might contend that, by organising his preaching around the liturgical celebration of the saving mercy of God within the context of a theology of what theologians call "salvation-history", Leo's achievement is to transport preaching from the sphere of the moral and hortatory to the realm of the kerygmatic proclamation of the divine mercy. Such a shift prepares the way for the evolution of the specifically "evangelical" preaching of St Dominic and his friars preachers in the middle ages, and in effecting it Leo develops the understanding of the Christological sermon as being not just a sermon *about* Christology, but as being Christology (that is to say, the logos about Christ) "incarnate".

As we have noted, preaching in the patristic period (and for some time after) was primarily the duty of the bishop. We know that Ambrose preached every Sunday and feast-day and on the days of Lent, and that a similar practice was observed in Carthage and Hippo.[45] Similar evidence is lacking for Rome, and before Leo only Liberius has handed down a body of sermons for the liturgical seasons of the year. Whether this implies a neglect of preaching by the popes or simply a lack of enthusiasm amongst potential compilers it is impossible to tell. Maybe the sermons of Leo simply superseded those of his predecessors in sheer quality and applicability to the problems faced by later generations, with the result that his sermons alone were preserved. Either way, we shall discuss later on how Leo regards himself as a kind of sacrament of Peter, and interprets his own rôle in terms of a "sacramental" extension of the "logos" spoken by Peter about Christ at Caesarea Philippi, in just a way that his own function within the Church is to be an instrument for the preaching and teaching of Christo-logic.

Those letters of earlier popes which have come down to us were most probably

recorded because they appear to decide finally on some doctrinal or disciplinary issue. Perhaps their sermons were not sufficiently imbued with dogmatic content to make it worth keeping them and using them in ongoing doctrinal debates. The strongly dogmatic character of Leo's preaching, by way of contrast, would have made his corpus of sermons attractive to those collecting materials for use in a polemical context. The rather diffuse combination of moral paraenesis and slightly obscure biblical exegesis that characterises a preacher such as Zeno of Verona in the fourth century contrasts markedly with Leo's almost single-minded commitment to the preaching of the message of the mercy of God, and suggests that, maybe, the reason why the sermons of the popes before Leo have not been preserved for posterity is that they lack that unitary vision of what the Christian faith is about that makes Leo's preaching so compelling. This is not to say that these earlier preachers lacked an understanding of the sacramental quality of the sermon, but is rather to claim that Leo more than anyone before him matches the message to the medium in such a way that the sermon which actually is an epiphany or incarnation of the Logos is also a sermon *about* the incarnation of the Logos.

The homiletic literature of the fourth century "is essentially biblical and is tied to the passages selected for the liturgy",[46] and may thus be seen as presenting an epiphany of the incarnate Word by providing an extended meditation on scripture leading to something akin to Maximus's "gnostic communion". Leo, on the other hand, while quoting freely from scripture, avoids sustained exegesis, and appears to have allowed dogmatic rather than liturgical considerations to influence his choice of texts. His polished style[47] is the work of a preacher who writes his sermons - a development from the earlier part of the period when sermons were as a general rule improvised and taken down by stenographers.

This explains the combination of rhetorical flourish and simplicity of form which characterises the Latin sermon of the period. Some sermons, notably the lengthy efforts of St Ambrose, were later turned into treatises of notable literary sophistication, but the majority of bishops appear to have preached shorter sermons which were not suited to that kind of editing. Many of Augustine's surviving sermons are series of sustained exposition of the gospels or of some other biblical text, but he

and other preachers also used the sermon to comment on contemporary events and problems, to attack the remnants of paganism, to warn against scandals or the threat of barbarian invasion, or simply to preach sound doctrine. Conscious that the sermon possesses a liturgical and sacramental dimension which elevates it above the status of a public lecture or religious address, Leo avoids such distractions, and restricts himself to preaching, directly or indirectly, about the incarnation which his own sermons make a present and accessible reality.

No preacher before Leo has a single overarching message of salvation or a theological *leitmotif* to order his meditations towards the proclamation of a unified kerygma - in Leo's case the kerygma of God's essential mercifulness and universal salvific will. Leo is arguably the first theologian in the west - and certainly the first of the great preachers - to develop what might be termed a "grand idea", and his achievement is to liberate the sermon from the subjectivity inherent in the kind of homiletics which was rooted in highly speculative interpretation of the Old Testament, and to employ it instead as an instrument for preaching the message of the Old Testament as witnessed in a broader perspective - the message that God is a God of love and mercy who desires to save and who intervenes in history for the sake of our salvation. However, as we have argued, the message is also the medium, and the divine mercy which is the subject-matter of Leo's preaching is itself manifested in the sermon during the course of which God makes himself knowable, and in which he reaches out to us in order to facilitate a kind of noetic appropriation of his love and mercy which are not only the gospel that Leo preaches, but which are incarnated in the pope's very act of preaching.

Those who gathered together the homiliaries of the western fathers may have had a number of motives in doing so, but one of the most likely reasons for the earliest collections may well have been the expansion of the Church into rural areas. In inaccessible villages the liturgical celebration would not have been presided over by a bishop, and it is quite possible that episcopal sermons were collected for reading out to the faithful in these outlying parts - with the result that the absence of the bishop as sacramental icon of Christ in the midst of the worshipping community would have been compensated for by the "sacramentality" of the word of his preaching. It is

also likely that some of these sermons were gathered together for the use of monks and nuns at a time when monasticism was expanding rapidly in the west - once again, in the knowledge that the word of the bishop was (in a mysterious sense) by definition "Christo-logical".

We know that Chromatius was the director of a community of monks in Aquileia, and it is quite possible that his sermons were at least initially preserved for their benefit. Similarly, there existed a convent of nuns at Verona, and it seems plausible to suggest that the earliest collection of Zeno's sermons was made for the use of these sisters. To such groups the strictly moral and ascetical sermon was very well suited, but Leo was conscious of his pastoral responsibility not only for the city of Rome but also for the universal Church, over which he saw himself (more, perhaps, even than his predecessors) as exercising a level of jurisdiction which he conceived in sacramental rather than ecclesio-political terms. The universality of his calling seems to have encouraged him to develop a message that was itself universal in scope, and may explain why he adopted the "grand themes" of the divine mercy and God's universal salvific will, and came to perceive more clearly than any of his predecessors that this message was sacramentalised or incarnated in the very medium of his preaching.

# NOTES

1 See C. van De Vorst: "La vie grecque de s. Léon", *Analecta Bollandiana* 29 (1910), 400-408.

2 See the excellent summary by Basil Studer in A. di Berardino (ed.): *Patrology*, volume 4 (Augustinian Patristic Institute, Rome), ET Westminster, Maryland, 1986, 589-612.

3 As testified by Leo in Letter 119,4.

4 As we learn in Prosper's *Epitoma Chronicae*, PL 51, 598.

5 A. Regnier: *Saint Léon le Grand*, Paris, 1910.

6 T. Jalland: *The Life and Times of St. Leo the Great*, London, 1941.

7 See F. di Capua: "Leone Magno e Prospero d'Aquitania", *Scritti Minori* 2, Rome, 1959, 184-190; J. Gaidioz: "Saint Prosper d'Aquitaine et le Tome à Flavien", *Revue des sciences religieuses* 23 (1949), 270-301.

8 On Prosper's Augustinianism, see G. de Plinval: "Prosper d'Aquitaine, interprète de saint Augustin", *Recherches Augustiniennes* 1 (1958), 339-355; R. Lorenz: "Der Augustinismus Prospers von Aquitanien", *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 73 (1962), 217-252.

9 M. Cappuyns: "Le premier représentant de l'augustinisme médiévale", *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 1 (1929), 309-337.

10 For Prosper's teaching on this subject, see M. Cappuyns: "L'auteur du 'De vocatione omnium gentium'", *Revue Bénédictine* 39 (1927), 198-226; L. Pelland: *S. Prosperi Aquitani doctrina de praedestinatione et voluntate Dei salvifica*, Montreal, 1936; C. Bartnik: "L'universalisme de l'histoire dans le De vocatione omnium gentium", *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 68 (1973), 731-758.

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12 See C. Lepelley: "S. Léon le Grand et la Cité Romaine", *Revue des sciences religieuses* 35 (1961), 130-150.

13 On this last point, see L.M. Martínez: "La restauración de San Léon Magno en la basílica Ostiense", *Römische Quartalschrift* 58 (1963), 1-27.

14 See R. Jurdin: "Le Pape chez Attila", *Nouvelle Revue Française* 17 (1969), 161-168.

15 On Leo and the barbarians see I Scalfati: *S. Leone il Grande e le invasioni dei Goti, Unni, e Vandali*, Rome, 1944.

16 See C. Lepelley: "S. Léon le Grand et l'église maurétanienne. Primauté romaine et autonomie africaine du V-ième siècle", *Les Cayers de Tunisie* 15 (1967), 189-204.

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22 CCSL 138 & 138A (1973).

23 See A. Chavasse in CCSL 138, p. cxiii.

24 On the extent of these, see E. Dekkers: "Autour de l'oeuvre liturgique de saint Léon le Grand", *Sacris Erudiri* 10 (1958), 363-398.

25 See D.R. Holten: "The Sacramental Language of S. Leo the Great. A Study of the Word Munus and Oblata", *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 92 (1978), 115-165; also T.W. Guzie: "Exegetical and Sacramental Language in the Sermons of Leo the Great", *Studia Patristica*, 13 (1975), 208-213.

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35 J.A. Jungmann, p. 289.

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42 L. Alfonsi: "Aspetti della tradizione culturale classica in San Leone Magno", *Annali Pontifical Istitute Superiore di Scienze e Lettere "S. Chiara"* 11 (1961), 93-100.

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44 For Maximus, Christ is a kind of "Ur Sacrament" and the duty of the bishop is to preach the *mysteria* or *sacramenta* which are grounded in the person of Christ. With regard to this theme see especially P. Visentin: "'Christus ipse est sacramentum' in S. Massimo di Torino" in *Misc. G. Lercaro* II, Rome, 1967, 27-51.

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46 *ibid.*

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# Chapter Two

# WHY DO CHRISTOLOGY?

## The Scope of the Divine Mercy

Why do we need to "do Christology"? Contemporary Christologists like Edward Schillebeeckx, Karl Rahner, and Hans Küng might argue that the duty of the theologian is constantly to be engaged in re-interpreting the dogmatic tradition of the Church in the light of recent insights in philosophy and theology in order to make it relevant both to the academic world that such people inhabit and also to the social, political and economic needs of "modern man" in a more extended sense. Leo would probably have dissented from the idea implicit in this that "theological experts" exist to restate ancient doctrines in new and improved ways for the benfit of each passing generation, for he sees Christology neither as an intellectual exercise which has to keep pace with the latest ideas nor as a prolegomenon to the development of specifically Christian attitudes to ethics, sociology, and politics. Rather, he envisages doctrine as being somehow *therapeutic*, in the sense that it is in Christological dogma as encountered in the Christological sermon that individual Christians are enabled to appropriate the benefits of the cycle of incarnation, passion, resurrection and ascension - with the result that the emphasis is not so much on ongoing reinterpretation as on unchanging liturgical proclamation.

Moreover, just as the sermon is not just a preaching *about* the incarnation but is itself an epiphany or "anamnesis" of the incarnate Word in the form of the preached

word, so also Christology is not simply the science of the incarnation of the Logos, but is itself the Logos made efficaciously present as logos under the materiality of the Christological sermon. Within the Dominican tradition it has been commonplace to equate study of scriptures with contemplation, and we shall be arguing that Leo anticipates this insight by regarding Christology as an exercise in contemplative ascent of the mind from the humanity to the divinity in Christ, and by seeing the sermon as the *locus* in which this act of contemplation - which Leo makes available not only to monks but to all Christians - is most perfectly practised.

Leo's Christology and spirituality proceed equally from the fundamental insight that God is a God of love and mercy - of love and mercy which the incarnation reveals to us and which the Christian contemplates in his or her spiritual life through liturgical meditation on Jesus Christ, and which he or she imitates through love of God and neighbour. As we shall see, the purpose of the sermon - and most especially of the Christological sermon - is to enable the ordinary lay Christian to emulate the desert spirituality of the monk by achieving a contemplative ascent of the mind to God who in his mercy reveals himself in Christ (and above all in Christ's enduring presence in the liturgical celebration of the Christian mysteries) in an accessible and approachable form. More than anything else, what Christ reveals is a merciful God whose chief characteristic is a loving desire to save which finds concrete expression most of all in the liturgical celebrations of the Church.

It is because he perceives this truth that Leo takes on board the Augustinian idea of a radical gulf between God and man across which God reaches out in love and mercy with his offer of grace and salvation, while at the same time accentuating the aspect of mercy to a degree which goes well beyond that envisaged by the bishop of Hippo - who is perhaps more acutely aware of the perennial antinomies implicit in any attempt to combine the twin attributes of God as just and merciful within a single system. In line with his preacher's tendency to emphasise the divine mercy over and above all other attributes of God, Leo develops a Christology which represents Christ as revealing, in so far as he is divine, the merciful love of God, and demonstrating, in as much as he is human, the love of God and neighbour by which we are to imitate the divine mercy.

In this way we are taught to reflect in our lives that "image of God" in which we were originally constituted and which Christ restores in a way that is simultaneously an efficacious "mystery" (*mysterium*) and a revelatory "example" (*exemplum*). Christ operates as an efficacious mystery through the medium of his historical and liturgical causing of grace, and as a revelatory example through his historical and liturgical exemplification of the divine nature as merciful and loving and of human nature as ordered towards a mirroring of these same divine attributes. Underlying all this is the presupposition that God is not the impassive, iceberg God of Greek philosophy which Hans Küng caricatures the fathers as upholding, but a thoroughly biblical God of mercy and love who enters the material order at the levels of history, liturgy and preaching.[1]

The particular and highly individual twist which Leo's Augustinianism takes may have something to do with Prosper of Aquitaine. Leo's Augustinianism has been well documented,[2] but whether he had actually read Augustine directly or whether he had imbibed an eclectic and modified Augustinianism from Prosper remains uncertain. What is undisputed is that Prosper played a major rôle in the composition of the "Tome" and perhaps in other of Leo's letters, and exerted a major influence on numerous aspects of Leo's thinking.[3] Without doubt his teaching on God's "universal salvific will" provides the ideological background for Leo's understanding of the divine nature as fundamentally loving and merciful, and represents the obvious point of departure for a consideration of Leo's Christological spirituality. The idea that the primary attributes of God are love and mercy permeates the thought of Prosper, and is a theme that is explored in considerable detail in his work "On the Call of All Nations", which offers a coherent theology of salvation history and of the doctrine of grace.

Although an ardent defender of Augustine, Prosper sees a problem in the apparent irreconcilability of the bishop of Hippo's teaching on election and predestination with the message of St. Paul that "God will have all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth",[4] and, accordingly, attempts to develop a theology of the salvific will of God which will correlate the teaching of his master with that of the New Testament. Augustine's presentation of the doctrine

of predestination appears - at least on the surface - to undermine human freedom, for it suggests that those who are not elected to salvation have no freedom to choose salvation for themselves, whereas those who *are* elected have no freedom *not* to choose salvation.

Taken literally, such a viewpoint leads to the systems of Luther and Calvin, though their versions of Augustinianism are rendered possible only when certain passages are read without reference to the context of Augustine's overall thought. Perhaps wisely, Prosper reintroduces the emphasis on human freedom - which is arguably rather obscured in some of Augustine's writings - by positing the idea of a "general grace" to which all may freely respond but which may be "topped up" in the case of the elect by special grace. Of course, Augustine affirms human freewill in his *de Libero Arbitrio*, but this was written before the Pelagian controversy, after which one gleans the impression that it is rather more difficult for him to reconcile true human freedom with his teaching on nature and grace.[5]

Although Leo does not wrestle with the paradoxes implicit in Augustine's doctrine of grace, he reprises with great enthusiasm Prosper's concern with the universality of the offer of salvation - most notably in the sermons for the feast of the Epiphany,[6] which in accordance with the tradition prevalent in Rome has to do with the revelation of Christ to the gentiles. Leo remarks that

> "it concerns the salvation of all humanity that the infancy of the Mediator between God and man was now being made known to the whole world, even while it was still confined to this meagre little village. He had chosen the nation of Israel, and - from that nation - one family in particular, as the one from which to take up the nature of all humanity (*de qua naturam universae humanitatis adsumeret*). Still, he did not want the beginnings of his appearance to remain hidden within the dwelling of his Mother. Instead, he wanted to be acknowledged right away by all, since he had seen fit to be born for all" (Sermon 31,1,5-12).

Clearly, the incarnation does not save by itself through communicating benefits to humankind in some automatic kind of way, but must be supplemented by a process of epiphanic proclamation if its benefits are to be rendered universally available. So far as Leo is concerned, this epiphanic proclamation takes shape most especially in the liturgy and in the liturgical sermon which is at the service of the kerygma of the divine mercy.

The salvation of all nations in Christ is central to the divine plan, and consists quite simply in the mercy of God liberating the nations from sin and bringing them to the adoration of the God whom Christ reveals. Leo explains that

> "God, in his providential mercy, planned to help the dying world in these last days, and determined beforehand the salvation of all nations in Christ. Since godless error had for some time turned all nations away from the worship of the true God, and since even Israel, the special people of God, had almost completely fallen away from the established laws - in short, since all had been confined under the dominion of sin - he had mercy on all" (Sermon 33,1,7-13).

A key word for Leo is *misericordia* ("mercy"), and he emphasises this even more than Prosper, whose concern, at least in the *de Vocatione*, is restricted to reconciling Paul and Augustine. Leo frequently speaks of the work of salvation as proceeding from the divine mercy, which he understands in terms of the forgiveness of sins.

This inclination to forgive precedes the cycle of incarnation, passion, and resurrection, and is not consequent upon it, and represents the foundation of the idea that salvation is at least a possibility for all. Thus Leo writes

> "justice was lacking everywhere, and the whole world had fallen into worthless and evil things. Had divine power not put off passing judgment, all of mankind would have received the sentence of condemnation. But wrath was converted into mercy, and in order to make the magnitude of the grace that was to be bestowed more evident, it then pleased him that the mystery of forgiveness (*sacramentum remissionis*) should be applied to the sins of men - sins that were to be wiped out - when none could boast about their own merits" (Sermon 33,1,14-20).

As we noted, there exists a kind of chasm between God and man which man is unable to bridge, so the initiative in reconciling God with human beings has to come from above - from the divinity whose anger has been changed into mercy through no prior act of atonement or appeasement by human beings. The entirety of Leo's Christological spirituality is rooted in the supposition that God's defining attribute is that of mercy, and that this mercy moves him to take the initiative in restoring man to the *imago Dei*. Leo anticipates something of Aquinas's insight that the incarnation is the logical consequence of God's self-communicative goodness, as well as something of Hans Urs von Balthasar's idea that love is essentially self-revelatory. The Anselmian concern with the satisfaction of the divine justice is less prominent, though we should note

that Anselm likewise grounds the satisfactory work of Christ in the saving initiative of the divine mercy and love.

Leo stresses God's merciful goodness to all in a manner which is reminiscent of Prosper's teaching on "general grace", and underlines the mercy of God in postponing punishment in order to give us time for repentance. He also develops an interesting insight on the nature of punishment itself, arguing that, at least in the present life, punishment is simply a matter of hardness of heart. We shall show when we come to discuss the conquest of Satan that Leo sees captivity to the devil in terms of ignorance of the divine mercy, and that idea seems to be echoed in Sermon 35 where the Pope describes the "hard and ungrateful mind" as being "its own punishment". He writes

> "in spite of all these things, God remains well disposed towards everyone (*permanet super omnes benignitas Dei*). To no one does he deny his mercy. Why, he even bestows many good things indiscriminately upon all. He prefers to invite with acts of kindness those whom he could rightly subdue with punishments. Delay in retribution makes room for repentance. It cannot be said, however, that there is no vengeance where conversion does not take place, for a hard and ungrateful mind becomes already its own punishment, and suffers in its conscience whatever has been deferred by the goodness of God" (Sermon 35,4,110-117).

The implication is that, in the wake of the revelation of the divine mercy and love in Christ, sin and punishment are to be understood in terms of refusing to accept that the infinite distance between God and man has been bridged, and in terms of continuing to rebel or despair in the face of that distance - even though Christ has revealed, firstly, the merciful love of the divinity which reaches out across the gulf of separation, and, secondly, the ideal of life in the *imago Dei* by which from our own side we can enjoy access to God.

The Pope interprets the universality of the offer of salvation in the light of the promises made to Abraham, and speaks characteristically of a "heavenly offspring" replacing the "earthly offspring". As we shall see, this has to do with the idea that Christ brings into existence a new and heavenly kind of creation into which we enter through the sacrament of baptism by which we are re-born as "spiritual" rather than "fleshly" and as "heavenly" rather than "earthly". Thus we are told that

"at one time the most blessed patriarch Abraham had been promised countless descendants from these nations. These were to be generated not from the seed of flesh but from the fecundity of faith. These were compared to the stars in number, so that the father of all nations would hope for a heavenly offspring (*caelestis progenies*) and not an earthly one (*terrena*). In order to create this promised posterity, the heirs (symbolically represented in the stars) are quickened by the birth of a new star, so that this new honour given by heaven might serve the one for whom the witness of heaven had been summoned" (Sermon 33,2,28-35).

Leo sees the star also as a symbol of the individual Christian who has a part to play in the mercy-inspired evangelisation of the world by transferring the focus of his desires from the earthly to the heavenly and from the fleshly to the spiritual:

> "this star's subservient function incites us to imitate its submission, so that we render service to this grace which invites all to Christ in as much as we can. Whoever lives in the Church with devotion and chastity, and whoever relishes the things which are above and not the things that are of earth, resembles in a way the celestial light. Preserving the glow of a holy life, that person, just as the star, points out for many the way to the Lord. In this zeal, dearly beloved, you ought all to benefit each other, so that, in the kingdom of God to which we come by a correct faith and good works, you may shine as children of light through Christ our Lord" (Sermon 33,5,117a-131a).

The gospel message of love demands that we should involve ourselves in God's work of saving mercy after this "evangelical" fashion. In a way which is remarkably eirenic and pastoral by the standards of the fifth century, Leo is concerned with the conversion of the Jews who have fallen away from their original "spiritual nobility". He insists that the Christian life is about more than saving one's own soul, but extends to a practical zeal for the salvation of others - a zeal which represents a sharing in the merciful activity of God, and which is expressed more by the example of our lives than by verbal attempts at conversion:

> "we ought, then, dearly beloved, to desire and to work for what belongs to true love, which we owe even to our enemies (according to the Lord's words), so that this same people who fell away from that spiritual nobility of their fathers might be engrafted back into the branches of their tree. This sort of good will recommends us very much to God. Their failure has made room for mercy on our part, so that our faith might recall them to that desire to receive salvation. It is becoming that the life of holy ones should benefit not only themselves but others as well. What cannot be accomplished in them with words can often be brought about through example" (Sermon 35,3,72-81).

Leo takes up the statement in Ephesians 5:8 to the effect that "you were darkness once, but now you are light in the Lord", and comments

> "let that which has gone before in the figure of the three wise men be filled out in you. 'Let your light shine before men in such a way that they, upon seeing your good works, might glorify your Father who is in heaven' [Matthew 5:16]. As it is a great sin when, on account of bad Christians, the name of the Lord is blasphemed among the infidels, so there is great merit in love when that name is blessed on account of the holy lives led by his servants" (Sermon 35,4,139-145).

Christian spirituality on this account is far more than a question of working out one's own salvation and achieving the contemplation of God by way of what (as we shall see a little later) might be termed the "transference of desires" from earth to heaven for its own sake. Certainly, to labour for one's own personal sanctification is a noble end, but for Leo there is the additional motive that the sanctity of the individual is a powerful force for conversion - and is accordingly an instrument of the divine mercy and universal salvific will. We have noted Leo's emphasis on the fact that man is made in the "image of God", and, if the nature of God is to exhibit salvific mercy, then clearly in order to imitate the divine likeness we must be co-operators in God's saving grace. We are called by our words but more especially by the example of our lives to participate in the redemptive work of the divine mercy, and it is in this way that we realise within us the image of God.

Prior to the previous passage Leo exhorts us, saying

> "while time has been conceded to you for accomplishing the commands of God, glorify God in your body, and shine, dearly beloved, like bright stars in the world. May the lamps of your minds be always burning. May nothing shadowy remain in your hearts" (Sermon 35,4,133-137).

This evangelical vision ties in with Leo's Christological teaching and with the theory of the "transference of desires". The biblical image of "light" is a common one in the western fathers,[7] being most especially associated with Ambrose,[8] and is found in the sacramentary of Verona.[9] Whether or not he adopts the theme from his predecessors or from liturgical sources, in Sermon 25,3 he describes the Father as light and the Son as the beam which emanates from that light without in any way being subsequent to it.

The incarnation, as we have seen, is understood in terms of the manifestation of the beam, and Leo describes how

> "the manifestation of this beam has been called a 'sending' (*missio*) - by which Christ appeared to the world. Although he filled all things with his invisible majesty, he came, nevertheless, to those who had not known him, as if from a very remote and deep seclusion. At that time, he took away the blindness of ignorance, as it has been written: 'For those sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death a light has risen' [Isaiah 9:2 & Matthew 4:16]" (Sermon 25,3,85-90).

On this account, Christ is the beam emanating from the Father's light, and we are the rays emanating from the beam. Moreover, just as the beam of the Son is manifested at a primary level through incarnation, so also is it manifested at a secondary level in us when we imitate Christ as revealer and reflect in the example of our lives the shining brightness of his light - in such a way as to reveal him to others as instruments of that saving mercy which is pre-eminently the divine attribute which Christ makes manifest and which the liturgical life of the Church realises in the midst of the faithful.

In condemning the error of the Manichees in Sermon 34, Leo presents the incarnation as an association of the created order with the "essence of eternal and incorporeal light". Thus he asks

> "if visible light does not become damaged by any of the dirt with which it may be surrounded, and if dirty and murky places do not infect the glow of the sun's rays (which no one doubts to be a physical creation), then what thing could by any quality of its own defile the essence of that eternal and incorporeal light? This essence offered purification to the creature (which it had made according to its own image) by becoming associated with it. It did not thereby contract any stain, but healed the wounds of infirmity in such a way as not to allow any compromise of its power" (Sermon 34,4,121-129).

In an important passage in Sermon 63, this light of Christ is related to the merciful working of grace, to the glory of Christ in Christians, to our transfer from Satan's kingdom of darkness to God's kingdom of light, and to the renovation of the soul through the "transference of desires". Leo writes that

> "we give thanks to the mercy of God for adorning the whole body of the Church with innumerable gifts of grace. Through many rays of the one light the same splendour appears everywhere, and Christians are unable to merit anything apart from the glory of Christ. This is the true light which justifies and enlightens every human being. This is what he has rescued from the power of

> darkness, bringing it into the kingdom of God's Son. This is what raises up the soul's desire through a newness of life while extinguishing the lusts of the flesh" (Sermon 63,7,124-132).

We shall discuss in a future chapter how the light that shines in the transfigured Christ on Mount Tabor reveals to us the glory to which we are called and which to a certain extent we already enjoy in so far as we are restored to the *imago Dei*, and here we see that the same light fills both the individual Christian and the Church as a whole. In view of what we have already said, this light that fills us both at the unitary and at the ecclesial level is ordered towards the evangelisation of the world, and is a shining forth of the glory of Christ in us - the instruments of the divine mercy - for the conversion and salvation of others. For Leo the Church is indeed a *lumen gentium*, and Christians are called to fulfil their vocation to live in the image and likeness of God by participating with God in his self-revelation as loving and merciful - a divine self-revelation which takes place in the life of Church in which Christians share liturgically, ascetically, spiritually, and charitably.

As well as encompassing the themes of God's universal salvific will and the evangelistic vocation of the Christian as a beam of the saving illumination, Leo's theology of the divine mercy also has a bearing on his doctrine of the papal office. Leo's teaching on this subject encompasses such issues as infallibility[10] and the primacy,[11] but goes way beyond them in so far as it represents an integral part of his Christological and soteriological message. This message is rooted in the promises to Abraham, and with regard to these Leo reminds us that Christ is

> "he . . . in whom the seed of Abraham was blessed with the adoption of the whole world. Consequently, that patriarch has been made father of the nations, since children of promise are born not of flesh but in faith. He does not make exceptions for any nation, and from every nation under heaven he has made one flock of holy sheep" (Sermon 63,6,99-103).

Thus we have what Leo describes as a "universal convocation of peoples" - a flock of which Peter is the chief shepherd. The notion of the Petrine office is inserted into the doctrine of the offer of salvation to all nations, and the universality of the divine mercy demands a corresponding universality of pastoral oversight. Peter is selected from the peoples to preside over them as a special instrument of the mercy of God, and

Leo explains that

> "out of the whole world Peter alone has been chosen to be put in charge of the universal convocation of peoples as well as of every apostle and all the fathers of the Church. Although there are many priests and many shepherds among the people of God, it is Peter who properly rules each one of those whom Christ also rules principally. God saw fit to bestow upon this man a great and wonderful share in his power, dearly beloved. If he wanted other leaders to share something with him, whatever he did not refuse entirely to these others he never gave unless it was through him" (Sermon 4,2,47-55).

There exists a certain connection between Abraham and Peter, for, just as Abraham was promised his progeny because of faith, so Peter's act of faith in the incarnate Word at Caesarea Philippi is the foundation on which the Church is built.[12] For Leo, faith is defined in terms of acknowledgment of Christological truth:

> "bodily vision does not see him, but the spiritual heart beholds. Though absent in the flesh through which he could be seen [while on earth], he remains present in the divinity through which he is always and entirely ubiquitous (*qui corporeo quidem intuitu non videtur, sed spiritali corde sentitur, absens carne qua qua potuit esse conspicuus, praesens deitate qua ubique semper est totus*). For the just live by faith, and the justice of believers consists in this, that they accept with their minds what they do not perceive with their vision. Ascending on high, the Lord took captivity captive and gave gifts to human beings - namely faith, hope, and love. These gifts are great and mighty and precious - all because a marvellous inclination of the mind believes in, hopes for, and loves what eyes of the flesh do not make contact with" (Sermon 5,2,40-48).

The justification of the individual is dependent upon his or her personal faith, but the salvation of the world as a whole - the universal salvation which lies at the very heart of Leo's theology of the divine mercy - follows on from the faith of Peter. In numerous passages Leo implies that Mary's faith possesses a co-redemptive aspect in bringing the union of Word and flesh into existence in the first place, and, in virtue of his emphasis on Mary's co-operative act of faith and on her communication of pre-purified flesh to the incarnate Word, he may be regarded as having advanced the patristic conception of Mary's co-redemptive and mediative activity further than any other western father of the period.[13] However, Peter is also something of a "co-redeemer" and a "universal mediator of graces" (if we may be allowed to borrow and adapt two slightly anachronistic terms from the vocabulary of Mariology) in virtue of his own act of faith in which he discerns the Christological structure which Mary's

faith has, so to speak, believed into existence.

We shall see in a future chapter how Leo enjoins us to discern the two natures in Christ and to distinguish between them, and this is precisely what Peter does. Mary's faith is co-redemptive because it makes possible the union of Word and flesh in the first place. Peter's faith is likewise co-redemptive because it reveals the true character of that union to all people in all generations. This in turn leads Leo to develop an exalted doctrine of Peter's mediating and co-redeeming power when he informs us that

> "if we do anything correctly or judge anything correctly, if we obtain anything at all from the mercy of God through daily supplications, it comes about as a result of his [Peter's] works and merits. In this sense his power lives on and his authority reigns supreme. This, dearly beloved, is what that confession has obtained. Since it was inspired by God the Father in the apostle's heart, it has risen above all the uncertainties of human thinking and has received the strength of a rock that cannot be shaken by any pounding" (Sermon 3,3,68-75).

The Petrine confession is repeated daily, and it is this profession of faith that liberates us from Satan and brings us safely to heaven. The context suggests that Leo sees himself as a kind of sacrament of Peter,[14] and perceives his own function as consisting in a perpetual proclamation of Peter's Christological orthodoxy.[15] This is the background against which we need to view Leo's Christological preaching and writing as a whole.

When Leo preaches the truth about Christology he is actually engaging in a salvific act which recalls in an almost sacramental way the confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi and which realises within the Church the effects of the divine mercy. While individual Christians imitate Peter's pronouncement on their own account, Leo - the guardian of doctrine[16] - does it on behalf of the entire Church and so articulates the faith which saves on behalf of all those who are descendants of Abraham by faith, and on behalf of all the nations who are called to salvation. Accordingly he writes that

> "in the universal Church, Peter says every day: 'you are the Christ, the Son of the living God'. Every tongue that confesses the Lord has been imbued with the teaching of this utterance. This faith binds the devil and looses the chains of his captives. It ushers the outcasts of this world into heaven, and the gates of hell cannot prevail

> against it. So great is the firmness with which it has been divinely fortified that no heretical depravity can ever corrupt it and no pagan faithlessness overcome it" (Sermon 3,3,75-82).

While Leo's treatment of God's universal salvific will does not encompass any discussion of the complexities of grace and predestination as Prosper's does, it nevertheless leads us from salvation history through to a spirituality of evangelical witness and finally to a doctrine of the papacy which is conceived both in Christological terms and in terms of Leo's overarching theology of the divine mercy. In their different ways both Christ and Peter make visible the sovereign mercy of God - the former in salvation-history, the latter in the liturgy - and it is this recurrent theme of mercy that informs Leo's Christological preaching at every stage.

## A Theological Programme

We have seen that, informed at each point by his perception of God as essentially loving and merciful, Leo envisages salvation as being offered not just to an elect few but to all people and to all nations. However, a casual reading of many of the fathers would seem to imply that, even in the early centuries, the Church had a tendency to erect what Hans Urs von Balthasar has termed "bastions" to separate clergy from laity in such a way that the divine mercy was in practice available only to a kind of spiritual élite. In particular, one might claim to discern such "bastions" in the often impenetrable language of Christological debate which appears at first sight to render an accurate understanding of the incarnation of the Word more or less impossible for the layperson, and, secondly, in the championing by the biographers of the great monks (such as Athanasius writing about Anthony the Great and Sulpicius Severus writing about Martin of Tours) of a spirituality which is appropriate to the desert but substantially inappropriate to the lay Christian. Leo, by way of contrast, is a universalist in the truest sense of that term, and we shall be arguing during the course of this study that his great achievement lies in the manner in which - perhaps by way of making his own personal contribution to the realising within the Church of the universality of that divine mercy which is the primary concern of his theology - he renders the Christological and spiritual tradition of the great dogmatic and monastic

writers of both east and west accessible to a lay audience by means of a process which involves adaptation but not dilution or emasculation.

If we take the case of John Cassian, the celebrated monk's specifically spiritual writings are not well suited to those living outside the confines of the monastery, and need adapting if they are to be of value to an audience of Christians existing "in the world". Likewise, his *de Incarnatione* is a dry and uninspiring affair which deals competently enough with the relevant theological issues but which makes no effort to present the doctrine of the incarnation as something that can be proclaimed to the faithful as a joyful gospel of salvation. Without compromising either on the enormous demands made by the spiritual life - even for the laity, of whom he expects much - or on the dogmatic integrity of the doctrine of the incarnation, Leo manages to recast both in a form which Basil Studer describes as "kerygmatic", and which is therefore perfectly attuned to lay requirements. Leo is a preacher whose highly ambitious programme is to preach the asceticism of the monastic life in a form which is adapted to the condition of "ordinary" Christians, and to preach the truth about Christ's incarnation and saving work in a way which is intensely theological yet at the same time calculated to inspire and enthuse the man or woman "in the pew", and his message is simply this: that, in his merciful love, the divine Word has become incarnate in Christ in order to bridge the gulf between God and man by healing us in body, mind, and spirit, and by showing us how we too can bridge that gulf by following the ascetic "way of the Cross" and by contemplating the truth contained historically and liturgically in the Christian mysteries.

The two aspects of Leo's enterprise - the preaching of the ascetic life and the proclamation of the gospel of salvation - cannot be separated from each other, for taken together they form a seamless whole in which the power of the divine mercy to heal and transform is impressively revealed. Leo's Christology is deeply rooted in his spirituality of asceticism and contemplation, and his spirituality in turn flows naturally from his Christological insights. Being a pastor and preacher, his first concern is with the spiritual wellbeing of the members of his flock as recipients of God's offer of mercy, and in his sermons he attempts to develop a kind of lay spirituality which complements and adapts the monastic spirituality which writers

like John Cassian had formulated elsewhere in the west. As we shall see, this spirituality begins from a contemplation of the nature of God, who is revealed historically and liturgically in Jesus Christ as loving and merciful, and leads us to imitate the divine mercy and love through love of God and love of neighbour in such wise that the *imago Dei* is fully restored within us. The function of Christology is, in the first place, to explain how Christ can reveal the divine nature of God as merciful and loving, and is, in the second place, to exemplify to us believers how we can live in the image of the merciful God by transferring our desires from an earthly and fleshly focus to a heavenly and spiritual focus, and by (as it were) incarnating in our own lives God's saving mercy towards us - which we accomplish through our constant striving to show mercy to others at the level both of converting unbelievers and of ministering to the material needs of the poor.

From a Christological perspective, the reason for Leo's implacable opposition to heterodox writers like Nestorius and Eutyches is that their teachings undermine the Christological foundations of the true spirituality of the imaging of the merciful God that Leo is trying to preach, and he combats them not out of any great love for the technicalities of theological debate (at which he is far less skilled than someone like Cyril of Alexandria), but because he possesses a preacher's zeal for the salvation of souls, and cannot bear to witness the propagation of Christologies which seem to him to destroy the very theological and liturgical foundations of that spiritual life which enables us to bridge the gulf between fallen man and the God of love and mercy. Leo's insistence on right faith as lying at the heart of the connection between Christ and the Christian is related to the character of his theology as a theology of hope - of hope rooted in a conviction that God is primarily a God of mercy - and accordingly he explains at some length how the errors of Nestorius and Eutyches are dangerous because they deprive us of our hope in the reality of our redemption (Sermon 28,5). Of the former he observes that

> "Nestorius had the temerity to preach that the Blessed Virgin Mary was mother only to the man. This led to the belief that, in his conception and birth, no union (*unitio*) occurred between the Word and the flesh, for the Son of God would not himself have become the son of a human being, but would merely have associated himself to a created human being by his good pleasure alone (*creato homini sola se dignatione sociaverit*). Catholic ears could never tolerate this -

> ears so imbued with the gospel of truth that they know with the greatest firmness that there could be no hope for salvation were he not himself both the Son of the virgin and the creator of his Mother" (Sermon 28,5,97-104).

As we shall see, it is important for Christian spirituality that the Word should bring healing both to the flesh (rendering it governable by the mind), and to the mind itself (rendering it capable of governing the flesh and of being properly ordered towards God). Nestorius destroys this vital union between Word and flesh which is the theme of Leo's incarnational preaching, and so undermines the foundations on which the liturgical, sacramental and spiritual life of the Christian is built. Without that union of Word and flesh the chasm that separates God and man remains unbridged by the liturgy in which the divine mercy is revealed and the fruits of that mercy made available, with the result that God can neither communicate saving grace through Christ nor be known by us in Christ as essentially merciful.

Eutyches is a threat to the relation between Christ and the Christian because, although he "admitted the union of the two natures", he nevertheless

> "asserted that - as a result of this union - only one of the two natures remained, while there was nothing at all left from the other's substance. This could be accomplished only by absorption or separation. These things are so inimical to a sound faith that they cannot be accepted without destroying the very name of Christian" (Sermon 28,5,108-111).

Leo goes on to explain exactly why this is so "inimical to sound faith", his argument being that according to Eutyches everything that happens to Christ happens only to the divinity and not the human nature in any meaningful sense. Thus Leo writes that

> "if the incarnation of the Word is the union of the divine and human natures (*unitio . . . divinae humanaeque naturae*) in such a way that - through this very combination - what had been double became single, then the divinity alone would have been born from the Virgin's womb. It alone - in a counterfeit appearance - would have undergone nourishment and bodily growth. To leave aside all else that is subject to change in the human condition, the divinity alone was crucified, the divinity alone died, and the divinity alone was buried" (Sermon 28,5,111-117).

The Christ of Eutyches is an insubstantial Christ - the Christ of the docetic heresy which taught that the supposed human nature is just a fictitious apparition. Leo cannot accept this, for as a preacher he is concerned with concrete realities, and is

addressing Christians who want to know that they share a common nature with Christ. Once again, if human beings do not share a common nature with Christ, Christ has not bridged the divide between divine and human, and remains a distant figure who can never be a mediator, and who can never act liturgically either as healer of our humanity or else as revealer of his own veiled divine mercy.

In Leo's eyes the result of our preaching the attenuated Christology of Eutyches is that

> "there would be no reason for hope in resurrection, and Christ would not be the first born from the dead, for no one could have been raised if there was no one who could be killed" (Sermon 28,5,118-120).

It will become clear during the course of our study that what Leo is driving at here is the idea that the various processes that are undergone by Christ's flesh and soul have important implications for our own, and that, if Christ does not possess a genuine human flesh and soul in which to undergo these experiences, then our own flesh and souls must necessarily remain unhealed, and the gulf between the God of mercy and man will remain uncrossed and uncrossable. Once again, we see that the Christology proposed by the preacher is related specifically to the question of our healing and sanctification through the sacraments and through the liturgical and spiritual life, with the consequence that a false understanding of the incarnation completely cuts away from beneath our feet the ground of hope for salvation which is perpetually on offer from the God of mercy. More importantly still, the fundamental vision of God's universal salvific will and mercy is undermined by both Eutyches and Nestorius, for neither offers a portrait of a merciful God who takes the initiative in salvation by reaching across the divide that separates divinity from humanity. Leo sees the divine mercy as being manifested most especially in the merciful condescension that allowed the Word to unite himself to human nature, and neither Eutyches with his absorption of the humanity nor Nestorius with his inadequate understanding of the hypostatic union offers an adequate perspective on a universal salvific will that manifests itself in the condescension implicit in the true doctrine of the incarnation.

Leo chooses to combat these damaging ideas within the context of the sermon because he sees Christology not as an intellectually absorbing technical abstraction but as a vital matter of everyday faith which - as a Christo-logic which is also the logic

of the divine mercy - must necessarily be "democratised" and made available to all. Far from regarding the complexities of Christological debate as simply too difficult for the laity to comprehend, Leo preaches Christology with an evangelical zeal, for he identifies saving faith with right doctrinal belief, and understands Christology purely and simply as a set of statements about the divine mercy. Christological error is a question not for the academy but for the public sermon, and the laity have a fundamental right to be given the whole truth about the Catholic faith, and not just those gleanings from the wisdom of the theologians that the latter deem them capable of assimilating. Christological truth is saving truth, for in Christological truth alone the nature of God as loving and merciful is properly revealed, and without such revelation there is no motivation for us even so much as to attempt to come to terms with the divide that separates us from the divinity.

As we shall see, the work of the devil is to persuade Adam that there is no way of crossing that divide, with the result that all human beings after Adam respond to the "fact" of this infinite distance between an "unmerciful" God and man by giving in to sin and despair, or else by refusing to acknowledge the sovereignty of God at all. The incarnation reveals to us the proper response in the face of such distance (the response of humility and of trust in the divine mercy), the lifestyle required for gaining access to God across this distance (liturgical participation, asceticism and contemplation, combined with an imitation of the divine mercy in our dealings with others), the locus of our encounter with God in the midst of our being distanced (Christ, his Church, the liturgy and the sacraments), and the proof that, in spite of our distance from God, such an encounter is possible in the first place - a proof rooted in the loving mercy of God revealed in his assumption of the likeness of sinful flesh.

# NOTES

1 I trust that my accusations of Küng's tendency to caricature the fathers is not itself a caricature of a notoriously difficult author. See H. Küng: *The Incarnation of God*, ET Edinburgh, 1987, especially pp. 509-537.

2 See especially Y.-M. Duval: "Quelques emprunts de S. Léon à S. Augustin", *Mélanges de science religieuse* 15 (1958), 85-94; A. Granata: "Note sulle fonti di S. Leone Magno", *Rivista di storia della chiesa in Italia* 14 (1960), 263-282; M. Pellegrino: "L'influsso di S. Agostino su S. Leone Magno nei Sermoni sul Natale e sull' Epifania", *Annali del Pont. Instituto Superiore di Scienze e Lettere "S. Chiara"* 11 (1961), 101-132; B. Studer: "Die Einflüsse der Exegese Augustins auf die Predigten Leos des Grossen", *Forma futuri. Studi in onore del Cardinale Michele Pellegrino*, Turin, 1975, pp. 915-930.

3 For the literature on Prosper, see Chapter One, notes 5,6 & 8.

4 1 Timothy 2:4.

5 Amongst the large bibliography on Augustine's understanding of human freedom, see especially M.T. Clark: *Augustine, Philosopher of Freedom*, New York & Paris, 1958; M. Huftier: "Libre arbitre, liberté et péché chez st. Augustin", *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 33 (1966), 187-281.

6 For Leo's Epiphany sermons see A.P. Lang: *Leo der Grosse und die liturgische Gebetstexte des Epiphaniefestes*, Wetteren, 1964. See also E.J. Ahern: "The Epiphanic Sermons of St Leo the Great", *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 99 (1963), 24-27.

7 S. Agrelo: "El tema biblico de la luz", *Antonianum* 50 (1975), 353-417.

8 R. Morgan: *Light in the theology of Saint Ambrose*, unpub. diss., Gregorian University, Rome, 1963.

9 S. Agrelo: "La simbología de la luz en el Sacramentario Veronese. Estudio histórico-literario", *Antonianum* 50 (1975), 5-123.

10 V. Gluschke: *Die Unfehlbarkeit des Papstes bei Leo dem Grossn und seinen Zeitgenossen*, unpub. diss., Gregorian University, Rome, 1938.

11 W. Ullmann: "Leo I and the theme of papal primacy", *Journal of Theological Studies* 11 (1960), 25-51.

12 On this idea of Peter as foundation of the Church, see G. Corti: "Pietro, fondamento e pastore perenne della Chiesa. Il pensiero di S. Leone Magno e del suo tempo", *La Scuola Cattolica* 85 (1957), 25-58.

13 For Leo's Mariology, consult the following: M. Armitage: "A Marian Theme in the Soteriology of St. Leo the Great", *Marianum* 55 (1993), 251-258; Melchior a S. Maria: "Maria's plaats in het verlossingswerk volgens St. Leo de Grote", *Standard van Maria* 24 (1948), 2-16; G.M. Polo: *Maria sul mistero della salvezza secondo il papa Leone Magno*, Vicenza, 1977; F. Spedalieri: "La madre del salvatore nella soteriologia di San Leone Magno", *Marianum* 25 (1963), 23-38; A. Spindeler: "Papst Leo I über die Mitwirkung Marias bei der Erlösung", *Münchener theologische Zeitschrift* 10 (1959), 229-234; A. Spindeler: "S. Leo Magnus: De parte B. Virginis Mariae in redemptione", *Maria et Ecclesia* (Acta Congressi mariologici-mariani in civitate Lourdes), 1958 (Rome 1959), pp. 141-152.

14 See E.P. Pepka: *The Theology of St. Peter's Presence in his Successors according to St. Leo the Great*, unpub. diss., Washington, 1986.

15 See F.X. Murphy: *Peter Speaks through Leo*, Washington, 1952.

16 See P. McShane: "Leo the Great, Guardian of Doctrine and Discipline", *Eglise et Théologie* 14 (1983), 9-24.

# Chapter Three

# THE SANCTIFYING SERMON

## Incarnation and the Life of the Soul

Leo does not reflect openly on his own rôle as preacher, but Chromatius of Aquileia writes

> "our Lord and Saviour gives us rain from heaven - that is, the preaching of the gospel, through which he might re-create with the waters of life the arid hearts of the human race like a thirsting land" (Sermon 25,6,139-142).[1]

Leo puts into practice this notion of recreative homiletics by concentrating his own preaching around the theme of the "new creation", the key text being found in Sermon 21 where he writes that

> "because of that great love of his with which he loved us he took pity on us, and, when we were dead through our sins, he brought us to life in Christ, so that we might be a new creature in him - a new handiwork" (Sermon 21,3,65-68).

This theme of the "new creation" which lies at the heart of Leo's preaching of the divine mercy and in whose recreative work Leo's own preaching plays (according to the insight of Chromatius) so integral a part, demands that the imperatives of God's universal salvific will on the one hand and of the liturgical and spiritual life on the other should determine the shape of Christology and not the other way round. In other words, the *lex orandi* influences the the *lex credendi*, and the liturgical and spiritual

needs of the faithful, who wish to appropriate the mercy of God and to approach the infinitely distant God in prayer and sacrament, become a source of dogma rather than being themselves prescribed by the deliberations of an intelligentsia of *periti*.

For Leo, Christology is inseparable from anthropology, and Christ has to be by definition the beginning of a "new creation" which itself consists firstly in God's merciful vivification of those who are dead through sin, and secondly in the living out by those who have been re-created of a new kind of life in imitation of the divine mercy. For this reason Leo does not commence with Christological formulae and then proceed to develop his teaching on salvation and on the spiritual life, but rather he starts with a vision of spirituality - that is, of liturgical and ascetical life in the new creation in which human beings enjoy access to the merciful God from whom they had previously been alienated - and asks what Christ (the "Emmanuel" - "God with us") needs to have been in order to bring about this "coming together". Such an assessment of Leo reflects the approach taken to the relation between Christology and soteriology by R.C. Gregg and D.E. Groh in their treatment of Athanasius and the Arian crisis,[2] in which they too suggest that fathers such as Athanasius argue backwards from soteriology to Christology rather than forwards from Christology to soteriology and spirituality.

However, such an approach is complete only when it is realised that the fathers are concerned more with the everyday life of sanctification than they are even with Christ's work of redemption, and that Christology is shaped by the sacraments and ordered towards spirituality - whether in its monastic or lay forms - rather more than it is towards soteriology. That there exists an intimate relation between Christology and liturgical and ascetical spirituality - which for Leo is nothing other than the life of the new creation in the image of the divine mercy - is suggested by the fact of the undeniable connection between Pelagian and Nestorian tendencies. This link was obvious to the fathers themselves, and indeed John Cassian begins his *de Incarnatione* with a denunciation of Pelagianism as the source of all heresies, and goes on to suggest an explicit correlation between Pelagianism and Nestorianism[3] - founding his Christological teaching on a rebuttal of these twin errors,[4] and proposing a spirituality which likewise is dependent on a rejection of Nestorian Christology.[5]

In a study of this alleged relation between Nestorianism and Pelagianism, J. Plagnieux finds that Prosper of Aquitaine and Augustine also noted a mutual dependence between the two heterodoxies,[6] and this circumstance serves to underline how essential it is for us to remember that Christology is, at a fundamental level, ordered towards the doctrine of grace and sanctification (especially in its baptismal and eucharistic forms) and towards perceptions of the spiritual life. For Cassian and for those after him, Nestorianism fails because it does not succeed in bridging the gulf between the God of mercy and man, and Pelagianism fails because it admits that God has not bridged that gulf in Christ - and accordingly leaves human beings to try to accomplish the impossible feat of bridging that gulf by their own efforts (in a way which denies the very reality of gratuitous mercy). Of course, Cassian tends to caricature both Nestorius and Pelagius, but he does so in order to make a serious point which is especially relevant to the theological situation in which he finds himself, and he can scarcely be criticised for his occasional oversimplifications.

In connection with this it is worth drawing attention to the related issue of the liturgical origins of Christological teaching, for it is in liturgy and sacrament that the encounter between God and man takes place, and it is in liturgy and sacrament that the "theology of the Emmanuel" and the "theology of the divine mercy" become real for the lay faithful. In the fourth century the battleground in the Trinitarian and Christological debates was centred around the interpretation of controverted biblical texts,[7] but it needs to be borne in mind that, for all that the polemical works that we possess are written in treatise form, the real concern was always with the proper interpretation of those controverted texts which were read out in the liturgy and preached on in the ensuing homily, for it was these texts that interpreted the encounter of the God of mercy and man in the God-man Jesus Christ. What is frequently forgotten is that thinkers like the Cappadocians are pastorally and liturgically orientated, even when they are at their most controversial, and that, rather like the early Dominicans, they study and engage in polemic in order to be able to *preach*. As a result of this situation, philosophical considerations are less to the fore than exegetical ones, and the fact that these theologians are essentially bishops whose primary function is *preaching* cannot be over-emphasised.[8]

Similarly, in the case of western authors such as Hilary during the same period, it is the interpretation of key scriptural texts that dictates the course of the debates, although in Hilary's case the circumstances of his life perhaps make him more of a genuine controversialist.[9] In the fifth century the same tradition is carried on by Cyril of Alexandria,[10] whose principal platform for communication was the liturgical sermon, and who directs all his more speculative endeavours towards a strictly pastoral goal - although this is not to say that insights from the realm of philosophy are not brought to bear at least in some degree.[11] Thus in democratising the patristic tradition and in presenting the saving truth about the incarnation and the divine mercy in an assimilable form, Leo is simply carrying to its logical conclusion a process to which other fathers were already committed.

Attention has recently been drawn by T.F. Torrance to the liturgical dimension of these debates,[12] and the question as to the relative extents to which liturgy shapes orthodoxy and orthodoxy shapes liturgy during this phase of the Church's history remains a fascinating and probably insoluble one. What is most likely is that there is a constant interplay between the two, but, in an age in which liturgical change imposed by committees has become commonplace, we tend to forget that in patristic times it was the *lex orandi* that determined the *lex credendi*, with the result that fathers may well have felt that it was the liturgy that set the agenda for theological debate rather than theologians. The *lex orandi* was designed specifically to acknowledge the distance between God and man and to provide a context in which the God-man who bridged that distance could be encountered liturgically and sacramentally, and is was almost certainly this perception that the Christ who was encountered liturgically and sacramentally had to be a genuine mediator who brought together the divine and human in his own unitary person that determined the shape of Christological debate.

Leo's Christology is likewise liturgical, in so far as it is woven round biblical quotations which in many cases we can safely assume were carefully selected from the day's readings or else from other liturgical texts.[13] Indeed, in east and west alike the language of Christology arises out of the liturgy and is directed towards the kind of moral and spiritual exhortation to which the patristic sermon is ordered. Even

polemical writers like Cyril are motivated less by the intellectual challenge of theology than by the need to create a resource for interpreting liturgy in a way which will be of spiritual benefit to the members of their flocks. One cannot emphasise too often that Greek thinking on the incarnation developed out of the practice of commentating on scripture at least as much as out of doctrinal polemics,[14] and that even these polemics were the fruit not only of philosophical speculation but also, more importantly, of biblical exegesis.[15] A writer such as Cyril, one of whose primary concerns is the elucidation of the Old Testament for a Christian audience,[16] develops his Christological teaching not only in terms of the technical distinctions which we nowadays associate with the disputes of the period,[17] but also in terms of the whole range of typological and symbolic references which he finds in Old Testament texts which in all probability were selected because of their liturgical significance.[18]

There is perhaps a sense in which the patristic sermon mirrors the self-communication of the divine Word in the incarnation by communicating the truth about the incarnate Lord in the shape of the spoken word - in such a way that, just as Word became flesh, so now, in the midst of the Church's liturgy, flesh becomes word. This sacramental dimension of the word of the preacher was to be rediscovered by St Dominic at the beginning of the thirteenth century,[19] (albeit outside the liturgical context in which it is located by Leo), and it informs the idea of the sermon as true "theo-logos" - the word about God who is himself the Word. This explains why Leo sees no contradiction in utilising the popular sermon for the purpose of solid theological exposition. The sermon "inverbates", so to speak, the incarnate Word in such a way that the theological content of preaching has to express the self-communication by the incarnate Word of the truth about himself - with the result that God is closely encountered by the faithful in the liturgical sermon.

This liturgical and pastoral background against which the Christological debates of the period developed helps to explain the close link between spiritual teaching and the doctrine of the incarnation. If we look at Theodore of Mopsuestia (for example) we see in his writings, controverted though the interpretation of them may be, an anticipation of this connection between Christology and spirituality.[20]

Theodore's views that (a) man cannot attain the fullness of grace in the present life, and (b) Christ's fullness of grace is the result of the indwelling of the Spirit rather than of physical union with the Word in the most complete sense of that concept, probably explain why he sees no possibility of real hypostatic union between humanity and divinity in Christ, while his belief that the fallenness of man exists primarily in the will seems to be the reason for the Pelagian tendency of his spirituality.[21] Part of the problem lies in the implication that Theodore's Christ is mutable,[22] and clearly, at least in the eyes of his opponents, Theodore's mutable Christ is unable to bridge the divide which separates God from man, with the consequence that human beings are left to try - and fail - to come close to God through their own graced but ultimately untransformed efforts.

In recent years there has been a tendency to reassess and even rehabilitate Theodore,[23] and attention has been drawn to the need to evaluate properly his concept of the term "person"[24] and his anthropological presuppositions.[25] Moreover, it should not be forgotten that Theodore, like his more orthodox counterparts, roots his teaching in exegesis[26] and evinces a strong awareness of the theological significance of liturgy,[27] but even so one wonders whether or not he succeeds in producing a theology of the Eucharist which satisfactorily accounts for the bridging of the gulf between God and man. Although the relevant passages in the Catechetical Homilies emphasise the reality of the transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, the point is that they become precisely that - body and blood by themselves rather than body and blood along with conjoined divinity.

J. Tixeront shows that Nestorius and Theodoret of Cyrus likewise restrict what we would now call the "real presence" to the human nature, and argues that these more radical advocates of a dyophysite Christology have a tendency to advance Eucharistic teaching in which the the divine nature is not really present in the sacrament, while those of a more monophysite inclination (whether this is understood in its heterodox sense or in its orthodox Cyrillian sense) tend to stress the literal presence of the divinity in the consecrated elements.[28] Theodore appears to see the real presence of the humanity of Christ in the Eucharist as being the *occasion* of a

gratuitous outpouring of the Spirit, while writers such as Cyril of Alexandria perceive a real presence not only of the humanity but also of the divinity which acts through what Aquinas would term the "conjoint instrumentality" of the humanity in order to communicate life and grace.[29]

If one compares Theodore with writers such as Cyril in the east or Augustine in the west,[30] one sees that, for these latter, the fall is understood more in terms of concupiscence of the flesh, and that the emphasis of soteriology and spirituality is very much on some sort of objective transformation of body and soul - understood as vivification and divinisation in the case of Cyril and as grace in the case of Augustine. In both instances this demands a kind of physical connection with the divinised flesh of Christ which is intimately conjoined to the Godhead, so that there can take place a direct flow of grace from Christ's divinity through Christ's flesh to our flesh - a flow of grace which is rooted in mercy which is genuinely active and self-communicative. Such an approach clearly demands a very strong doctrine of the hypostatic union which, in their different ways, Cyril and Augustine duly provide.[31]

Latin fathers such as Augustine and Leo are fond of seeing the work of Christ in terms of the diptych "mystery" and "example", which suggests both this physical aspect of divinising grace on the one hand and the exemplifying work of Christ on the other.[32] In the eyes of a Cyril or a Leo, thinkers such as Theodore of Mopsuestia undermine both these dimensions of the saving activity of the merciful God by destroying the "mystery" by which mercy is communicated and by reducing the "example" of mercy to the level of an example of perfect manhood rather an example of perfect *exalted* manhood - a perfect exalted manhood in which what is revealed is the mercy manifested in Christ's case by the glorious union of his human flesh with the Word and in our case (for we too are exalted) by the elevating union of our flesh with the exalted flesh of Christ.

## Opposing Nestorius and Eutyches

The immediate context of Leo's own involvement in the Christological controversies of the fifth century is the crisis occasioned by Eutyches, though the

humanity of Christ but not the divinity, while Cyril insists that the divine nature is present and active in the sacrament.[40]

Eutyches, on the other hand, appears at first sight to revive the teaching of Apollinarius[41] whereby Christ's human nature is effectively absorbed by the Word in such a way that it does not exist any more. This poses a problem for soteriology and spirituality for two reasons. Firstly, a totally absorbed flesh of Christ cannot be a medium through which the divine Word mercifully communicates His divinising power to *our* flesh through the physical process of eucharistic touch, and, secondly, it cannot provide a meaningful example for us to imitate. As we have noted, Leo stresses the duality of *mysterium* and *exemplum*,[42] and each of these poles of the work of the incarnate Lord is undermined by Nestorianism and Eutychianism alike. Nestorius fails to bridge the divide between God and man because he does not allow humanity to be properly elevated to union with the Word, while Eutyches fails to bridge it because he does not allow the Word to condescend to assume human nature in any meaningful sense. Yet although Nestorius is vehemently opposed by Leo, it is Eutyches for whom he reserves his bitterest attacks - not because he himself is in any way guilty of Nestorianising tendencies, and not simply because Eutyches is the more recent threat, but because Nestorianism is an obvious heresy, whereas Eutychianism could be interpreted as a legitimate development of the teaching of Cyril. Of course, it is Leo who is more truly the heir of Cyril, and it is Eutyches who has misinterpreted Cyril by failing to realise that the Cyrillian formula "one nature of the Son of God incarnate" is coined in order to emphasise the unity of the human nature with the person of the Word.[43]

The declaration at the end of the Council of Chalcedon to the effect that "Peter has spoken through Leo; thus did Cyril teach" is a significant one, for it illustrates that what was at stake was the authentic interpretation of Cyril's theology.[44] As Arnobius the Younger shows in his *Conflictus cum Serapione*, the Roman Christology of Leo is in full accord with the Alexandrian Christology of Cyril.[45] This is for the simple reason that, although he draws his Christological terminology from the Latin tradition (and in particular from St Augustine), while

Cyril derives his from the so-called school of Alexandria, Leo shares with both Augustine and Cyril a view of grace as efficacious and communicable through the medium of the flesh of Christ united with the Word[46] - and so stands in opposition to a figure such Theodore of Mopsuestia who tends to present grace less in terms of a physical and transformative action of the Word on our flesh by means of the flesh of Christ, and more in terms of the Spirit given to us by Christ as man in such a way that we share with him in a grace which we ourselves can enjoy only partially in the present world.[47]

In other words, Leo, Cyril and Augustine present us with a Christ who is able to communicate the healing power of the Godhead across the divide which separates the God of mercy and man in order to give human beings access to God in the spiritual, ascetical, sacramental, liturgical, and charitable life of the Church. In their very different ways, neither Nestorius or Eutyches can conceive of the Word as bending sufficiently low in the condescension of his mercy as to bridge the chasm and make possible the communication of grace as understood in the higher Cyrillian or Augustinian sense. Leo's great achievement is to emphasise again and again the "self-humbling" of the Word who assumes each and every aspect of the likeness of human flesh, and this theme has recently been taken up by Hans Urs von Balthasar, who traces the "kenosis" beyond incarnation and passion right through to the descent into hell, where the God-man gives access to the Godhead to those who are most radically distanced and alienated from any sense of the divine mercy and love.[48]

Theodore and Nestorius, then, are guilty in the eyes of Cyril and Leo of setting up the most damaging of all "bastions" - the bastions which so separate God from man that the divine Word cannot be seen as truly assuming a human nature or as truly communicating to us a fullness of his grace through prayer, liturgy, and sacrament - and both Cyril and Leo are, in their contrasting styles, equally committed to destroying the barriers which hold us back from access to an almost physical contact with the merciful Word. Thomas Aquinas renders this approach classic with his idea that the humanity of Christ is attached to the divinely causal Word as "conjoint efficient cause of grace", and that the sacraments are attached to the humanity as "disjoint efficient causes of grace".[49]

Modern theology, which tends towards a rehabilitation of Nestorius, disrupts this causal flow and moves away from the idea of the Word as healing and transforming us through the conjoint instrumentality of his flesh and through the disjoint instrumentality of the sacraments, and it may legitimately be argued that this is the crucial weakness underlying Karl Rahner's "transcendental Christology" with its "ascending" character - which contrasts sharply with the "descending" Christology of the fathers and, in more recent times, of writers such as Hans Urs von Balthasar.[50] An "ascending" Christology, even when it asserts with Rahner that God takes the initiative in the work of salvation, tends to ground the saving activity of Christ and the sanctification of human beings in the inner potential of man rather than in the utter gratuity and self-emptying of the divine mercy, while a "descending" Christology places more emphasis on the divine mercy and love which are made manifest in the act of incarnational "descent" or "condescension" - and correspondingly less emphasis on the human capacity for transcendence. Leo's preaching on the incarnation presents the elements of "descent" and "condescension" as central pillars of his theology of the divine mercy as universal, self-communicative, and causally efficacious, and so may be regarded as favouring a Christology of the so-called "descending" type.

Küng, Rahner and Schillebeeckx are all in their different ways committed to the idea that the cycle of incarnation, passion, and resurrection enables human beings to be more perfectly human, and Küng effectively twists the traditional formula which states "God became human that men might become divinised" to read that "God truly became man so that man might become human".[51] He criticises the fathers for proposing a remote, impassible God of Greek philosophy who cannot meaningfully be said to become incarnate, and charges them with inevitably tending towards either monophysitism or Nestorianism as they struggle to make sense of a supposed union of mutually contradictory natures. In fact, as we shall discover, the result of the Leporius crisis in the west was that the attempt to see things in terms of a union of natures was to all intents and purposes abandoned in favour of the idea of the union of the person of the Word (who possesses a divine nature) with human nature. A divine person, not divine nature, is joined to human nature - and the distinction is a highly significant

one, as we hope to demonstrate in a future chapter.

From a systematic point of view, this insight may well prove to be equally problematic, but it is worth pointing out that, however apposite Küng's criticisms of Athanasius and Cyril might be, they scarcely apply to the situation in the west after Leporius. Küng cannot accept that the impassible divine nature of Greek philosophy can enter into any meaningful kind of union with human nature[52] - but then neither could fathers such as Augustine and Leo, for whom it is the dynamic person of the Word who assumes human characteristics without abandoning his divine ones. As we shall see, Leo believes that benefits accrue to the humanity of Christ not from union with divine nature but from union with the personal Logos. On this reading, the man Jesus of Nazareth becomes an expression of the second person of the Trinity, not an expression of the divine nature. Küng appears to be conditioned by the view of certain western writers that the Trinitarian persons all possess a common divine nature, whereas the truth is that for many patristic and mediaeval writers of both east and west the ground of union within the Trinity is not "divine nature" but the person of the Father. In particular, authors such as Leo who are not unduly influenced by neo-Platonism have little or no concept of "nature" in any technical sense of that word, and, whatever philosophical vocabulary they may employ, they almost think entirely in terms of the Logos as a *person* who assumes human flesh and a human soul, and have little interest in the problems posed by a putative union of impassible divine nature with passible human nature.

So far as Küng's critique of Greek Christology is concerned, it is the view of the present writer that he underestimates the significance of the motif of the *imago Dei* (a theme which is prominent also in Leo's sermons). The Greek fathers in general (as well as many patristic and mediaeval writers in the west) teach that the image of the triune God is reflected in the higher part of the human soul, and that it is in this mirroring of the Trinity that the gulf between impassible God and passible humanity is bridged. The significance of the human soul of Christ is that it is in this soul alone that the image of the Trinity remains unbroken and undiminished, and it is with this soul alone that the Logos, who is the image of the Godhead, is united in such a way that the reflection of the divine image and the divine image itself become in a sense

coterminous.

Küng, on the other hand, is unable to accept that human nature can express a divine nature which Greek philosophy has defined in terms of impassibility, simplicity, and the like, so he reduces Christology to a revelation of ideal humanity rather than a revelation of Trinitarian love. Von Balthasar, who appreciates that St John writes not that God became man but that the Word became flesh, retains the Leonine emphasis that Christ reveals not man to man but the person of the Word to man - and in this he reflects the authentic Christological teaching of the fathers. One might add that, somewhat ironically, while the fathers are accused of depicting a divinity who is too transcendent to become human, Küng may be said to be guilty of portraying man as too deeply rooted in the world to be able to become divine. In consequence, while insisting (rightly) on a profoundly biblical God who irrupts into the material order and involves himself in human history, he denies the capacity of human beings to be elevated into the realm of spirit and of the divine life.

## Leo's Christological Mysticism

Because of the significance of his "Tome" (Letter 28) in relation to the dogmatic definitions of the Council of Chalcedon in 451, Leo's Christology has received widespread and comprehensive treatment by twentieth century scholars. However, one is forced to ask whether many or all of these treatments do not in fact miss the point by approaching Leo's doctrine of the incarnation from the wrong angle. As we have argued, Leo is first and foremost a preacher of that "saving Christology" which accounts for our coming close to the essentially merciful (yet normally distant) Godhead in liturgy and sacrament, and is only secondarily a "dogmatic theologian" as such. Theology, in the narrowest sense of that term, is subordinated by Leo to spirituality and to the theology of the divine mercy and of the *imago Dei* - with the result that Christology follows on from mysticism and asceticism and not the other way round. So far as Leo is concerned, the dogma of the incarnation of the Word is most emphatically not the purview of academic *periti*, but belongs to the laity - in the sense that it is shaped by the spiritual aspirations of lay Christians to bridge the divide that separates them from the God who reaches out to them in mercy, and in the sense

that the Church's pastors have a duty to preach Christology to the laity in a form which is simple enough for the latter to understand but which does not in any way compromise the integrity of theological truth.

In the light of these observations one might wonder whether the whole scope of the major study by H. Arens, through focussing specifically on the Tome, fails to perceive the truly pastoral nature of Leo's theological concern.[53] Likewise, A. Grillmeier brilliantly analyses Leo's notoriously imprecise use of technical terminology, while rather ignoring the fact that the Tome is compiled from Sermons in which terminological precision was subordinated to homiletic considerations.[54] A similar criticism could be levelled at R.V. Sellers, whose "historical and doctrinal survey" of the Council of Chalcedon once again tends to underestimate the question of literary genre.[55] M.J. Nicolas similarly adopts a highly technical approach,[56] as do B. Studer[57] and H. Diepen,[58] and one soon realises that the curious historical circumstance by which strictly pastoral writings have been brought by compilers to bear on dogmatic disputes has been somewhat forgotten by modern authors who are conditioned to approaching Christology from the point of view of doctrinal formulae rather than that of spiritual meditation.

However, the more nuanced approach that we are advocating has not been neglected entirely, for J.-P. Jossua effects a shift in the right direction with his treatment of the incarnation as orientated towards soteriology in the western fathers in general and in Leo in particular,[59] while honourable mention may be made of H. Denis who concentrates on the mystery of the ascension as that towards which Christology is properly ordered.[60] Perhaps the most interesting treatment is that of the Franciscan scholar C. Burgio who, writing unashamedly from the perspective of the great thirteenth century theologian Duns Scotus, attempts to prove that for Leo the incarnation is a necessary development of the God of mercy's saving plan, and would have happened with or without the fall.[61] However, the quintessentially spiritual nature of Leo's theology is still unrecognised by many scholars, and the suspicion persists that there remains much that is new to be said about Leo's understanding of the incarnation.

The reality is that Leo is not interested in the technicalities, though he was happy enough to let the compiler of the Tome (almost certainly Prosper of Aquitaine) utilise his sermons in order to compile a treatise that was to be used for dogmatic purposes. All along, Leo is concerned with the divine mercy and with what, in the light of the divine mercy which it "exemplifies" and "mysterifies", the incarnation means for *us* - with the result that in Sermon 21,2 he typically insists that "unless He were true God He would not bring us a remedy; unless He were true man He would not give us an example". Here the two natures are simply affirmed without further investigation, partly because that is the tradition, and partly because they are necessary for salvation - in so far as they explain how God reaches out to bridge the gulf that separates us from him, and how we are to reach out in response to bridge the gulf that separates him from us. The mechanics of nature and substance and hypostasis are, as elsewhere, of little or no interest to Leo, for all that matters is his obsession (as one might call it) with accounting for the liturgical and sacramental encounter of God and human beings - who are infinitely distant from each other, yet who, in virtue of the divine mercy, are brought together in Jesus Christ.

Indeed, as Leo makes clear in Sermon 25,1, the incarnation cannot be comprehended by the wise of the world unless the true light disperses the shadows of human ignorance. In other words, the mystery of the incarnation is accessible not to reason but only to grace, and Christological preaching is not a human attempt to bridge the divide but an attempt by God to grasp our minds and to reach out to us across the infinite distance by his own merciful initiative. Elsewhere, in Sermon 27,1, Leo says that when we attempt to understand this mystery we should drive away the clouds of earthly reasonings and purge the smoke of worldly wisdom from the eyes of illuminated faith, and he says this to emphasise that the incarnation cannot be understood unless it seizes our understanding and actively makes itself understood.

Leo explains that we trust in a "divine authority" and follow "divine teaching", and insists that the fundamental truth is encapsulated in the prologue to the gospel of St John. He sums up the entire process in Sermon 25,4 by saying that

> "the humanity does not corrupt the equality which the Godhead possesses as inviolable, and the descent (*descensio*) of the creator to the creation is the carrying up (*subvectio*) of believers to eternal things" (Sermon 25,4,105-108).

Leo's interest in Christology, accordingly, concerns the effect that it has on our spiritual lives, and particularly on our contemplation of the heavenly - a contemplation which is most especially accomplished in the liturgical setting. His primary enthusiasm is for the idea that the *descensus* of the Word leads to a corresponding *ascensus* on the part of human beings - not only in the exaltation of Christ's own assumed humanity, but in the elevation of minds to heaven in such a way that the distance between the God of mercy and man is recognised, accepted, and bridged through the encounter of the faithful with the God-man Jesus Christ. This encounter, which is undermined not by the "hellenistic" God of the fathers and scholastics but by the excessive humanism of modern writers like Küng and Schillebeeckx - is one which makes manifest the merciful nature of God, and which is realised in the liturgical, sacramental, ascetical, and other aspects of the life of the Church.

Another example of the way in which Leo's Christology is as much about the Christian as it is about Christ is found in a letter to Timothy, bishop of Alexandria. Discussing the errors of Nestorius and Eutyches, Leo concludes that Christ

> "would not have reconciled the whole world to God the Father had he not, by the regeneration of faith, adopted us all in the reality of our flesh" (Letter 171,2,1215CD).

Here Leo orders the truths of Christology to the truths of sacramental theology in such a way that *Christ*'s assumption of *our* flesh is subordinated to *our* assumption of *his* flesh through the regeneration brought about by baptismal faith. Thus a letter that is about Christological heresy succeeds in making a profound point about faith effecting an intimate union between Christ and the Christian that Leo goes so far as to describe as "fleshly". This is a far cry form the text-book Christology of Leo's interpreters, (and, incidentally, rather gives the lie to Küng's charge that the fathers do not take seriously the Johannine claim that the Word actually became flesh). A similar point is made in Sermon 24,6 where Leo says that we are joined to Christ by his assumption of our flesh, but proceeds to relate this union to faith and baptismal regeneration. Leo

equates faith with life and tells us that eternal life is gained by true faith which is pleasing to God and without which nothing is holy, pure, or alive. Once again, what interests Leo is not so much the mechanics of Christ's incarnational union with us as that of *our* spiritual and fleshly union with *him* - a union which takes place *par excellence* through faith and baptismal regeneration and which is the fruit of the saving initiative of the divine mercy. This is because, while the incarnation sets up the coming together of divine and human natures in the person of the Word, what is really important is the way in which the life of the Church in its various dimensions gives us access to the infinitely distant but ever-merciful God through the medium of the God-man whom the same Church makes mystically and efficaciously present to us.

Leo's achievement, as we hope to demonstrate, is to develop a kind of Christological mysticism which returns Christology - which is the science of the divine mercy - from the cleric-scholar at his desk to the layperson on his or her knees. Christology is not an abstract intellectual discipline, but a practical science, and it stems from the experience of the praying Church of what it means for the Word of God to become incarnate. In the light of Leo's teaching on the merciful God's universal salvific will, we must conclude that the Word descended to us in order that *all* people might ascend to God, and any description of what it means for the Word to have emptied himself out so as to become truly human must take into account the traditional model of atonement - one that unites Leo in the fifth century with von Balthasar in the twentieth. This model of atonement teaches that God imitated and encountered us in our weakness, lowliness, suffering, alienation, and abandonment in order that, by imitating and encountering him in his, we might bridge the divide that separates humanity from divinity, and ascend through the focussing of our minds successively on the humanity and then on the divinity of Christ (in whom God and man are united) to the contemplation of the God of mercy in a way that is partial and proleptic in the present life but that will be rendered perfect and complete in the life to come.

However, it is not sufficient to present Christology merely as the prolegomena for this lay spirituality, for the fact is that it is above all through that Christological truth which is preached and meditated on during the sermon that the Word's kenosis becomes real for us, and that our minds are concentrated upon the

descent and re-ascent which carries our contemplation downwards into the very depths of our own miserable condition (as witnessed in Christ's solidarity with us in his passion and death) and then (and only then) upwards into the mystery of the Trinitarian being in which Christ's human nature is glorified. The sermon - and in particular the Christological sermon - gives the mystery of the incarnation back to the laity in order that they themselves can "do Christology" - not by passively listening, but by allowing dogma to heal them, transform them, and elevate them to contemplation of God as essentially merciful.[62] The modern situation in which Christology is firstly reinvented on the grounds that in its ancient form it is "mythological" and secondly withheld from the laity on the grounds that it is too difficult for them to understand (whether in its traditional or in its reformulated versions) is typical of the way in which liberalism has erected a new set of "bastions" between the laity and the intellectual élite, and the message of a figure like Leo is that Christology belongs to the laity, that the laity can assimilate Christological teaching if it is sensitively preached, and that, far from being a speculative or theoretical discipline, Christology is the science of the divine mercy which springs from and gives shape to the liturgical and devotional lives of lay Christians.

Nestorian affair is never far in the background. Leo has the double problem - not faced by Augustine who largely preceded both crises or by Cyril who was concerned only with Nestorius (a Patriarch of Constantinople) - of having to steer a middle course between the two extremes. Nestorianism - certainly as perceived by its enemies such as Cyril, and possibly as understood by Nestorius himself - effectively reduces the union of natures in Christ to a moral union of will.[33] This poses a problem for spirituality in as much as it blurs the distinction between the believer's union with God and that of Christ, and, more importantly, leaves open to doubt the extent to which the distance between God and man has really been bridged - thus undermining completely any theology which takes as its starting point the idea that the God of mercy takes the initiative in the work of salvation. One must add in fairness that in his later work, the *Bazaar of Heraclides,*[34] Nestorius seeks to minimise the difference between his own position and that of his arch-enemy Cyril, while recent discoveries of previously unknown fragments have led to a more favourable assessment of the patriarch[35] - even leading to his complete rehabilitation in the eyes of some as an orthodox theologian.[36]

What, according to Nestorius (at least as portrayed by his enemies and his less sophisticated disciples), is the fundamental difference between the spiritual union of the individual with God and the Christological union of Christ's human and divine natures? Is it merely a difference of degree? Does either "union" succeed in bridging the gulf between God and man? In the case of Theodore, certainly, the distinction lies primarily in the supposition that Christ possesses a fullness of grace in this life thanks to the indwelling of the Spirit whereas we possess grace only partially - and not in any strong doctrine of the gulf-bridging union of flesh and Word.[37] When the confusing terminology of the Nestorian controversy is stripped away this remains the key problem, and helps to explain why the fathers were so critical of Theodore and Nestorius.[38] In keeping with the character of the theology of the period as ordered towards the liturgical context, the Christological struggle between Cyril and Nestorius had important implications for Eucharistic teaching,[39] with Nestorius tending to teach that what is present in the consecrated elements is the

# NOTES

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# Chapter Four

# THE "TWO FORMS" CHRISTOLOGY

## A Vision of Lay Spirituality

If we wish to understand Leo's own spiritual preaching, the best place to start is the sermon on the beatitudes. Particularly significant is the section on the "meek who will inherit the earth". Leo explains that

> "the earth promised to the mild, to be given into the possession of the meek, is the very flesh of the saints. This will be changed by a happy resurrection because of the merit of humility, and will be clothed in the glory of immortality. It will no longer in any way be contrary to the spirit, and will have the harmony of perfect unity with the will of the soul" (Sermon 95,5,102-107).

Christian spirituality on this account is about the transformation of the flesh in such a way that the flesh is no longer a hindrance to the proper activity of the soul - a hindrance which prevents the soul from looking upwards to heaven and from recognising the reality of that divine mercy which enables us to bridge the gulf that separates the divine from the human. Leo adds that

> "then the exterior person (*exterior homo*) will be possessed in a quiet and undisturbed way by the interior (*interioris hominis*). No obstacles of bodily weakness will hinder the mind intent on seeing God" (Sermon 95,5,107-110).

Once again, the message of the preacher is that we should aim for a condition in which our flesh is "possessed" by the soul in such a way that the latter is free for the

contemplation of heavenly things - and in particular for contemplation of the saving mercy of God. With Leo, contemplation ceases to be the prerogative of the monk, and is opened up to the lay Christian, for whom existing treatises such as the *Conferences* of John Cassian are largely inappropriate. In making the liturgical sermon itself a prolegomenon to the contemplative life (as in the highly ascetical sermons for Lent), and, over and above this, an occasion for the ascent of contemplation itself (as in the sermons for Christmas and the paschal mysteries), Leo arguably goes beyond any of his predecessors or contemporaries in developing the preacher's art as a medium for offering a kind of microcosm of monasticism to the lay Catholic - and reminds us in the process that the merciful God's *universal saving* will is also a *universal sanctifying* will.

The theme of the contemplation of God is further developed later in the same sermon. Here Leo looks forward to the future vision of God which

> "will be accomplished when human nature is transformed, and then [we shall see him] not in a mirror or in a dim reflection. Face to face will each one see that divinity which no human being can see as it is. Each of us will obtain through the indescribable joy of eternal contemplation what the eye has not seen and the ear has not heard and what has not entered the human heart" (Sermon 95,8,151-157).

The way to obtain this vision of God in the next life lies in a turning away from earthliness - in other words, as we have seen, in a bringing of the flesh into obedience to the soul:

> "unclean eyesight will not be able to see the splendour of the true light, and what will be true bliss to glowing hearts will indeed be punishment to the tainted. Let the clouds of earthly frivolities (*terrenarum vanitatum*) be turned away. Let the inner eye be cleansed from all the filth of sin, so that a serene contemplation may be nurtured with the indescribable vision of God" (Sermon 95,8,158-162).

The accent here is on the theme of *purity*. The basic scheme of ideas is that the "possession" of the flesh by the soul leads to purity of heart, which in turn leads to the possibility of the contemplation of God - a theme that is especially familiar to John Cassian.[1]

In the writings of the western fathers in general, we might note, there exists an analogy between the purity of heart which is the precondition for contemplation and

the purity which manifests itself as chastity, for sexual impurity is but one of a number of genres of "impurity" (albeit a most serious one) which concentrates the mind on the earthly and the fleshly rather than on the celestial and the spiritual. In the eyes of these theologians sexual ethics is less a question of morality in the strict sense than of spirituality, since, as St Paul affirms, "all things are lawful, but not all things build up", and, for all the perceived legalism of the western tradition, the Latin fathers understand ethical questions in general and human sexuality in particular not so much in juridical terms as in terms of what fosters that liberating contemplation which is the goal of the spiritual life.

Leo's own spirituality, then, deals with the transformation of the flesh and the alignment of the soul with the will of God as expressed through what might be termed the "transference of desires". Leo writes that

> "the grace of God brings it about daily in the hearts of Christians that every desire of ours should be transferred from earthly things to heavenly" (*Sublimitas quidem, dilectissimi, gratiae Dei hoc cotidie operatur in cordibus christianis, ut omne desiderium nostrum a terrenis ad caelestia transferatur*) (Sermon 16,1,1-3).

The two components here are grace and the "transference of desires", which is nothing other than a different way of describing the twofold movement of the subordination of the flesh to the soul and the ordering of the soul in line with the will of God. Because Leo is a preacher rather than an academic theologian there is no technical discussion as to how grace operates - just a bald assertion that it is upon the foundations of grace and mercy that Leo's theology of what we could nowadays call "transcendence" is built. One presumes that Leo affirmed the Augustinian synthesis on the subject of grace - perhaps as mediated to him by that great sanitiser of Augustine's doctrine, Prosper of Aquitaine.

The unity with the will of God in which peace consists and which is the consummation of the transference of desires represents that merciful love of God by which we are restored to the divine image. Leo tells us that

> "it is by loving that God refashions us to his image (*imaginem*). In order that he might find in us the image (*formam*) of his goodness, he gives us the very means by which we can perform the works that we do - by lighting the lamps of our minds and inflaming us with the fire of his love, so that we might love not only him but also whatever he loves" (Sermon 12,1,20-25).

From the love of God comes grace. From grace comes the illumination of the mind and the fire of love. In loving what God loves - in aligning our wills with his - we love God himself, and in this we are restored to his image - which in practice means that we come to imitate the divine mercy.2

There exists in human beings, then, a certain opposition between flesh and spirit which has to be overcome if we are to be returned to the image of God, and in this regard Leo quotes Galatians 5:17 "the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh" (Sermon 39,2,35-36). He explains that

> "if in this opposition the desires of the body are stronger, the soul will shamefully lose the dignity that is proper to it, and it will be calamitous for it to be a slave to what it ought to govern. But if the mind, submissive to its Ruler and to heavenly gifts, tramples on the lure of earthly indulgence and does not allow sin to reign in its own body, reason will hold a well-ordered leadership (*ordinatissimum principatum*), and no deceit of spiritual evil will weaken its defences. A human being has peace and true liberty when the flesh is ruled by the soul, and when the soul is governed by God as Director" (Sermon 39,2,36-46).

Our *rector* and *gubernator* is none other than the Holy Spirit, who comes to dwell in the hearts of those who have been purified, and possesses and rules them in the same way that the soul possesses and rules the flesh:

> "into the temple of God, which is the Church of Christ, nothing contaminated ought to be brought, nothing profane ought to be admitted, so that, when all impurity has been shut out from the depths of our heart, our fast may be sanctified, and we may be the eternal dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, who deigns to possess us washed from the stains of our sins and to rule us forever" (Sermon 42,6,242a-254a.).

Thus does Leo preach a kind of hierarchy within those who have been redeemed - a hierarchy of flesh which is subordinated to the mind or soul and of mind or soul which is subordinated to the Holy Spirit.

The implications of this for Christology are obvious. Leo needs to work out a doctrine of the incarnation which guarantees to us both that our flesh has been rendered governable by the mind and that our minds have been rendered capable both of governing the flesh and of being properly ordered towards God. Furthermore, as will become plain, in the light of these concrete effects of the divine mercy through which we are led to contemplation of the Godhead by meditation on the incarnate Word

(who constitutes a kind of ladder of ascent for the mind), it is necessary for Leo to construct a simple but clearly formulated Christology which enables the preacher to guide the Christian through a contemplative ascent from the human to the divine nature of the Saviour - a contemplative ascent in which we encounter and draw close to the previously distant God.

Leo's spiritual doctrine echoes the teaching of St Ambrose in his *de Fuga Saeculi,* which presents the vocation of the Christian as consisting as a "flight from the world" - not in the sense that we are to separate ourselves off from the world in such a way as to erect new "bastions" between world and Church, but in the sense that any undue focussing of the mind upon the earthly and the fleshly will prevent it from making the spiritual ascent from earth to heaven and from flesh to God. As we shall see, the Word assumed flesh and was made visible upon earth in order that, in concentrating our minds upon the earthly and fleshly Christ, we might mentally follow his ascent back to heaven in such wise as to permit him to lead our minds into the heart of the Trinity.

The "flight from the world" as envisaged by Ambrose and Leo most emphatically does not entail a withdrawal from openness to the world, but means rather that we should not allow preoccupation with the world - whatever form that might take - to hold us back from the ascent of contemplation. As we observed earlier, this insight informs the sexual ethics of the western fathers, and we shall discover later on during the course of our study that it informs their social and political ethics also - which suggests once again that to transcend the world does not mean to reject the world. One might add that some post-Vatican 2 writers such as Küng and Schillebeeckx are so preoccupied with the idea that the incarnation should be seen as affirming the world that they often appear to replace the alleged scholastic tendency to deny the world (which is surely a caricature of scholasticism in any case) with a new humanistic tendency to deny anything that lies *beyond* the world - with Schillebeeckx in particular transforming Christology into a handmaid both of social ethics and of a virtually Marxist politics.[3] Rahner and von Balthasar in their very different styles resist this temptation - the former through his emphasis on the aspect of "transcendence" and through his immersion in Ignatian spirituality, the latter

through his application to theology of categories derived from dramatics and aesthetics, and though his affinities with thinkers as diverse as Maximus the Confessor and Karl Barth who serve to rescue him from the siren-song of Hegelianism which seduces so many of his most prominent Catholic contemporaries.

By way of summary we might say that Leo's Christology is dictated by the condition of man - of man as infinitely distant from the God of mercy (as he was even before the fall), and of man as radically unable to cope or come to terms with this distance (as is the case after the fall). The incarnation reveals to us the merciful love of a God who, while infinitely distant, is infinitely condescending, and this in turn encourages us not to rebel or despair in the face of our distance from God, but to acknowledge his lordship over us. At the same time, the God-man brings healing grace with which we come into contact in prayer, liturgy, sacrament, fasting, almsgiving, and the like, and so orders our flesh to our souls and our souls towards God.

This in due course leads to the "transference of desires", which Christ exemplifies in his sacred humanity, and which results in an ascent of the mind which is the corollary of the Word's self-emptying descent to us. Because we cannot come close to God, God comes close to us in incarnation and passion, and we remain close to him by encountering the incarnate Lord in liturgy, sacrament, and every aspect of the life of the Church in which the "transference of desires" from flesh to spirit and from earth to heaven is made possible. Meanwhile the sermon - and especially the Christological sermon - represents an opportunity for God to reach out and seize our minds, uniting us to him by contemplation, and once again drawing near - in virtue of his ineffable mercy - as "Emmanuel" (God-with-us) to those who cannot of themselves draw near to his sublime divinity.

## The "Form of a Servant"

We need to state at the outset that Leo's Christology is a "kenotic" Christology in the sense that it takes its point of departure from the Pauline hymn in Philippians 2:6-11 which tells how Christ "did not cling to equality with God" but "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant", and "humbled himself and became

obedient unto death, even death on a Cross". The spiritual teaching that we have been discussing inspires Leo to develop his highly kenotic "form of a servant" Christology - a Christology which anticipates many of the modern insights of writers like von Balthasar, and which presents two aspects of the utmost significance.

Firstly, Leo's kenoticism presents the aspect by which Christ, in his divine mercy, reaches out to assume a flesh that is placed in a proper relation of servitude to the mind, and to assume a mind that is placed in a relation of proper servitude to God. The consequence of this is that, in Jesus, the Word comes close to distanced humanity by means of a kind of self-emptying "descent", while, in virtue of a corresponding "ascent" of the mind, the human nature draws close in a mysterious fashion to the infinitely distant God. The distance between God and man remains in one sense, but, in the descent of the Word and in the exaltation of the humanity, the ontological distance - which is enduring - is bridged by a kind of sacramental proximity, in which the divinity acts therapeutically on the humanity, and in which the humanity contemplates the infinitely distant divinity not in despair and rebellion but in loving awe and wonder.

Secondly, the "form of a servant Christology" presents the aspect of revelation, whereby the incomprehensible "form of God" is offered by the preacher for our contemplation through the veiling medium of the "form of a servant". Once again, God comes close to infinitely distant humanity by revealing in Christ his nature as loving and merciful, and by offering his transformative grace in the sacramental order in which the God-man is encountered. This self-revelation of God as merciful and loving takes place under the form of mystery - interpreted liturgically, sacramentally, and in various other essentially ecclesial ways - in such wise that the distance between divinity and humanity remains as infinite as ever, while at the same time the infinitely distant God comes close to his people so that, as "Emmanuel" (God with us), he is made present and accessible to us in his distance, and is incomprehensibly distant from us even in his self-revealing proximity.

A comparison with the teaching of the great fourth century writer Hilary of Poitiers is informative.[4] Hilary's teaching is centred around the idea that the Word takes on a human "form" in order to be able to communicate divine power to that human form in such a way that it too could after a fashion become divine.[5] Thus he

tells us that

> "when he emptied himself of the form of God and took the form of a servant, the weakness of the assumed humanity did not weaken the divine nature, but that divine power was imparted to humanity without the virtue of the divinity being lost in the human form. For when God was born to be man the purpose was not that the Godhead should be lost but that, the Godhead remaining, man should be born to be God" (On the Trinity 10,7).[6]

The kenosis (that is, "self-emptying") of the Word involves no self-lowering, but means simply that he comes to dwell with us while remaining in heaven - a theology of God as "Emmanuel" - and the consequence of this is the glorification of the sacred humanity, as Hilary goes on to explain:

> "thus Emmanuel is his name, which is 'God with us', that God might not be lowered to the level of man, but man raised to that of God. Nor, when he asks that he may be glorified, is it in any way a glorifying of his divine nature, but of the lower nature that he assumed; for he asks for that glory which he had with God before the world was made" (On the Trinity 10,7).

His assumption of the "form of a servant" most emphatically does not require us to believe that the Word ceased to be with the Father, or that he abandoned his heavenly dwelling. What happens, Hilary appears to think, is that the Word enters into a relation with the flesh which is not conceived in crude spatial terms (as in the sense of the flesh "containing" the Godhead), but which is to be understood in the sense of the Word acting causally on the human nature to glorify it and to impart the divine virtue. This relation is not the "moral relationship" of Theodore of Mopsuestia and Nestorius (at least as caricatured by their opponents), but is a genuine manifestation of the Word - a "form" which he assumes and which makes him truly "Emmanuel". Thus Hilary writes

> "by the virtue of the Spirit and the power of God the Word, though he abode in the form of a servant, he was ever present as Lord of all, within and beyond the circle of heaven and earth. So he descended from heaven and is the Son of Man, yet is in heaven; for the Word made flesh did not cease to be the Word. As the Word he is in heaven; as flesh he is the Son of Man. As Word made flesh he is at once from heaven, and Son of Man, and in heaven, for the power of the Word, abiding eternally without body, was present still in the heaven he had left - and to him and to none other the flesh owed its origin. So the Word made flesh, though he was flesh, yet never ceased to be the Word" (On the Trinity 10,16).

The strength of Hilary's Christology is that it retains the crucial emphasis on

the distance between God and man which the incarnation does not eradicate but which it renders redemptive and therapeutic through the aspect of mystery in which God comes close to us in liturgy and sacrament while at the same time remaining infinitely distant. This approach to Christology finds its corollaries in concern with divine transcendence,[7] with the question of the possibility of a spirituality rooted in the knowledge of God,[8] and with the doctrine of salvation through faith.[9] However, where Hilary falls short of later orthodoxy is in his refusal to countenance the idea that the kenosis involves a genuine self-emptying by which the Word reaches out to us in order to draw close to us - in the flesh taken from Mary, in the Church, and in the liturgical and sacramental order - and it is here that Leo marks an advance on the thinking of the fourth century.

Leo, like Hilary, perceives the "kenosis" by which the Word assumes the "form of a servant" in "relational" terms, and portrays the descent not as a quitting of the Father to dwell in a place where he had not dwelt previously, but as an entry of the Word into a special relation with the human nature taken from Mary for the purposes of healing and exalting that nature and of rendering his divinity "contemplatable" through it. As with Hilary, this "relation" is no mere moral association (as arguably it is for Theodore and Nestorius), but the term "form" of a servant indicates that this "form" has become an outward manifestation of the Word which is now so much a part of the Word that it his "face", so to speak, and certainly not another "person" in the Nestorian sense (though in Greek *prosopon* can mean both "face" and "person"); in fact, Leo's *forma* is broadly equivalent to the later Greek term *tropos hyparxeôs* (mode of existing).

However, where Hilary makes frequent references to "heavenly flesh", Leo is adamant that Christ's flesh comes from a fully human source, and where Hilary has a tendency to portray the suffering of Christ as "economic" and thus unreal, Leo has no qualms about depicting the passion of the Lord as genuine. Hilary's understanding of the kenosis does not appear to go beyond a coming together of Word and humanity (though, unlike Theodore and Nestorius, he affirms an authentic union), but Leo speaks time and time again of the "humbling" of the Word and makes far more sense of the Pauline statement in Philippians 2 that "he did not cling to equality with God, but

emptied himself, taking the form of a servant". Leo does not exaggerate his kenotic Christology to the extent of describing the Word as laying aside his divine power, but he does prepare the way for von Balthasar's account of the total solidarity of the incarnate Word with sinful human beings in their sense of abandonment and alienation from God.

In particular, Leo expresses this idea within the context of his belief that the incarnate Christ is in the "form of a servant" in as much it looks as though he too is bound to a certain servitude by the flesh which he assumes. He is a *servant* because he possesses flesh which under normal circumstances would be enslaving due to concupiscence, and a mind that in normal circumstances would be enslaved to the devil through ignorance of the truth about God's mercy (as we shall demonstrate). However, he is in the *form* of a servant because his own fleshliness does not bring servitude of the mind to the flesh in its wake. Thanks to the virginal conception, he assumes flesh without concupiscence - that is to say, flesh which has the outward appearance of flesh that dominates over the soul but which is in actual fact completely possessed by and subordinated to the soul. In exhibiting the "essence" of our race without its defect, Christ is the "new man" in whom flesh is properly controlled by the mind - that is to say, who has the "form" of servitude but not real servitude. The word "form" refers to the fact that the incarnate Lord is in no way a slave to the world, the flesh, or the devil; the word "servant" witnesses to the fact that he submits himself to a genuine participation in the experience of alienation suffered by human beings in consequence of their servitude to all three.

Christ's essential sinlessness is affirmed when Leo asserts that "he was brought forth in a new kind of birth" (Sermon 22,3,41-42a), and he explains this with the statement that "[Mary's] untouched virginity did not know concupiscence of the flesh but provided its substance". Leo adds that

> "it was nature that was assumed from the Lord's mother, not guilt. The form of a servant was created without the condition of servitude. The new man was distilled from the old in such a way that he took on himself the full essence of the race while shutting out the defect of that oldness" (Sermon 22,3,119a-129a.).

The kenosis of the incarnation affects the flesh by creating a new kind of flesh which is duly ordered towards the mind, but it also orders the mind towards God through

revelation. The "form of a servant" makes God comprehensible to the eyes of human beings, and so initiates, in the instance of the God-man Jesus of Nazareth, the proper object of the inchoation of that future contemplation of God as essentially merciful which will be the reward of the pure in heart. Leo writes

> "he was brought forth in an unusual manner (*novo ordine*) because, though invisible in his own nature, he has been made visible in ours; because, though incomprehensible, he willed to be comprehended; because, though already existing before time, he came into being at a certain point in time; because the Lord of the universe, drawing a cloud over the dignity of his majesty, took on the form of a servant (*servilem formam*); and because God, though incapable of suffering, did not think it beneath himself to suffer as man and to subject himself to the laws of death as mortal" (Sermon 22,2,35-41).

The kenosis of the Word, accordingly, has to do with *revelation*, and the solidarity of Christ with sinful human beings is ordered towards revealing to us the divine mercy in order that we might know God contemplatively and liturgically and love him in response. This in turn reflects the twofold process according to which God reaches out across the infinite distance that separates him from man in order to make himself known in Christ and - within the locus of the Church - in the words of the preacher and in the liturgical and sacramental re-presentations of Christ, while at the same time we ourselves are encouraged to respond to this initiative by reaching out to God in the asceticism and contemplation that characterises the "transference of desires" and life in the *imago Dei*.

What Leo is driving at is that the Son assumes the form of a servant (that is to say, the outward appearance of someone whose soul is improperly enslaved to the flesh) - firstly in order to reveal the merciful Godhead that our minds are directed towards comprehending, and secondly in order to be subjected to the laws of death (which derive from the flesh). As we shall see, this subjection of Christ to the laws of death is intended to deliver the faithful from enduring such subjection, and so to liberate their minds from captivity to the flesh and render them subordinate to that which is heavenly (revealed as comprehensible through the incarnation) rather than to that which is earthly. Leo here is echoing the idea proposed by St Ambrose in his *de Bono Mortis* according to which Christ's death and resurrection effectively means that death ceases to be the ultimate distancing that separates us from God and instead

becomes the greatest of all the mysteries through which we draw close to God while at the same time acknowledging our infinite distance. In this way the "form of a servant" helps to bring about the "transference of desires" from *terrenus* to *caelestis* mentioned in Sermon 16 both by revealing to us the Godhead in a manner appropriate to our human condition, and also by delivering flesh and mind from that servitude which consists in a response to our sense of distance that manifests itself in rebellion and despair rather than in adoration and love.

The uniting of the *forma servi* with the *forma Dei* is intended to free us from eternal death by transferring death from the category of punishment to the realm of mystery, but, if this is to come about, the two natures must remain in their integrity so that the higher can communicate life to the other in an almost physical sense, and for this reason Leo emphasises that the two "forms" are not compromised by the union:

> "the Word of God, God the Son of God, who in the beginning was with God, through whom all things were made and without whom nothing was made, was himself made human in order to free human beings from eternal death. He condescended to take up our lowliness without diminishing his majesty, and, remaining what he was and taking on what he was not, he united the true form of a servant with the form in which he is equal to God the Father (*veram servi formam ei formae in qua Deo Patri est aequalis uniret*), grafting together both natures in such a union (*et tanto foedere naturam utramque consereret*) that glorification should not overwhelm the lower nor humiliation diminish the higher" (Sermon 21,2,35-43).

What is important here is that, on the one hand, the divinity should not swallow up the form of a servant and so render meaningless the healing of the flesh by the Word and its governance by the human soul of Christ, and, on the other hand, that the humanity should not undermine the form of God and so destroy the divine self-revelation which takes place in Christ and which makes the contemplation of Christ in the form of a servant a kind of stepping-stone to that contemplation of his merciful divinity towards which Leo's spiritual preaching is ordered. We argued above that the two forms are, so to speak, two aspects or faces presented to the world by the single Word - one which is his by nature, the other which is his by assumption. Such an interpretation of the "two forms" Christology explains how the kenosis leads, in the first place, to a healing of the "form of a servant" which becomes conjoined to the Word (with the result that the gulf between God and man is no longer a threat but

becomes an occasion of worship), and, in the second place, to a corresponding ascent of the mind in contemplation of the divine mercy by which Christ in his human nature reveals to us that it is in meditation on him as encountered in liturgy, sacrament, preaching, and the like, that we draw near to the mystery of the infinitely distant "God-with-us".

In his *de Bono Mortis* Ambrose teaches that humanity is condemned to death because of the sin of Adam, and that the death of Christ so to speak pays the debt of death due to sin and at the same time institutes resurrection and communicates life.10 Leo echoes this idea when he speaks of the way in which the Word himself pays the "debt of our condition" by pouring his inviolable nature into mortal nature, dying in the form of his humanity (into which inviolability has been poured), and accordingly rising again because of the form of God which has rendered the form of a servant superior to death. He writes :

> "when, therefore, the identity of each substance is preserved and they join in a single person (*Salva igitur proprietate utriusque substantiae et in unam coeunte personam*), majesty takes up humility, strength takes up weakness, eternity takes up mortality. To pay the debt of our condition, his inviolable nature pours forth into a vulnerable one. True God and true man are combined into the unity of the Lord (*Deusque verus homo verus in unitatem Domini temperatur*). So, as suited our healing, one and the same Mediator between God and man was able both to die by reason of one state and to rise again by that of the other" (Sermon 21,2,43-51).

In this passage the aspect of servitude contained in the phrase "form of a servant" is presented in terms of what Leo describes as the "debt of our condition" - not a debt owed specifically to God or even to Satan, but just a *debitum*. The assumption (the verb is *suscipio*) by the Word of the effects of this debt (effects such as humility, weakness, and mortality) through taking on a human "form" in addition to his divine "form" brings into existence what Leo frequently describes as a "new creation" in which, as is the case for Ambrose, death is merely an entry into life. In this way death ceases to be the culmination of our progressive alienation from the infinitely distant God, but becomes, in our encounter with Christ's death in liturgy and sacrament, in our death to the world, to the flesh, to sin, and to the devil, and in our own literal death which is the gateway to eternal happiness - the ultimate mystery in which we draw closest to the merciful divinity.

This theme of the first and second Adam is central to the teaching of Cyril,[11] but Leo puts his own stamp on it by linking it in with his preaching on the idea of the "form of a servant", making the point that, in virtue of belonging to the new Adam who mediates between the two "forms", we are in a sense associated with the divine majesty:

> "they live no longer in the first Adam, but in the second Adam, who have been made members of the body of Christ - of Christ who, though he was in the form of God (*forma Dei*), condescended to become the form of a servant (*forma servi*). In the one Mediator between God and human beings, Jesus Christ the man, there would be the fullness of divine majesty and the reality of human nature" (Sermon 69,5,130-134).

Leo adds that it is because the Word has united himself to the form of a servant that everything that we receive from Christ - especially liturgically and sacramentally - is salvific and life-giving. Just as Hilary develops a Christology based on the idea that in assuming the form of a servant the Word becomes truly "Emmanuel" - God with us - so also Leo concludes that the Word who "works all things in all" dwells within each individual Christian. Where Cassian thinks in terms of a union between the Word-filled soul of Christ and the flesh of the Church (On the Incarnation 5,12), Leo likewise envisages an inhabitation both of the Church as the body of Christ and of the individual Christian by the Word who first manifested himself in the "form of a servant" and to whom we are united by dying and rising with him in baptism.[12]

In a sense, we could argue that in baptism we imitate the pattern - the *forma* - of the death and resurrection of the Word as experienced in his "form of a servant". Be that as it may, Leo writes

> "had the divinity of the Word not received this [human] nature into the unity of his own Person (*Quam nisi Verbi deitas in suae personae reciperet unitatem*), there would be no regeneration in the water of baptism nor regeneration in the blood of the passion. Since, however, in the mystery of Christ's incarnation we have received nothing false and nothing in figures, it is not in vain that we believe ourselves to have died with him in his dying, and to have been raised with him in his rising. He himself who works all things in all remains in us" (Sermon 69,5,134-140).

Without the assumption by the Word of a genuine human nature the sacraments of the Church would simply be empty signs of the distant God, and would in no sense be mystical re-presentations of a God-man in whom the gulf between divinity and

humanity has been bridged. If there is no incarnation then the liturgy and the sacraments do not give us access to the merciful yet distant God through the medium of the incarnate Word in whom we can encounter God under the form of human flesh, but simply depict for us a God who remains unapproachable. Such sacraments cannot regenerate and give life, and hence cannot transform us in such a way as to bring about the "transference of desires". Leo anticipates Aquinas in seeing salvation in terms of the divine self-communication, and the Christologies of Nestorius and of Eutyches simply do not explain how God's saving causality can reach out to us through the media of the humanity of Christ as extended in liturgy and sacrament. Neither Nestorius nor Eutyches offers a solution of how the distance between God and man can be bridged, with the result that their liturgies and sacraments fail to provide us with an encounter with God as mediated and made present to us in the person of the incarnate Word.

Leo describes how the Word simultaneously offers a "remedy" in as much as he is God and provides an "example" in so far as he is man. He tells us that

> "such, then, dearly beloved, was the nativity that befitted Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. By it he both conforms to us through humanity and rises above us though divinity (*qua nobis et humanitate congrueret et divinitate praecelleret*). Were he not indeed true God he could apply no remedy. Were he not indeed true man he could show no example" (Sermon 21,2,54-58).

The remedy refers to the virgin birth which accomplishes that healing of the flesh which in turn subordinates the flesh to the mind and which does away with the element of servitude in the *forma servi*. We have seen that the "remedy" applied by the Word refers to inviolability and immortality, and it seems that, while the virginal conception and birth produce a restored flesh which is free from the consequences of the fall (that is to say, from rebelliousness towards the soul), they do not produce flesh that is free from the punishment due to sin (which is death) and so, as in the case of Cyril's system, a union of the Word with human nature is required over and above the simple virgin birth of a human being in order to pour life and incorruption into the latter.

Christ can offer a remedy in view of the union of natures because, paradoxically, the subject of all the terrible things that happen to him - that is, the

Person of the Word - is incapable of suffering such things. The incarnation is on the surface nonsensical, for it unites opposite and indeed mutually exclusive characteristics within a single individual. The point of this paradox implicit in the "two forms" Christology is that the qualities of the higher seep down into the lower, though not in such a way that either loses its integrity. As we have seen, the Word communicates immortality and incorruption to that which is fundamentally and essentially mortal and corruptible. This is the famous doctrine of the "communication of idioms" according to which what is predicated of one nature can be predicated of the other.

We have here far more than a neat bit of word-play or clever theo-logic, for the "communication" means in practice that the attributes of the higher form are shared in by the lower form. Thus the following passage describes a series of states suffered by Christ in the "form of a servant", and goes on to show how at a deeper level he remains unaffected by them - precisely because he shares by association in the attributes of the "form of God". This in turn explains how, as we have seen, he can submit to death and yet emerge risen and glorious. The conjunction of the two forms guarantees that, whatever happens to Christ as man, his humanity will be glorified by the "form of God". Leo writes:

> "he who took on the form of a servant also has the form of God. He who took up a body also remains incorporeal. He who suffered in our weakness cannot be harmed in his strength. He who was crucified by the godless on a piece of wood has not been separated from the Father's throne. He who ascended over the heights of heaven as a victor over death will not abandon the universal Church up to the consummation of the world" (Sermon 30,5,113-119).

So much for the "remedy". The "example", meanwhile, must surely refer to Christ's revelation of what it is to live with flesh totally ordered to the soul and the soul totally ordered to God. The goal of the spiritual life demands that Christ should be true God united to human nature in a way that transcends the merely moral (as opposed to the teaching of Nestorius) in order that inviolable nature might be "infused" into passible nature (Sermon 21,2,47) - though not in such a way as to undermine the integrity of either - and so bring healing to the flesh and lead it under the control of the mind. At the same time it demands an example of what it is to have

a flesh under the control of the mind and a mind under the control of God as *gubernator*, so that we can make the best use of the redeemed flesh that we have been given.

The "two forms" Christology lies at the very centre of Leo's preaching of the economy of mercy. It understands the kenosis in terms of the Person of the Word, who exists from all eternity under the form or aspect of God, taking to himself a second form or aspect. The word "face" is the original meaning of Greek *prosopon*, and the doctrine that there are two *prosopa* in Christ is the teaching of Nestorius. However, the two *prosopa* advocated by Nestorius are far more than "faces" or "aspects" or "ways of being" of the Word, and denote a real distinction between the human nature of Christ and the assuming Word who for Hilary and Leo is very much the ground of unity of two "forms" that are in no sense separate or divided. The term "form" as employed by Hilary and Leo on the basis of the famous hymn in Philippians 2 is far closer in meaning to the ancient Greek sense of *prosopon* as "face" or "mask" than it is to the Nestorian interpretation of *prosopon* as "person". Leo's Christology leans heavily on this idea that the Word possesses two "aspects" or "forms", and that the "form of a servant" fulfils the twofold function of being a ladder upon which our minds can ascend to contemplation of the "form of God", and of being intimately conjoined with the "form of God" in such a way that the divine virtue is poured into the human nature and communicated liturgically and sacramentally throughout the mystical body.

## The "Communication of Idioms"

Closely connected to the Christology of the "two forms" is the idea of the *communicatio idiomatum* ("the communication of idioms"), which is the theological term given to the theory that what can be said of the divinity of Christ can also be said of the humanity - and vice versa. Like so much in Leo's Christological preaching it echoes a theme which is central to Hilary's theology of the incarnation, but is developed in such a way as to give it a new twist in line with Leo's more profound understanding of the kenosis.[13] The issue is also raised in certain writings by Cyril, though again Leo invests it with additional significance,[14] and its rejection is one of the cornerstones of Nestorianism. Thus in the Tome Leo describes how

> "in consequence of this unity of person which is to be understood in both natures (*Propter hanc ergo unitatem personae in utraque natura intelligendam*) we read of the Son of Man also descending from heaven, when the Son of God took flesh from the Virgin who bore him. And again the Son of God is said to have been crucified and buried, although it was not actually in his divinity (whereby the only-begotten is coeternal and consubstantial with the Father) but in his weak human nature that he suffered these things" (Letter 28,5,771A).

This is because the person of the Word is the subject of two sets of actions - human and divine - with the result that by extension his human acts can be predicated of the divine nature while his divine acts can be predicated of the human nature without the integrity of either being compromised.

In another letter Leo describes at length how the "communication of idioms" relates to the "form of a servant". He writes that

> "the form of a servant by which the impassible Godhead fulfilled a pledge of mighty loving-kindness is human weakness which was lifted up into the glory of the divine power, since the Godhead and the manhood were so completely united (*connexa*) from the time of the Virgin's conception that without the manhood the divine acts were not performed and without the Godhead the human acts were not performed" (Letter 124,7,1066CD).

Here the communication of idioms helps to underline the point that the closeness of the union of natures - not in virtue of any union with each other but by their shared union with the Word - means that the human nature is glorified through its association with the divine Logos. This provides us with an answer to a possible question which asks why, if Christ inherits a sinless humanity from Mary, the Word needs to be involved in an actual union with that humanity at all? The solution is that the mere fact of the birth of a sinless human being is not sufficient to elevate that human being to immortality and incorruption, or to enable that human being, who, though sinless himself, has voluntarily assumed the condition of slavery which is due to sin, to accomplish the "transference of desires" through the ascent of contemplation.

Leo continues, saying that

> "for this reason, just as the Lord of majesty is said to have been crucified, so he who from eternity is equal with God is said to have been exalted. Nor does it matter by which substance Christ is spoken of, since with the unity of his person remaining inseparable he is at one both wholly Son of Man according to the flesh and wholly Son of God according to his Godhead, which is one with the Father.

> Therefore whatever Christ received in time he received in virtue of his manhood, on which are conferred whatever things it did not previously possess" (Letter 124,7,1066D-1067A).

The last sentence is the crucial one, for it explains that something objective is communicated to the manhood in the light of its connection to the divinity. As we shall see, the ascension gives us something over and above what Adam lost. That something, it would seem, is the exaltation of our human nature, which is the consequence of the union of that human nature with the Word, and not of the virginal conception and birth (which guarantee only a return to prelapsarian sinlessness in Christ).

Not only is it the case with the communication of idioms that what we predicate of one nature we can predicate of the other, but it is also true that what is conferred on either nature can be said to be conferred on the other. This means that whatever the Father confers on the Word in view of their shared nature is conferred on the humanity of Christ in virtue of its attachment to the divine nature through the medium of union with the Word. Thus Leo tells us that

> "according to the power of the Word the Son has indiscriminately everything that the Father has, and that which he received from the Father in the form of a servant he himself also gave in the form of the Father" (Letter 124,7,1067A).

Anything that is conferred on one of the natures in Christ is shared with the other, but (as in the case of the law of thermodynamics which states that heat cannot of itself pass from one body to a hotter body) the human nature (being lesser) confers nothing on the divine nature (being greater) whereas the divine confers exaltation on the human - exaltation which leads eventually to the ascension. This is partly because Leo does not really think in terms of a union of natures at all, but in terms of a union of Word and human nature. Thus in practice it is not so much the case that what can be predicated of the divine nature can be predicated of the human, but that what can be predicated of the person of the Word can be predicated of the human nature. Again, it is not the divine nature that communicates exaltation to the human nature but the Word who takes on human nature.

Küng's difficulty with Chalcedonian Christology stems largely from his belief that it views an impassible and transcendent divine nature as entering into an

unreal union with human materiality, whereas the truth is that writers such as Leo view a dynamic *person* as genuinely expressing himself through the medium of that human materiality.[15] Moreover, for Leo that divine person is one whose very nature is to be loving and merciful - in short, to be "personal" in the fullest sense of that term - and there is no question of mutually contradictory natures being united (one or two instances of less than felicitous phraseology notwithstanding).

From a systematic perspective this raises the problem of how the Word can possess two natures even if these remain distinct (as both Hilary and Leo are at pains to emphasise)? For Aquinas the solution to this quandary probably lies in the phenomenon of the beatific vision, which represents the point at which that way of knowing which characterises rational human nature coalesces with that divine act of knowing which constitutes the nature of the Godhead.[16] Leo, like Duns Scotus, is more interested in loving than in knowing, and may well understand Christ both as an expressive "mystery" of the divine mercy and love and as an foundational "example" of the ideal of human mercy and love. So far as Leo is concerned, the diptych of "mystery" and "example" is fundamentally Christological, for the aspect of "mystery" denotes the activity of the person of the Word irrupting into the created order in the person of Jesus Christ and in liturgy and sacrament, while the aspect of "example" signals the way in which Christ is a paradigm of that "transference of desires" which leads to the comformity of human beings with the *imago Dei*.

In Leo's hands, then, the "communication of idioms" is a device for affirming the close relation that the divine nature has to the human in virtue of the symbiosis of the two in the unity of the exalting Word. Because it is the case that the Word shares with his human nature everything that he receives from the Father, it follows that the pure flesh assumed from Mary will receive the grace of exaltation and glorification. What we have is not just a "communication of idioms" but a straightforward "communication" whereby the Father communicates himself to his Word and his Word communicates exaltation to the human nature which is intimately connected to the same Word in virtue of the same Word's act of incarnation.

This emphasis on "communication" is lost in those modern Christologies of the "ascending" type which overstress the correlation between Christology and

anthropology and perceive Christ as a uniquely and archetypally self-transcendent human being in whom the Word finds ultimate self-expression - rather than as the Word who descended from heaven to communicate grace to human beings through (as Aquinas would have it) the conjoint instrumental cause of his humanity and the disjoint instrumental cause of the sacraments (almost as if the human nature of the patristic and scholastic Christ and its liturgical and sacramental extensions formed a kind of "electrical conductor" between God and human beings).

However, we might add that Aquinas understands such divine self-communication largely in terms of the revelation of the knowable God to rational human beings.[17] Thomas teaches that "spiritual eating" expressed as faith in the sacraments which represent the passion is enough to appropriate the passion's spiritual benefits.[18] In other words, the passion is appropriated by noetic touch rather than by physical touch, for, as Aristotle and Aquinas both teach, the known exists inside the knower. Thomas's theology is ordered towards the attainment by man of his supernatural end of the knowledge of God, and the sacraments cause grace in our souls not "magically" but by causing knowledge of God and thus producing that grace which, being a "certain participation in the divine nature", constitutes a sharing in God's self-knowledge and thus a kind of divinisation of the rational human being.[19] For writers as diverse as Leo, Aquinas, and von Balthasar, what is "communicated" by a Christology of the "descending" type is that knowledge and love of God which is a participation by way of likeness in God's own divine knowledge and love. By way of contrast, advocates of the "ascending" approach to Christology are more interested in the idea that Christ reveals to us what it is to be fully human (an emphasis which is not absent from the Christology of Leo but which is the corollary of the primary revelation of the scope of the divine mercy).

Küng and the later Schillebeeckx are so intent on rejecting the idea of a union of natures which, after the Leporius episode, was not taught in the west anyway, that they neglect the Trinitarian dimension of Christology which is so crucial for classical Chalcedonians from Leo to von Balthasar. At the risk of over-simplifying, one might argue that Küng and Schillebeeckx both attempt to reformulate the union of natures by arguing that the man Jesus is effectively a divine expression of what it means to be

perfectly human, whereas Leo and von Balthasar understand Christ as a human expression of what it means to be the divine Word. For Küng and Schillebeeckx, Jesus of Nazareth articulates on behalf of God and in a sense as God a radical reinterpretation of the possibilities of human existence, whereas for Leo and von Balthasar he articulates on behalf of man and in a sense as man the Trinitarian being of the Logos. All agree that Christology is concerned with revelation, but the advocates of the "ascending" Christology see things primarily in terms of a revelation of man to man, whereas the protagonists of the "descending" Christology are committed to the idea that Jesus Christ reveals to us the divine mercy and love, and that he accordingly renders knowledge and love of the divine nature and persons truly possible for all classes of human beings.

This, it must be stressed, is not mere Abelardianism, for revelation as understood by Leo, Aquinas and von Balthasar transforms, justifies and sanctifies in a way that is genuinely objective. Moreover, an authentic interpretation of Anselm's satisfaction-theory would emphasise the extent to which satisfaction, far from doing anything to God, simply restores the harmonious balance of the universe (an idea which Jonathan Edwards develops so fruitfully in the eighteenth century), and presents Christ as man responding in a way that is paradigmatic for human spirituality to the truth concerning the divine mercy which Christ as God has revealed.

At the end of the day the rival "ascending" and "descending" approaches may be regarded as complementary rather than as mutually exclusive, but, Leo's and von Balthasar's "descending Christology" does appear to leave more scope for the patristic and Thomistic idea that the Word uses the humanity of Christ as an *organon* (Athanasius) or an *instrumentum* (Aquinas) for the communication of some kind of healing revelation or illumination which leads to the *theiosis* of the spirituality of the Greek fathers, and, later on, to the distinctive spiritual doctrine of Gregory of Palamas and to St Symeon the New theologian and his theology of light.[20] Each of these themes, *mutatis mutandis*, is to be found in the writings of Leo, for whom Christology has to *empower* spirituality (by way of "mystery") as well as to *exemplify* it (by way of "example").

## *THE "TWO FORMS" CHRISTOLOGY*

To return to Leo and the communication of idioms, while it remains the case that what we predicate of one form we can predicate of the other, it is also true that the two natures remain distinct though juxtaposed in the unity of the Word, with the result that on the one hand the reality of Christ's flesh is affirmed, while on the other hand the true Trinitarian relation of the Son to the Father is carefully maintained. These two elements, as we have seen, are central to Leo's spirituality. If, on the one hand, Christ's flesh is not real, then his subduing of the flesh is unreal, and there is (a) no baptismal re-birth by which we can be united with Christ's glorified flesh and so placed in contact with his conjoined divinity, and (b) no hope or pattern for our own subduing of the flesh. If, on the other hand, Christ's divinity is not real, then he is not the Son of God - with the result that there is no exaltation of the human nature and no ladder of ascent for the contemplative soul.

As we have observed, Christology has to do with a twofold revelation - the revelation by way of "mystery" of the divine mercy and love, and the revelation by way of "example" of how we are to respond to that divine self-revelation. Leo opposes Eutyches and Nestorius because they undermine the mystery and example structure of Christology which informs this double revelation, and it may legitimately be argued that, in our own time, Küng and the later Schillebeeckx have followed Nestorius by effectively dissolving the category of mystery within the category of example.

Once again, we must stress that the "communication of idioms" relates to Leo's vision of Christology as revelatory or "epiphanic". This is for the simple reason that, if what is predicated of one nature can equally be predicated of the other, it follows that what we observe in the visible human nature reflects the reality underlying the invisible divine nature as possessed by the conjoined person of the Word. Accordingly, if Christ as man demonstrates love and mercy towards human beings, it is because he is mirroring the divine mercy and love and incarnating God's universal saving will. Similarly, because each component of the complex of Mary, the Church, the liturgy, the sacraments, the sermon and the ascetic life represents a prolongation and extension of the incarnate Christ, the "communication of idioms" means in effect that God's loving mercy is revealed to the world not only in the Word made flesh but in Mary who is the type of the Church, in the Petrine office which heads the institution of the

Church, in the liturgical, preaching and sacramental order which is the life of the Church, and in that ascetical practice which is observed within the locus of the Church.

For John Cassian and others there is a sense in which the Word, in assuming human flesh, becomes "married" to the Church, with the result that the Church becomes part of the matrix of the "communication of idioms" and plays a central rôle in the self-revelation and self-communication of the divinity. The primary result of this is that, by an extension to ecclesiology and spirituality of the fundamental principle of the "communication of idioms", each of the various aspects of the Church's outward realisation of the divine mercy and love constitutes an *exemplum* of the "transference of desires" and of the *imago Dei* which is offered to the world by the Church - which in turn becomes (especially in the Christological sermon) a *lumen gentium* for the conversion of sinners and an epiphany of the loving mercy of God.

# NOTES

1 See M. Olphé-Galliard: "La pureté de coeur d'après Cassien", *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 17 (1936), 28-60.

2 On the rôle of "love" in Leo's theology see D. Polato: *Aspetti di una teologia della carità nei sermoni di San Leone Magno*, unpub. diss., Padua, 1969.

3 This seems to the present author to be the only possible interpretation of the conclusions arrived at in works such as E. Schillebeeckx's *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, ET London & New York 1979 and *Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World*, ET London, 1980. It is made even more explicit by numerous passages in *God is Each New Moment*, ET Edinburgh, 1983.

4 On Hilary's Christology see G. Giamberardini: *De incarnatione Verbi secundum S. Hilarium Pictaviensem*, Piacenza, 1948.

5 P. Galtier: "La *forma Dei* et la *forma servi* selon saint Hilaire de Poitiers", *Recherches de science religieuse* 48 (1960), 101-118.

6 I have used the translation by W. Sanday in the *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Church* series, second series, vol. 9, 1898, reprinted 1973.

7 J.M. McDermott: "Hilary of Poitiers: the Infinitie Nature of God", *Vigiliae Christianae* 27 (1973), 172-202; P.C. Burns: *The Christology of Hilary of Poitiers' Commentary on Matthew* (Stud. Ephem. Augustinianum 16), Rome, 1981.

8 J. Doignon: "Ordre du monde, connaissance de Dieu et ignorance de soi chez Hilaire de Poitiers", *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 60 (1976), 565-578.

9 A. Peñamaría de Llano: *La salvación por la fe. La noción fides en Hilario de Poitiers*, Burgos, 1981.

10 See W.T. Wiesner: *De Bono Mortis*, Washington (Patristic Studies 100), 1970; S. Pasquetto: *Morte di Adamo e novità di vita in Cristo nella dottrina di S. Ambrogio*, Venice, 1967.

11 R.L. Wilken: "Exegesis and the History of Theology: some reflections on the Adam-Christ typology in Cyril of Alexandria", *Church History* 35 (1966), 139-156.

12 On Leo's ecclesiology in general and the idea of the Church as an extension of the body of Christ in particular, see especially E.M. Burke: *The Church in the Works of Leo the Great*, Washington, 1945; L.J. McGovern: *The Ecclesiology of St. Leo the Great*, unpub. diss., Rome, 1957; M. Pellegrino: "La dottrina del corpo mistico in s. Leone Magno", *La Scuola Cattolica* 67 (1939), 611-615; M. Garrido Bonaño: "Prolongación de Cristo en su cuerpo místico según San Léon Magno", *Studium*, 15 (1975), 491-505.

13 See R. Favre: "La communication des idiomes d'après Saint Hilaire de Poitiers", *Gregorianum* 18 (1937), 318-336.

14 See G. Jouassard: "Saint Cyrille d'Alexandrie aux prises avec la 'communication des idiomes' avant 428 dans ses ouvrages anti-ariens", *Studia Patristica* 6 (1962), 112-121.

15 H. Küng: *The Incarnation of God*, ET Edinburgh, 1987, pp. 445-456.

16 For a sustained treatment of the idea that the desire to know is fundamental to human nature, see Jan Aertsen: *Nature and Creature: Thomas Aquinas's Way of Thought*, ET Leiden, 1988.

17 *Summa Contra Gentiles* 3-1, 25.

18 *Summa Theologiae* 3a,80,1.

19 I am not convinced that Aquinas intends us to take his distinction between sacramental signification and sacramental causality as anything more than an epistemological distinction.

20 On the idea of "divinisation" in Greek theology in general see M. Lot-Borodine, *La déification de l'homme selon le doctrine des Pères grecs*, (Bibliothèque oecuménique 9), Paris, 1970. For a treatment of the development of the idea by Gregory of Palamas in particular, see Georgios I. Mantzaridis: *The Deification of Man*, ET New York, 1984. On Symeon, see the relevant sections in Archbishop Basil Krivocheine: *In the Light of Christ: St Symeon the New Theologian - Life, Spirituality, Doctrine*, ET New York, 1986.

# Chapter Five

# A THEOLOGY OF GLORY

## Christ's Transfigured Humanity

We have concentrated up to now on the mystery of the incarnation, but have also suggested in passing that Leo, in virtue of his emphasis on the rôle of the passion in the unfolding of the kenotic self-revelation of the divine love, is an exponent of the "theology of the Cross". However, what might be described as the "theology of glory" is also prominent in his thought, and we shall be devoting this section and the one that follows to looking at the part played by the transfiguration and the ascension in Leo's gospel of salvation. Perhaps the best expression of what one could designate Leo's "Christological mysticism" is found in Sermon 51 (on the Transfiguration),[1] where Leo begins by summing up the idea that salvation consists in recognition of the two natures in Christ, saying that

> "the Saviour of mankind, Jesus Christ, in founding that faith which calls the wicked to righteousness, used to instruct his disciples by admonitory teaching and by miraculous acts to the end that he, the Christ, might be believed to be at once the only-begotten of God and the Son of Man" (Sermon 51,1,10-14).

Leo describes how Peter,

> "passing, thanks to the revelation of the most high Father, beyond corporeal things and surmounting things human by the eyes of his mind, saw him to be the Son of the living God, and acknowledged the glory of the Godhead, because he looked not at the substance of His flesh and blood alone" (Sermon 51,1,22-26).

This revelation to Peter is counterbalanced with a reminder of the reality of the human nature, for, as Leo writes,

> "this exalted and highly praised understanding, dearly beloved, had also to be instructed with regard to the mystery of Christ's lower substance, lest the apostle's faith, being raised to the glory of confessing the deity in Christ, should deem the reception of our weakness both unworthy of the impassible God and somehow incongruous, and should believe the human nature to be so glorified in him as to be incapable of suffering punishment, or of being dissolved in death" (Sermon 51,2,32-38).

The emphasis on the reality of each of the natures is important, for, as we have demonstrated, the one gives access to the other. This is more, however, than simply a matter of the ascent of the mind through contemplation of first the earthly and then the heavenly, for the contemplative must actually *imitate* Christ in order to arrive at purity of heart. In particular, we attain contemplation not only through meditation on the cycle of incarnation, passion, death, and resurrection, but through imitating it and participating in it sacramentally through baptism and liturgically and ascetically through the observance of the Christian fasts and feasts - for, as Leo makes abundantly clear, the transference of desires is accomplished most especially within the context of the Church by way of the three essentially liturgical actions of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. What Leo is effectively doing is taking up Cassian's teaching on the relation between the contemplative and active life[2] and on the acquisition of spiritual knowledge,[3] and "democratising" it by relocating it from a monastic to a liturgical context through the medium of the liturgical sermon.

In the light of this we need to remember that there is a distinctly ecclesiological perspective to his words when Leo says that the exhortation of the Saviour that followed on from the rebuke to Peter

> "instilled and taught this: that they who wished to follow him should deny themselves and count the loss of temporal things as light in the hope of things eternal; because he alone could save his soul that did not fear to lose it for Christ" (Sermon 51,2,46-50).

Certainly, we are to attain unto that contemplation of the divine attributes which is the goal of Leo's lay spirituality by means of the transference of desires, but this transference of desires demands that we should travel the way of the Cross as

prepared for us within the Church through the Church's liturgical cycle of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving,[4] and not simply through an unadorned "mysticism".

The purpose of the transfiguration is that the apostles might not be scandalised by the passion, but that they might realise that, just as it was through suffering and death that the Lord was to return to the fullness of his state of glory, so also it was only through imitative suffering (as expressed in the ecclesial sense that we have outlined) that they themselves could be exalted and glorified. As is clear from Sermon 95 (on the beatitudes) and from the sermons on the ascension, such exaltation and glorification of the Christian is to be seen in terms of the ascent to true contemplation of God. The Pope looks forward to our elevation towards a contemplation which

> "will be accomplished when human nature is transformed, and then [we shall see him] not in a mirror or in a dim reflection. Face to face will each one see that divinity which no human being can see as it is. What the eye has not seen and the ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, each of us will obtain through the indescribable joy of eternal contemplation" (Sermon 95,8,151-157).

Rooted in the life of the Church, the ascetic path with all its attendant sufferings is the way to attain by way of the "transference of desires" the joys of post-ascension contemplation, and the episode of the transfiguration illuminates the crucial link between passion and glory, between ecclesial transference of desires (as worked out in prayer, fasting, and almsgiving) and the contemplative ascent of the mind to a deeper knowledge of the divine mercy.

All of this explains why Leo is able to write in his sermon on the transfiguration that

> "in order that the apostles might entertain this happy, constant courage with their whole heart, and have no tremblings about taking up the Cross, and that they might not be ashamed of the punishment of Christ, nor think what he endured disgraceful to themselves (for the bitterness of suffering was to be displayed without despite to his glorious power), Jesus took Peter and James and his brother John, and, ascending a very high mountain, with them apart, showed them the brightness of his glory; because, although they had recognised the majesty of God in him, yet the power of his body, wherein his deity was contained, they did not know" (Sermon 51,2,50-60).

Peter and James are shown what the flesh of Christ is really like - that underneath

the "form of a slave" and the "likeness of sinful flesh" there is *glorified* flesh. We shall be arguing that, as well as being a step on the ladder of contemplative ascent that leads us from the suffering flesh of Christ to his divinity, this glorified flesh also reveals to us the true character of the transformation wrought in our own flesh by baptism, when our flesh is rendered governable by the mind - thus revealing to human beings the potentiality of human existence, but revealing also a potentiality which is entirely a consequence of the incarnation and is not in any sense a mere self-realisation of the human spirit (as Rahner sometimes appears to imply).

What Christ reveals, then, is not just divinity, but glorified manhood - which is what stands at the limits of our contemplation in this present life. Leo says that

> "rightly and significantly had he promised that certain of the disciples should not taste death till they saw the Son of Man coming in his kingdom, that is, in the kingly brilliance which, as specially belonging to the nature of his assumed manhood (*ad naturam suscepti hominis*), he wished to be conspicuous to these three men" (Sermon 51,2,60-64).

In much the same vein Leo concludes

> "the unspeakable and unapproachable vision of the Godhead itself, which is reserved until eternal life for the pure in heart, they could in no wise look upon and see while still surrounded with mortal flesh" (Sermon 51,2,64-67).

Carrying the argument one stage further he observes that

> "the Lord displays his glory, therefore, before chosen witnesses, and invests that bodily shape which he shared with others with such splendour that his face was like the sun's brightness and his garments equalled the whiteness of snow" (Sermon 51,3,68-71).

All this represents a foretaste of the contemplation that we shall enjoy in heaven, when we gaze upon the full glory of Christ's exalted humanity and his conjoint divinity in the beatific vision, and ties in with Leo's lay spirituality of a transference of desires which leads to a saving inchoation of future beatitude.

In Sermon 51,1 the emphasis is on Peter's confession of the divine nature, which is paradigmatic both for our faith in this life and for our contemplation of that nature in the next. 51,2 makes the point that we cannot behold the divine nature in the present life, but offers the vision of the glorified Christ as something that we can meditate on and that contains something of the glory of the divinity - while at the

same time reminding us that we can attain to contemplation of Christ's human glory only if we ourselves pass through the same vale of suffering through which he passed in undergoing his passion and Cross - a vale of suffering which Leo understands as being realised in our own case through the liturgical, ascetical, and charitable life of the Church. Leo adds to this that

> "in this transfiguration the foremost object was to remove the offence of the Cross from the disciples' hearts, and to prevent their faith being disturbed by the humiliation of his voluntary passion by revealing to them the excellence of his hidden dignity" (Sermon 51,3,71-75).

He then goes on to observe that

> "with no less foresight the foundation was laid of the holy Church's hope, that the whole body of Christ might realise the character of the change which it would have to receive (*ut totum Christi corpus agnosceret quali esset commutatione donandum*), and that the members might promise themselves a share in that honour which had already shone forth in their head" (Sermon 51,3,75-79).

This "change" is nothing other than the glorification both of the Church as a unit and of its individual members which will be brought about by suffering in imitation of the passion of Christ. We need to ask, though, in what such glorification consists. For a writer like Aquinas it consists pre-eminently in the vision (though not the comprehension) of the divine essence, and, *mutatis mutandis*, it may well be that Leo has something similar in mind. As we have noted, Sermon 51,2 looks forward to the

> "unspeakable and unapproachable vision of the Godhead itself which is reserved until eternal life for the pure in heart" (Sermon 51,2,64-67).

Once again, the purpose of the episode of the transfiguration is to make known to us the goal of Christian contemplation which we shall enjoy in heaven provided that we live out Leo's version of the mystical and contemplative life - which he has suitably adapted for Christians in the world from the insights of monastic writers like John Cassian - in the here and now.

Henri Denis divides his treatment of the subject of Christ's divine nature into three headings,[5] which we would do well to retain. These headings relate to three fundamental principles from which Leo never deviates - that in the incarnation Christ loses nothing of his divinity, does not quit the side of his Father, and continues to live

with Father and Spirit within the unity of the Trinity. Clearly, if Christ is an object of contemplation who raises our minds through contemplation of his humanity to contemplation of his divinity, such a mental ascension will be vitiated if either divine or human nature is lacking in its full integrity, and this explains why Leo enunciates these three principles concerning the Godhead in Christ. These principles do not, however, undermine the reality of the kenosis, for, while remaining by the side of the Father, the Word nevertheless experiences all the abandonment and alienation of the "form of a servant" and the "likeness of sinful flesh" in order to reveal to us both the possibilities of human existence and the reality of the merciful love of God.

Much of this is summarised in Sermon 27 where Leo writes as follows:

> "in both natures it is the same Son of God who takes what is ours and does not lose what is his own, who renews man in his manhood but endures unchangeable in himself. For the Godhead which is his in common (*communis*) with the Father underwent no loss of omnipotence, nor did the form of a slave do despite to the form of God, because the supreme and eternal essence (*summa et sempiterna essentia*), which lowered itself for the salvation of mankind, transferred (*transtulit*) us into its glory but did not cease to be what it was" (Sermon 27,1,18-25).

The phrase "transferred us into its glory" refers, we can be fairly certain, not to any idea that we are all mystically contained in Christ and therefore elevated physically (almost magically) with him in his ascension. Rather, it refers, in the first place,to the elevation of the flesh that Christ assumed from us at the incarnation and that he communicates to us - in its elevated form - in baptism and Eucharist, while, in the second place, it refers to the uplifting of our minds which ascend to heaven using the two natures of Christ as a kind of ladder to transport them from the earthly to the heavenly, from the fleshly to the spiritual, and from the human to the divine.

## Leo's Ascension Christology

As well as healing and glorifying our flesh, Christ has elevated it in virtue of the ascension. Even the resurrection appearances make this point, showing as they do that the human nature of Christ - which was taken from human beings by way of Mary and which will be given back to us (duly transformed) in baptism - will be located with the Father in heaven. Thus Leo writes:

> "he had preserved the wounds of the nails and the lance as signs to heal the hearts of unbelievers, so that, with a very constant knowledge rather than a hesitant faith, they would understand that this nature which had lain in the tomb was to take its place on the throne of God the Father" (Sermon 73,3,51-54).

The ascension itself consists in nothing other than the association of our human nature with the Father to whom it is united in the incarnate Word. Leo can hardly contain his enthusiasm as he meditates on the almost incredible implications of what he is preaching, and attempts to communicate his excitement to the faithful, saying

> "truly it was a great and indescribable source of rejoicing when, in the sight of the heavenly multitudes, the nature of our human race ascended over the dignity of all heavenly creatures, to pass through the angelic orders and to be raised beyond the heights of the archangels. In its ascension it did not stop at any other height until this same nature was received at the seat of the eternal Father, to be associated (*sociaretur*) on the throne of the glory of that One to whose nature it was joined in the Son" (Sermon 73,4,64-71).

Leo develops this idea that the ascension in some sense unites our human flesh to God the Father, explaining that this comes about through the grace of Christ and reminding us that it vouchsafes to us a degree of blessing beyond even that enjoyed by Adam in paradise. He writes:

> "since the ascension of Christ is our elevation (*provectio*), and since, where the glory of the head has preceded us, hope for the body is also invited there, let us exult, dearly beloved, with worthy joy and be glad with a holy thanksgiving. Today we are not only established as possessors of paradise but we have penetrated the heights of the heavens in Christ, having been prepared more fully for it through the indescribable grace of Christ which we had lost through the ill will of the devil. The Son of God has placed (*conlocavit*) those whom the violent enemy threw down from the happiness of our first dwelling and whom he has incorporated (*concorporatos*) within himself at the right hand of the Father" (Sermon 73,4,71-80).

Leo can write that "*we* have penetrated the heights of heaven" and that *we* are "concorporated" and "conlocated" with Christ because the glorified flesh of Christ is flesh that he has received from Mary as our representative and that he has shared with us through baptism and Eucharist. Because from both these points of view we are truly "consubstantial" with Christ, we participate in the glory of his subdued flesh and enjoy in virtue of our union with him a flesh which is at least "governable", and which he has shown us by way of example how to govern.[6]

## A THEOLOGY OF GLORY

During his life on earth, the purpose of the incarnate Word is to inculcate truth in the reality of his human nature, but after the resurrection the "signs" are increasingly directed towards revealing his intrinsic glory. Leo describes how:

> "the mystery of our salvation, dearly beloved, which the Creator of the universe thought worth the price of his blood, has, from the day of his bodily birth to the end of his suffering, been carried to completion through the condition of his humility. Although many signs of the divinity in the form of a servant have been evident, strictly speaking the action of that time pertained to demonstrating the truth of the humanity which he assumed. After his passion, when he had broken the chains of that death which had destroyed its own strength by proceeding against one who had no acquaintance with sin, then weakness was turned to strength, mortality to eternity, grace to glory. The Lord Jesus made this obvious in the sight of all with many signs that were both numerous and clear, until such time as he carried the triumph of victory that he had brought back from death up into heaven" (Sermon 74,1,1-12).

As we have argued, Leo is interested in the idea of an ascent of the mind - an ascent of the mind that in many ways corresponds with the physical ascension of Christ, and this ascent is conceived very much in liturgical terms. Leo continues by saying that

> "as the resurrection of the Lord was a cause of rejoicing for us in the paschal liturgy, so his ascension into heaven is a matter of present delight for us. We recall and rightly venerate that day when our lowly nature was carried in Christ above all the hosts of heaven, over all the angelic orders and beyond the height of all powers, to the seat of God the Father" (Sermon 74,1,13-19).

It seems likely that Leo is moving towards the idea that the liturgical celebration and preaching of the ascension makes the historical mystery genuinely present to us in the eucharistic mystery, with the result that we are enabled to meditate upon the ascended Christ. Leo goes on to develop his theme in what follows, saying that

> "we have been established, we have been built in this order of divine works, in such a way that the grace of God might become the more wonderful when, though those things which are felt to incite proper reverence are removed from the sight of human beings, faith still does not weaken, hope still does not waver, and love still does not grow cold" (Sermon 74,1,19-23).

What Leo appears to be arguing is that the liturgical celebration, especially in so far as it is preached, fills us with faith in the truth about Christ in such a way that when "those things which are felt to invite proper reverence" - that is, the

various sacramental signs - are taken away, our faith, hope, and love will not vanish with them, but will remain transformed by the liturgical experience. During the present life, Christian contemplation is essentially liturgical, and when Leo refers to our being born with Christ, dying with Christ, rising with Christ, and ascending into heaven with Christ, he is in all probability thinking in terms of our accomplishing all these things *liturgically*. Leo sees liturgy and contemplation as inextricably intertwined, for it is in the liturgy that our mystical union with Christ is most intensely realised, and it is in virtue of the same liturgical celebration - manifested both in rite and in preaching - that our minds are raised from earth to heaven. The linear time of the Old Testament has been replaced by a kind of cyclical time in which the liturgical re-enactment of the mysteries of the life of Christ is the supreme reality, but we still have to live everyday lives in the world, and Leo promises that the contemplation of Christ need not necessarily be confined to the liturgy in which he is most perfectly encountered, but that the "transference of desires" of which we spoke earlier can be a more permanent condition - even if the unwavering "fixity of mind" to which John Cassian aspires is an impossibility for the lay-person.

With the ascension Christ has transferred himself into what might be described as the "sacramental order", and Leo accordingly tells us that

> "what was to be seen of our Redeemer has passed over into the sacraments (*in sacramenta transivit*). In order that faith might be more perfect and more firm, teaching has taken the place of sight, and to this authority the hearts of believers, illumined by heavenly rays, have conformed" (Sermon 74,2,42-45).

For Leo the two key elements of the liturgical celebration are the revelation of Christ in the sacramental order and the revelation of Christ in preaching. Each of these helps us to meditate on Christ as if he were present amongst us, and indeed the overall effect is to render our faith stronger and firmer than it would have been had he remained on earth. This last passage might also be taken as suggesting that Leo sees the work of preaching not so much as parallel to the sacramental order, but as being in some sense sacramental itself, and that the sermon may properly be understood as an integral part of the liturgical act that effects the re-presentation of the mysteries of the life of the incarnate Lord.

Be that as it may, Leo now describes the ascent of the mind more explicitly,

speaking of the apostles as they contemplate the ascending Christ and recounting the way in which they

> "raised the whole gaze of their souls to the divinity of the one sitting at the right hand of the Father. No longer are they held back by any use of bodily sight which would prevent them from looking with sharpness of soul on that one who had neither been absent from the Father by his coming down, nor had departed from the disciples by his ascension" (Sermon 74,3,58-63).

The incarnate Word, then, is even more visible to the eye of contemplation than he was to the fleshly eye during his sojourn on earth. Spiritual vision replaces bodily vision, and Christ's presence to the contemplative is portrayed as being real and immediate.

Indeed, as Christ's human and bodily presence recedes his divine and spiritual presence becomes more accessible to us. Leo explains that

> "the son of a human being became known more eminently and more sacredly as the Son of God when he entered into the glory of his Father's majesty. In an ineffable way, he began to be more present in the divinity as he became more remote from our humanity" (Sermon 74,4,64-67).

In consequence of this our faith is drawn through the medium of the glorified body attracted to touch the divine Son not with our bodily hands but with the "spiritual intellect". Leo writes:

> "then, by a spiritual step, a more instructed faith began to give assent to the Son equal to the Father, because with the nature of the glorified body remaining, the faith of believers was drawn where the only-begotten Son who is equal to the Father might be touched (*tangeretur*) not only by fleshly hand (*carnali manu*) but by the spiritual intellect (*spiritali intellectu*)" (Sermon 74,4,67-73).

Though absent in the flesh, Christ is genuinely present to the spiritual heart through the mind's activities of faith, hope, and love. Leo interprets the Pauline doctrine of "justification by faith" from a Christological point of view, expressing the idea that "justice" consists in an acceptance by the mind of what is not seen through the medium of bodily sight. What is seen - at first hand or with the eye of contemplation - is Christ's human flesh, while what is believed in is the divinity of the Word. "Faith" is properly understood only within this Christological context, for it is not a belief in one's own salvation (which is more or less what it is for Luther), but is rather faith in the fact that behind the human flesh of Christ lies the assuming

Person of the Word. Leo insists that

> "bodily vision does not see him (*corporeo intuitu*), but the spiritual heart (*spiritali corde*) beholds. Though absent in the flesh through which he could be seen [while on earth], he remains present in the divinity through which he is always and entirely ubiquitous. For the just live by faith, and the justice of believers consists in this, that they accept with their minds what they do not perceive with their vision. Ascending on high, the Lord took captivity captive and gave gifts to human beings - namely faith, hope, and love. These gifts are great and mighty and precious - all because a marvellous inclination of the mind believes in, hopes for, and loves what eyes of the flesh do not make contact with" (Sermon 5,2,40-48).

When Christ says to Mary Magdalen who "manifests the person of the Church" (Sermon 74,4,74) "do not touch me because I have not yet ascended to my Father" (John 20:17), what he is actually saying is

> "I do not want you to come to me bodily (*corporaliter*), nor to acknowledge me with the perception of your flesh (*sensu carnis*). I am taking you to higher things. I am preparing greater things for you. When I have ascended to my Father, then you will feel me more perfectly and more truly. You will embrace what you do not touch and believe what you do not see" (Sermon 74,4,77-81).

The fact that Mary Magdalen is said to represent the Church suggests that this is another liturgical reference. Christ, as we have shown, has passed out of this world and into the sacramental order, and Leo is arguing that the presence of Christ in the eucharistic celebration of the Church is in some senses even more "real" than his bodily presence on earth. We are not talking about a "real presence" in the traditional Catholic sense of the term, though such an idea is by no means foreign to Leo's way of thinking, but rather we are speaking of Christ's "real presence" in the celebration itself, in so far as the liturgical "re-presentation" of the historical mystery of the life of Christ renders Christ genuinely "present" to the eye of the soul.

What Leo says about the ascension has implications for his spirituality of the "transference of desires". He begins with an exhortation to us believers to elevate our minds to the heavenly Christ:

> "let us exult, therefore, with a spiritual gladness, dearly beloved, and let us joyfully and with due gratitude to God raise the eyes of our hearts to that height where Christ is" (Sermon 74,5,98-100).

Next he implores us not to let that which is "earthly" hold the mind back from its ascent to that which is "heavenly":

> "let not earthly desires (*desideria terrena*) hold down the souls called upwards. Let perishable things not hold those ordained for eternity. Let false pleasures not detain those who have entered the way of truth" (Sermon 74,5,101-103).

It is, explains Leo, a straight choice between the ascent of the mind to heaven (which, as we have shown, gives us something greater than Adam lost at the fall), and that servitude to the devil from which God's self-revelation in Christ is supposed to rescue us. Thus Leo asks:

> "For whom if not for the devil do the worldly pleasures make war? Who is it that delights in hindering by the pleasures of corruptible goods the souls that are reaching for heaven, and in leading them away from that home from which he himself fell?" (Sermon 74,5,112-115)..

And what is the import of this theology of the ascension for Leo's Christology? Quite simply, if the "transference of our desires" from earth to heaven is to be accomplished by a parallel transference of the eye of the soul from the flesh of Christ to the divinity of Christ - as if we were ascending to heaven by way of a ladder of contemplation - it follows that Christ must possess both a genuine human nature and a genuine divine nature if this meditative ascent is to have any meaning. We have already argued that Leo's teaching on the proper ordering of flesh to the soul and of the soul to God requires that there should be a union of Word and humanity in which the virgin flesh of Christ is governed by a human soul which is in turn directed hegemonically by the divinity, and now we must add to this that the affirmation of a "two natures" Christology is essential if the incarnate Lord is to provide an authentic ladder of ascent for the eyes of the soul in such a way that this due orientation of our various anthropological components may be achieved.

The virginal conception produces human flesh that is sinless and pure, and the Word communicates some sort of immortality and inviolability over and above the purity and sinlessness of the flesh assumed from Mary. However, the grace that we receive in virtue of the incarnation as appropriated by the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist - in other words, the benefits of the enfleshment of the Word understood from the perspective of a "descending" Christology - need to be complemented. Accordingly, Leo posits a second set of benefits of the incarnation - as seen from an "ascending" perspective - in terms of the exaltation of God's humanity of Christ and of

the revelation to us of the human possibilities revealed in Christ in contemplating which our minds ascend to a certain meditation on the divine nature. The doctrine of a kind of contemplative ascent which begins with the human nature of Christ and ends with the person of the Word clearly demands a genuine union of Word and flesh, and it is in the light of this insight more than any other that we can say that Leo's Christology is dictated by the requirements of his spirituality. The purpose of the incarnation is the unfettered ascent of the mind, and Leo's Christology operates on the level both of removing the obstacles to that ascent, and, from a more positive point of view, of tracing - and expounding to the laity during the course of the liturgical sermon - the various steps which make such an ascent possible. This contemplative ascent of the mind which finds its proper context in the Church's liturgical preaching represents the fruit of that divine mercy which is ordered towards our universal salvation and sanctification - with the consequence that the message of mercy about which Leo unceasingly preaches is itself realised and made efficacious through the medium of his very act of preaching.

## The Primacy of Christ

A further dimension of Leo's *theologia gloriae* lies in his emphasis on the primacy of the incarnate Christ within the created order, and on the idea that the incarnation is directed not merely towards the removal of the negative effects of sin but towards our positive promotion towards glory and divinisation. If there is a slight weakness in J.-P. Jossua's interpretation of Leo it lies in the fact that it sees Leo's Christology as ordered primarily towards salvation, and accords less emphasis to its implications for the spiritual life. An alternative possibility is hinted at, though never fully explored, by C. Burgio in a provocative article from 1940, which is rich in insights for our understanding of Leo's preaching of the incarnation as ordered specifically towards spiritual concerns.[7]

Burgio, a Franciscan writer, takes the line traditionally associated with the great thirteenth century Franciscan Duns Scotus that Christ would have become incarnate even if Adam had not sinned. One of the great debates in scholastic theology

was that between Dominican followers of Aquinas and Franciscan followers of Scotus as to whether or not the incarnation was contingent upon the fall, and Burgio enters the lists of this particular debate by adducing Leo on the side of Duns Scotus. According to such an interpretation, the new creation brought about by the "communication of idioms" and by Christ's appearance in the "form of a servant" is not so much a restoration of the old creation as the ultimate phase in the single act of creation which began with the creation of the world as recounted by Genesis and which culminates in the incarnation of the Son of God.[8]

Burgio concedes that the Word assumed our flesh and was made one of us for the salvation of mankind through the expiation of our sins and the destruction of the devil, but adds that the incarnation is the primary work of God, predestined from the beginning in a way that was independent of the fall of the human race and of the need for redemption (C. Burgio, p. 83). Unlike that of certain of the moderns such as Karl Rahner, Leo's approach to the business of preaching is at heart Christocentric rather than anthropocentric (C. Burgio p. 86), and this gives rise to two basic principles, namely that Jesus Christ as man is the first-born of all creation, and that Jesus Christ is the essential and vital head of the innocent Adam. We might, in the light of all that we have said, add to this a third principle - namely, that Leo's preaching is concerned with the fact that we as individuals are intimately connected to Jesus Christ, and that any consideration of the mechanics of the incarnation which underestimates the extent to which that incarnation is ordered towards the spiritual fulfilment and perfection of human beings is necessarily a partial one. In the case of Leo, as in that of other fathers, it is not enough simply to say that the incarnation takes place for the sake of salvation. Rather, we must insist that strictness of precision in Christological language is rendered necessary by the very specific character of how the various theologians of the period conceive the spiritual life and the gratuitous relation of the Christian to Christ - in which context even the apparent occurrences of terminological looseness (of which Leo and John Cassian are both at times guilty) are usually occasioned by the agenda set by some particular approach to spirituality.

Underlining the point that Christ is head both of Adam and also of all Christians, Leo writes that

> "there is no doubt, dearly beloved, that human nature was taken up (*susceptam*) by the Son of God in so great a connection (*in tantam conexionem*) that not only in that man, who is the first-born of all creation (*primogenitus totius creaturae*), but even in all his saints, Christ is one and the same, and, just as the head cannot be divided from its members, so the members cannot be divided from the head" (Sermon 63,3,41-45).

Likewise, Christ is described as the "first-born of the new creation who came to do not his own will but that of him who sent him" (Sermon 26,5,125-126), and Burgio regards this primacy as proceeding from the divine intention and destination rather than from the exigencies of the fall (C. Burgio p. 87). To this we might add that it proceeds from the divine intention and destination for the course of our spiritual lives - which consists primarily in the ascension of the mind to God by way of a contemplative anticipation of the perfect vision that we shall enjoy in the next life, and which exceeds the beatitude vouchsafed to prelapsarian Adam.

Burgio's conclusion is entirely plausible. Leo is most fond of speaking of the "divine dispensation" (*dispensatio divina*), and the idea of a grand plan is very much in keeping with his thinking. If numerous passages appear to make the incarnation dependent on Satan's deception of Adam, this alternative interpretation is still not ruled out. As we shall see, the fall determines the form which the incarnation takes (the "form of a slave" rather than the "form of glory"), but is not itself responsible for the fact of the incarnation. We tend to think of the incarnation as contingent upon the fall because we have been conditioned to see Christology as ordered primarily towards soteriology. In fact, the likelihood is that for Leo the incarnation is directed towards spirituality, and this circumstance exercises a notable effect on his thought. Although the incarnation does indeed serve to repair the effects of the fall, over and above this it facilitates that contemplation of God which was our destiny before the fall and which would have to have been rendered possible even if the fall had not taken place. As a preacher who is concerned with lay spirituality rather than with dogmatic theology as such, Leo is especially alive to this point.

As H. Denis has shown, the mystery of the ascension stands at the centre of Leo's system, and this is because the ascension represents the means by which our minds are pointed towards heaven and by which we exchange an earthly way of

living and thinking for a heavenly way of living and thinking. This new way of living and thinking marks an advance on our prelapsarian state, as is clear when Leo writes that

> "today not only are we confirmed as possessors of paradise, but have also in Christ penetrated the heights of heaven, and have gained still greater things through Christ's unspeakable grace than we had lost through the devil's malice" (Sermon 73,4,74-77).

Leo does not discuss the condition of Adam before the fall in any great detail, so at first sight it is difficult to work out exactly what it is that we gain in virtue of the incarnation, passion, resurrection, and ascension that Adam did not possess. The answer seems to lie in a level of union with Christ which would not otherwise have been possible for human beings, and Leo tells us that

> "those whom the violent enemy threw down from the happiness of our first dwelling the Son has placed, incorporated with himself, at the right hand of the Father" (Sermon 73,4,78-81).

This appears to suggest that, without some sort of incarnation, unfallen humanity would simply have enjoyed immortality in an earthly paradise, while fallen and redeemed humanity, in virtue of the union of the Word with human flesh, will be taken up to dwell with God in heaven. The language of incorporation does not mean that we are already in heaven in virtue of some mystical inclusion in Christ, but rather, as Leo explains,

> "since the ascension of Christ is our elevation, and since, where the glory of the head has *preceded* us, there *hope* for the body is also invited, let us exult, dearly beloved, with worthy joy and with a holy thanksgiving" [italics mine] (Sermon 73,4,71-74).

If, then, what we have gained is the ability to contemplate a celestial future in a way which without the incarnation was beyond prelapsarian Adam, it may well be that Burgio is correct to argue that in Leo's eyes the incarnation would have taken place even without the fall - albeit in a drastically different form. According to such an interpretation, Christ's work of redemption is necessary but secondary. What is primary is his making possible the ascent to heaven in union with him of human nature - body and soul - in a manner that was beyond prelapsarian Adam, and which would accordingly have had to have been communicated to us in some way or another even without the fall. Once again, we see that the incarnation is ordered not so much

towards salvation as towards spiritual perfection and the life of the soul - from which it follows that whenever Leo and others like him start using technical terminology they do so in accordance with the dictates of a preconceived doctrine of grace.

A key text in Burgio's argument is located in Letter 59. Here Leo quotes Ephesians 5:30-32 to the effect that

> "we are his members - members of his flesh and bones. For this cause a man shall leave his father and shall cleave to his wife, and there shall be two in one flesh" (Letter 59,4,871A).

Leo interprets this, in line with St Paul, with regard to the Church, and writes that

> "from the very commencement of the human race, Christ is announced to all men as coming in the flesh" (Letter 59,4,871A),

implying that what he is about to expound represents God's plan from the very start, and not something that is contingent upon the fall. The "two in one flesh", he says, are to be understood in terms both of the two natures in Christ, human and divine, and in terms of Christ and the Church, which latter

> "issued from the bridegroom's flesh when it received the mystery of redemption and regeneration, water and blood flowing from the side of the Crucified" (Letter 59,4,871AB).

Christ's coming, then, is announced "from the beginning of the human race", and is ordered towards the union between Christ and Church. The Church comes into existence by means of redemption and regeneration, but this appears to be secondary to the underlying idea that the goal of the incarnation is what we might regard as Christ's twofold incarnation - the incarnation of the Word in flesh and the incarnation of the Word in the Church. The fall means that the incarnation involves an assumption of the "likeness of *sinful* flesh", but a different situation would still have demanded an incarnation - albeit a very different sort of incarnation - in order, as we have seen, that we might be elevated to heaven and enjoy a celestial rather than a merely earthly paradise.

Burgio cites Sermon 77,2 where Leo writes that

> "if man who was made in the image and likeness of God (*ad imaginem et similitudinem Dei*) had remained in his state of honour, and had not been deceived by the fraud of the devil and deviated through concupiscence from the law that he had been given, the Creator of the world would not have become a creature, neither would the eternal have become temporal, nor would the Son

> of God who was equal to God the Father have assumed the form of a slave and the likeness of sinful flesh (*formam servi et similitudinem peccati carnis*)" (Sermon 77,2,24-29).

The point here is that the Word would still have become incarnate without the fall, but not in a temporal fashion in the form of a slave and after the likeness of sinful flesh. Against this, one has to set the large number of texts which relate the incarnation directly to the fact of the fall and the actuality of sin. Burgio's solution is always to argue that the fall determines not the phenomenon of the incarnation but the precise form which it takes (C. Burgio p. 92 ff), and we might add to what he says our insight that the incarnation would have been necessary even without the fall for the purposes of man's being able to enjoy the highest kind of contemplation of God as essentially loving and good.

The "kenotic" language of Christ's self-emptying taken from Paul's Epistle to the Philippians derives (according to this theory) from the fact of the sin of Adam, without which the incarnation would still have taken place - albeit in a very different manifestation. The sermons on the ascension, as we have seen, are concerned primarily with the elevation of human nature - flesh and soul - to the celestial paradise in virtue of incorporation in Christ, and Burgio's argument would be strengthened by greater emphasis being placed on this "theology of ascension". The coming of Christ in the form of a slave delivers us from captivity to the devil and effects the purification of the flesh which has inherited concupiscence as a consequence of the fall, but the preparation of the mind to perceive the higher mysteries is at its most exalted level independent of the sin of Adam, and the implication is that a very different sort of Christ - perhaps closer to the more glorious portrait of Christ advanced by Hilary of Poitiers - would have come in order to reveal the Trinitarian truth even if Adam had not fallen. The underlying point is that, although the precise form that the incarnation takes is contingent on the fall, there would still have had to have been some sort of incarnation in order to realise God's plan for the spiritual perfection of individual human beings.

Burgio's ideas are important because they point the way forward to the more significant insight that Leo's theology is at heart a theology of revelation and contemplation - though one specifically tailored to suit a lay rather than a monastic

audience. Even when Leo is talking about concupiscence and the purification of the flesh he does so because concupiscence is an obstacle to contemplation of the heavenly mysteries. As we shall see in a future chapter, Adam's sin was to try to seize by force the glorification that he was supposed to earn by maintaining the divine likeness, and, presumably, the divine likeness would still have had to be revealed through the medium of incarnation in order for Adam to *maintain* what he had been given and not lost, even without the fall entering into the equation.

We have argued that Leo's Christology is inspired by his ideal of a genuine lay spirituality in which everything is ordered towards our knowing God to the end that we might imitate him, love him, and enjoy unanimity with Him. Christ's work does not merely restore the human nature that was destroyed at the fall but adds to it something extra. Although the mysteries of Christ's life do possess a redemptive function in so far as they unpick the malign effects of the devil's deception of our minds and concupiscence's corruption of our flesh, the tendency of Leo's Christology is directed beyond this towards the self-transcending life of grace, and presupposes an emphasis on the Christian's relation with Christ through the medium of a "graced" contemplation of the Saviour's divine and human natures. Leo's theology is centred upon the theme of the revelation of the divine mercy and love, and, if Burgio is right about his "Scotist" tendencies, he is right because the incarnation took place not only in order to heal what the devil had vitiated but also to reveal the divine love which would have had to have been manifested for our contemplation - albeit in a very different form - even if we had never lost the *imago Dei*.



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# NOTES

1 Leo is one of the few fathers to offer an extended treatment of the transfiguration. However, Hilary of Poitiers in particular can be said to have developed a "transfiguration Christology". See J. Driscoll: "The Transfiguration in Hilary of Poitiers' Commentary on Matthew", *Augustinianum* 29 (1984), 395-420; A Fierro: *Sobre la gloria en san Hilario. Una sintesis doctrinal sobre la noción biblica de 'doxa'*. Rome, 1964. For a more general treatment of the theology of the Transfiguration, see J.A. McGuckin: *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition*, New York, 1987.

2 In Book 1 of the *Conferences* Cassian proposes his vision of Christian perfection - a perfection which is quite clearly beyond the reach of the lay Christian, and which Leo seeks to recast in a more "accessible form". On the realtion between action and contemplation according to Cassian, see M. Olphé-Galliard: "Vie contemplative et vie active d'après Cassien", *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique*, 16 (1935), 252-288.

3 *Conferences* 14 (Abbot Nesteros on Spiritual Knowledge); see M. Olphé-Galliard: "La science spirituelle d'après Cassien", *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique*, 18 (1937), 141-160.

4 See especially V. de Rosa: "Il digiuno liturgico nei Sermoni di San Leone Magno", *Annali del Pont. Instituto Superiore di Scienze e Lettere "S. Chiara"* 11 (1961), 19-91.

5 H. Denis p. 121.

6 On the idea that we are "consubstantial with Christ", see B. Studer: "*Consubstantialis Patri - consubstantialis matri*: une antithèse christologique chez Léon le Grand", *Revue des études Augustiniennes*, 18 (1972), 87-115; *idem*: "Il concetto di 'consostanziale' in Leone Magno", *Augustinianum* 13 (1973), 599-607.

7 C. Burgio: "Le ragioni dell'incarnazione secondo san Leone Magno", *Studi Francescani* 37 (1940), 81-94.

8 On this subject see especially D. Unger: "Franciscan Christology", *Franciscan Studies* 23 (1942), 428-475; J.F. Bonnefoy: "La place du Christ dans le plan divin de la création", *Mélanges de science religieuse* 4 (1947), 237-284.

# Chapter Six

# THE MYSTERY OF FAITH

## Christ's Human Nature

During the course of this section we shall be looking at Leo's portrayal of the human nature of Christ and at the part this portrayal plays in the preaching of his characteristic theology of the economy of mercy. Leo's rôle in bringing about the Christological settlement of Chalcedon was pivotal, but he was swiftly accused by opponents such as Timothy Aelurus of abandoning Cyrillian orthodoxy,[1] and has been charged by more modern critics, notably those in the Coptic and other non-Chalcedonian churches, of covert Nestorianism.[2] For this reason it is important both from the point of view of the history of doctrines and also from the perspective of modern ecumenical debate to determine what Leo actually believes about the human nature of Christ, and to explain why he lays so great an emphasis on it that he runs the risk of antagonising those who favour a more "Cyrillian" synthesis. We shall argue that his motive in taking this risk lies in his preacher's insistence that Christology is the handmaid of liturgical contemplation, and that the genuine union of the Word with a complete human nature is necessary if the incarnate Lord is to become a ladder for that spiritual ascent of the mind which is opened up for the laity during the course of the Christological sermon.

Leo's preaching on the flesh of Christ - what St Paul calls "the likeness of

sinful flesh" - must be understood in terms of his teaching about the concept of "flesh" in general.[3] Commenting on the beatitude in which the earth is promised to the meek he writes that

> "the earth promised to the meek, to be given into the possession of the gentle, is the very flesh of the saints. This will be changed by a happy resurrection because of the merit of humility, and will be clothed in the glory of immortality. It will no longer in any way be contrary to the spirit, and will have the harmony of perfect unity with the will of the soul" (Sermon 95,5,102-107).

Man is created to be properly ordered towards God, which means that the flesh must be directed by the soul, and that the mind must be directed by God. Accordingly, Christian spirituality deals with the right relation of flesh to spirit and of spirit to God, and any Christological formulation must take into account that the incarnation is designed to bring about this regulation or justification of the anthropological structure of human beings.

Elsewhere Leo deals more precisely with with the hegemonic relation of soul to flesh, observing that

> "if in this opposition the desires of the body are stronger, the soul will shamefully lose the dignity that is proper to it, and it will be calamitous for it to be a slave to what it ought to govern. But if the mind, submissive to its Ruler and to heavenly gifts, tramples on the lure of earthly indulgence and does not allow sin to reign in its own body, reason will hold a well-ordered leadership, and no deceit of spiritual evil will weaken its defences. A human being has peace and true liberty when the flesh is ruled by the soul, and when the soul is governed by God as Director" (Sermon 39,2,36-46).

As a result of the fall the flesh has gained dominion over the mind and the image of God in man has been destroyed. Where Theodore of Mopsuestia sees the solution in a healing of the mind by the grace of the Holy Spirit given through Christ, Leo is of the opinion that there is also required a healing of the flesh in order to make possible that purity of heart which leads ultimately to the restoration of the image of God. After all, in the monastic teaching of writers such as John Cassian, the flesh is presented as dragging the mind down from contemplation of the heavenly to preoccupation with the earthly - with the consequence that Theodore's healing of the mind is by itself not sufficient to bring about Leo's "transference of desires". Such a healing demands a healing of the flesh and a genuine "infusion" of "inviolable nature"

into "vulnerable nature" (Sermon 21,2,47).

In the case of Jesus Christ, the virginal conception and birth produces an authentic human flesh which is free from the taint of sin and impurity:

> "with the Holy Spirit coming upon her and the power of the most high overshadowing her, the unchangeable Word of God assumes for himself from her uncontaminated body a habit of human flesh, which brings none of the contagion of concupiscence, and lacks nothing of those things which pertain to the nature of soul and body" (Sermon 30,4,96-100).

However, the flesh assumed by the Word is not free from the punishment of sin due to death, and the assumption by the Word of human flesh born of a virgin and a human soul produces an individual human being in whom there is nothing of the stain of sin - but in whom there nevertheless exists the mortality and corruptibility which are the consequence of sin. It follows from this that it is essential that the flesh assumed by the Word should be real flesh, and not a mere veil of imitation-flesh which clothes the divinity and which is not human flesh in any meaningful sense. This explains not only why Leo is so severe in his attacks on groups such as the Manichaeans and the Priscillianists with their dualistic denigration of the flesh, but also why he opposes Apollinarius and Eutyches, who, so far as Leo is concerned, in asserting "one nature" in Christ (in a non-Cyrillian sense) are denying the reality of Christ's human fleshliness.

In a key text Leo assures us that Christ is "totally man" (*totus homo*), by which he appears to mean that he assumes an entire human nature, body and soul:

> "he who has taken on the true and whole man (*totumque hominem adsumpsit*), dearly beloved, has taken up also the true senses of the body and the true affections of the soul. Nor, because all within him was full of mysteries and full of miracles, does this mean that he wept with false tears, or ate food with false hunger, or slept with pretended sleep. He was despised in our lowliness, saddened in our sorrow, and crucified in our pain. For this did his mercy undergo the sufferings of our mortality: that he might save it; for this did his strength accept [these sufferings]: that he might overcome them" (Sermon 58,4,138-146).

Christ needs to have real flesh so that governable flesh can be communicated to us in baptism (the aspect of "mystery"), and he needs to have a real soul so that his real soul can give a real example of how to rule over his real flesh (the aspect of "example"). The point of the passion as Leo understands it seems to be not only that

the human nature should undergo death and rise again in virtue of his conjoint divinity, thus making resurrection unto life possible for all those who submit themselves to baptism, but also that it should offer that example of proper government of the flesh and of proper subordination to the divinity which in turn teaches us how to live out the new life that has been communicated to us. This is the famous diptych of "mystery and example" which plays such an important part in Leo's preaching.

In all this it is with the assumption of a genuine flesh that Leo is especially preoccupied, and in particular he loves to meditate on the phrase "the Word was made flesh" from John 1:14. With regard to this text he writes:

> "'The Word was made flesh' does not mean that the nature of God was changed into flesh (*quod in carnem sit Dei natura mutata*), but that flesh was taken up by the Word into the unity of his Person (*quod a Verbo in unitatem personae sit caro suscepta*). Within the identity of this Person, complete human nature has been received (*in cuius utique nomine homo totus accipitur*) - a nature with which the Son of God was inseparably united inside that womb of the Virgin which was made fruitful by the Holy Spirit" (Sermon 27,2,31-36).

We should note that there is no question of human nature being united to divine nature. Leo holds that the flesh of Christ is united to the Person of the Word, and that it is the Word who acts on the flesh to render it inviolable, incorruptible, and immortal. We must assume (without any evidence for or against) that Leo believes both in the natural immortality of the soul and also in the intrinsic sinlessness of the soul in virtue of its direct creation by God (for we have no reason to suspect Leo of being a traducianist). That being the case, it is the flesh that requires healing - even though it is spotless in consequence of the virginal conception - and it is the flesh that needs to be made immortal and incorruptible. Where Ambrose's Christology emphasises the assumption of a human soul in order to make the point (against the Apollinarians) that it is a complete human being who undergoes death and rises again to life, Leo is more intent on stressing the assumption of flesh because he sees the problem of the human condition as lying in the rebelliousness of the flesh towards the soul and in the mortality which is inherent in the fleshly part of our nature.

In concentrating on the union of human flesh and soul not with divine nature as such but rather with the divine Person of the Word, Leo follows the lead taken by

Leporius when the monk of Marseilles, at the instigation of Augustine, depicted the incarnation as a union of Word with flesh, and not as a coming together of mutually incompatible natures.[4] The sheer impossibility of conceiving of an actual union of natures explains why so many moderns like Schillebeeckx and Kung have difficulty with traditionally formulated Christology, but Leporius and those who come after him in the west demonstrate conclusively that a union of natures is not what is being envisaged in any case. According to writers like Leporius and Leo, what takes place in the incarnation is the assumption by the divine Word of a set of human characteristics - defined as "human nature" - which preclude his complicity in human sin but which result in his experiencing all the sense of alienation and abandonment that sin and fleshliness bring in their wake. In this fashion the Word takes on the "likeness of sinful man" and the "form of a servant", with the result that divine and human natures are juxtaposed in the person of the Word who is their subject, but never united with each other - and still less merged. Leo opposes Nestorius on the grounds that in (rightly) denying a union of natures he comes in effect to resist (wrongly) the union of human nature with the Word, and he opposes Eutyches on the grounds that in (rightly) affirming the union of Word and human nature he permits himself (wrongly) to assert a union between the two natures which does damage to the integrity of each.

What features of Leo's spiritual preaching determine that he too should follow the model laid down by Leporius? In all probability he insists on a genuine union of human nature with divine Word in order that, firstly, the Word can act hegemonically and transformatively on the human soul of Christ in such a way that it might govern the flesh which the virginal conception has made governable, and, secondly, in order that the contemplation of the "form of a servant" might lead directly to the contemplation of the "form of God" in a way which focuses not on abstract divine nature but on the concrete Person of the Word within a Trinitarian context. These dual spiritual motives which inform Leo's Christology are really two sides of the same coin, for they both have to do with the "transference of desires" from the fleshly to the spiritual and from the earthly to the heavenly. As we have seen, Leo writes that

> "the grace of God brings it about daily in the hearts of Christians

> that every desire of ours should be transferred from earthly things to heavenly" (Sermon 16,1,1-3).

The due ordering of mind and flesh is the precondition for the liturgical contemplation of God in Christ which is the primary function of the incarnation, and Leo's Christology is cleverly constructed in such a way that a single model encompasses both the proximate and the ultimate end of the Word's assumption of our nature. This ultimate end is kept in view by the "transcendental Thomists" like Rahner, but they tend to forget the dimension of objective healing by which the "touch" of God - as mediated through the humanity of Christ and through the sacraments of the Church - prepares us in a way that is almost physical for the "transference of desires". The "transference of desires" in turn responds to the revelation of the divine love (von Balthasar's insight) and to the revelation of the human potential for self-transcendence (Rahner's insight) only after the more "medicinal" self-communication of grace through participation by faith in God's self-knowledge in a Thomistic sense has been effected. Cyril in particular emphasises the idea of Christ's eucharistic flesh as divinising, while Augustine develops the idea of the *Christus medicus*,[5] and both insights tend to disappear if we adopt the "ascending" Christology of Rahner rather than the genuinely patristic "descending" Christology of von Balthasar.

The "transference of desires" which is the goal of Christ's objective act of healing is surely what Leo has in mind when he speaks of Christ as becoming the "spiritual beginning" of a "new creature". He writes that

> "in being born as true man (*homo verus*) while never ceasing to be true God, our Lord Jesus Christ made himself the beginning of a new creature (*novae creaturae in se fecit exordium*). In the manner of his coming forth he gave to the human race a spiritual beginning (*spiritale principium*). In order to wipe out the contagiousness of carnal generation, those to be regenerated would have an origin without the seed of crime" (Sermon 27,2,40-45).

The union of Word with flesh brings into existence a "new creature" of which Christ is the beginning (*exordium*). Fleshly generation is replaced by a different kind of origin, which, as Leo repeatedly affirms, is imparted to us in baptism. This new creation is basically a new kind of flesh - a flesh that is subdued and that is properly subordinated to the soul as its governor with the result that the "transference of desires" becomes a genuine possibility. "Carnal generation" is destructive not because

Leo is negative about the body or about sexual intercourse, but because unsubdued flesh naturally gives birth to unsubdued flesh, and so interrupts the "transference of desires" at which Leo's spirituality - and hence his Christology - are aimed.

The virgin birth is required because, as Augustine teaches, sexual generation passes on concupiscence (which is inherent in the flesh),[6] and a "spiritual beginning" (*spiritale principium*) is needed to produce a kind of human being in whom flesh is subordinate to soul and who can accordingly accomplish the "transference of desires". In the case of Christ, the virginal conception produces a transformed human nature in which flesh is subordinate to soul. Union with the the human soul of Christ which is governed by the Word further governs, heals, and transforms this flesh (hence what we said earlier about an "infusion" of "inviolable nature" into "vulnerable nature") ready for its being handed on to us in baptism and Eucharist.

Certain critics might venture ask whether the virgin birth is strictly necessary in the scheme of things. After all, if the Word can heal the flesh simply through contact with it, why does the flesh have to be preserved from concupiscence from the start in virtue of a miraculous conception and birth? And, if the flesh is real flesh but at the same time only the "*likeness* of sinful flesh" rather than *sinful* flesh itself, why does Christ need to go through the gruelling process of fasting and suffering which constitutes the means by which the flesh is disciplined and subjected? The answer may well lie in the observable fact that Christians who receive a "spiritual beginning" in baptism in imitation of the virgin birth are still subject to concupiscence in spite of that origin, and the same must apply to Christ, whose flesh still needs to be *actively* subordinated in spite of its exceptional origin. In other words, his human flesh might well start off governable, but it still has to be governed, and perhaps we could say that in the case of Christ it is the virginal conception that renders his flesh "governable" by his human soul and that it is his fastings and sufferings - ordered by his soul under the governance of the Word - that render it actually "governed".

At the same time these same sufferings provide an "example" which we need to follow if we too are to subdue the "subduable" flesh which has been communicated to us through baptism and Eucharist. All of this corresponds with von Balthasar's vision of the Word who subjects himself, though sinless, to all the sense of

abandonment and alienation that are due to sin - most notably in the descent into hell. In order to experience such abandonment and alienation, von Balthasar's Christ would, like Leo's, have to battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil so as to achieve the "transference of desires", and needs to do this with a view to offering both an example (in so far as he is truly human) of how the transference of desires is to be accomplished, and a manifestation (in so far as he is truly divine) of the greatness of a love which will submit itself to such immediate solidarity with human suffering, and which will accordingly present itself as an object of liturgical contemplation.

We have mentioned that Christ needs to heal us in flesh and mind before we can respond through imitation to his exemplifying of the "transference of desires", but the realisation that Rahner's over-anthropological approach to Christology undervalues the patristic perspective of the life-imparting Word (Cyril) and of the *Christus medicus* (Augustine) should not lead us to go to the other extreme. Leo is a preacher with an intensely practical outlook on doctrine and spirituality, and he is neither so naive nor so mythopoeically inclined as to believe that the union of Word and flesh in Christ exercises some kind of magical transformation in all of us - as is held by supporters of the so-called mystical or physical theory of the atonement, which teaches that we are all "mystically" or "physically" incorporated into Christ in virtue of his assumption of a kind of platonic human nature in the incarnation. Such a theory rests on a selective treatment of fathers such as Athanasius and Cyril in the east and Hilary and Leo in the west, and has been given brilliant expression in the twentieth century by Emile Mersch, and, with important qualifications, by Henri de Lubac.[7] Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's gross cosmological version of the theory is merely the logical development of a fundamentally flawed idea.

However, Leo does believe that the Word acts upon us transformatively through the medium of what Aquinas would call the "conjoint instrumentality" of the sacred humanity and the "disjoint instrumentality" of the sacraments. In particular, Leo anticipates the modern insight that the Church is a "sacrament" in which through liturgy, through synaxis, and through the sacraments themselves we encounter the transforming causality of Christ which prepares us to imitate him in accomplishing the "transference of desires". Leo presents us with a vision of the

human nature of Christ which describes the first phase of a process that culminates in our liturgical contemplation of the Word who became enfleshed for our salvation. Christ comes to infuse into human nature inviolability and incorruption, and above all the capacity to live with the soul ordered towards God and in full command of the flesh. This healing which is accomplished in Christ and which we appropriate sacramentally prepares us for the ascent of the mind through faith and contemplation which is the goal of the Christian life, and illustrates that, for Leo, Christology is not a science in its own right, but is the handmaid of the very practical lay spirituality - rooted in the theology of the divine mercy - which is adapted and "democratised" from the insights of earlier writers such as Ambrose and Cassian.

## Faith in the Incarnation

In this section we shall be looking more generally at the terminology used by Leo to emphasise the literal truth of Christ's human nature, and showing how it relates to that faith in the incarnation which is the necessary preparation for Christian contemplation. The treatment in H. Denis has been used as a starting-point,[8] but the comments and conclusions are those of the present author. We need to bear in mind at all stages that Leo is not a sophisticated employer of philosophical terminology after the fashion of Cyril of Alexandria or, later, Leontius of Byzantium. Rather, he is preacher, pastor, and pontiff - and as such has in mind the grounding of the re-created lives of Christians under grace in the new order brought about by the incarnation. His mission, as we have argued, is to communicate Christological truth to the laity in order that they might be enabled, through the media, pre-eminently, of the liturgy and of the liturgical sermon, to imitate in a way that is appropriate to them the contemplation of the monks, and his lofty intention is that they might be made capable of achieving in their own lives that "transference of desires" which is his expressive term for what Cassian is proposing to his monks in the *Conferences*.

Leo assures us in that Christ is "totally man" (*totus homo*), by which he appears to mean that he assumes an entire human nature, body and soul, and that he does this in order to be able to heal every aspect of the human nature which he assumes. Thus Leo is able to preach that

> "he who has taken on the true and whole man, dearly beloved, has taken up also the true senses of the body and the true affections of the soul. Nor, because all within him was full of mysteries and full of miracles, does this mean therefore that he wept with false tears, or ate food with false hunger, or slept with pretended sleep. He was despised in our lowliness, saddened in our sorrow, and crucified in our pain. His mercy underwent the sufferings of our mortality that he might save it, and his strength accepted [these sufferings] that he might overcome them" (Sermon 58,4,138-146).

The use of the formula *totus homo* would seem to represent a conscious attempt on the part of Leo to distance himself from Apollinarius, who spoke in terms of a direct union of Logos and flesh without the medium of a human soul, and whose heresy Leo sees Eutyches as reprising. Leo says that the Word

> "had chosen the nation of Israel, and, from that nation, one family in particular from which to take up the nature of all humanity (*natura universae humanitatis*)" (Sermon 31,1,8-10),

but this most likely does not mean human nature in the sense of that "platonic form" of abstract human nature in which all individuals supposedly participate. If Leo really believed, as many patrologists have alleged,[9] in the "mystical" or "physical" theory of the atonement by which the whole of mankind is healed in virtue of being somehow mystically included in Christ, he could hardly (without incurring charges of inconsistency) have set such store on the sacrament of baptism and on rightness of faith as uniting us with the benefits of the incarnation and paschal mystery. Lack of faith excludes us from any union with Christ, whilst baptismal birth from the Spirit includes us in such union. Thus Leo asks

> "has that taking on of our substance in the divinity (*ipsa illa substantiae nostrae in Deitate susceptio*) - by which the Word became flesh and dwelt among us - left any person outside his mercy except one who lacks faith (*infidelis*)? Besides, who is there whose nature is not one with Christ if Christ has received him by taking our nature and if he has been born again of that Spirit by which Christ was begotten?" (Sermon 66,4,99-104).

We should remember in this regard that, for all his devotion to an incarnational doctrine of the sacraments, Aquinas teaches that faith in the sacraments is sufficient to derive their proper benefits, for the sacraments cause grace by bringing us into a kind of physical contact with the incarnate Christ who is in a variety of ways present in them, but who is touched less by the bodily organs than by the faith which is a graced

act of knowledge as a result of which, in line with Thomistic epistemology, the known comes to exist inside the knower.10

The reason why the supernatural order is to be distinguished from the natural is that it is only through the self-revelation of God in the incarnation and, under a material veil, in the sacraments, that human nature can achieve its potential for transcendence. In this sense Rahner is wrong to see Christology as being convertible with anthropology, for, as von Balthasar makes clear, the incarnation reveals the truth about God as well as the truth about the possibilities of human existence. However, it must be emphasised that the "descending" approach to Christology and soteriology as favoured by Leo, Aquinas, and von Balthasar stresses that the transformative power of efficient causality works not by some "magic" touch but by rendering the supremely unknowable God supremely knowable - and hence transformatively active within us in virtue of the fact of the Thomistic principle that the known lives inside the knower. Although Rahner is perfectly in line with Leo's doctrine of Christ as *exemplum* when he teaches (effectively) that what Christ reveals to us is the human potentiality for what the fathers called "divinisation", he lacks the deeper perspective (which Leo preaches and which von Balthasar retains) that salvation consists in knowing and contemplating the love and mercy of God. We might develop Leo's position by saying that, as he sees it, the incarnate Word and the sacraments which continue the incarnation's presence in the world are appropriated by faith which in turn transforms us in what might be described as a therapeutic way in order that we might be able to accomplish the transference of desires and accordingly attain unto contemplation of the invisible God whom the incarnation and sacraments reveal under their veil of materiality.

We might add that we are "of a common nature with Christ" not as a result of the incarnation, but in consequence of faith and baptism. We are not yet glorified, but have been *called* to share in Christ's glory, and have entered into a *hope* - not into its fulfilment. This hope can be realised only through conformity with the example set by Christ, and, when Leo writes that all that Christ accomplished in the flesh was in order that the *virtus* of the head might be in the body, he is envisaging every stage of the process by which we enjoy access to the saving power of the Word - through

incarnation, through baptism, through liturgy, through the life of faith, and through the imitation of Christ. Thus Leo says

> "as we celebrate the wonderful mystery of this paschal feast, dearly beloved, let us announce - while the Spirit of God teaches us - in whose glory it is we have been called to share and into what hope it is that we have entered. Let us not so anxiously or so proudly busy ourselves with the occupations of this present life as not to struggle - with the whole affection of our hearts - to be conformed with our Redeemer through his example. He did nothing and suffered nothing that was not for our salvation, in order that the strength that was in the head might also be in the body" (Sermon 66,4,92-99).

Elsewhere Leo employs the somewhat more dilute language of similarity, arguing that we and Christ are "dissimilar in origin but similar to each other in nature" - *natura consimilis* (Sermon 22,2,54b-55b). and describing how Christ is one with us in the "communion of our nature" - *de nostrae communione naturae* (Sermon 60,2,34). In the light of all these considerations, the phrase "the nature of universal humanity" probably denotes that part of human nature which is common to all human beings, as opposed to that which is particular to specific people. Since Leo is emphatic that Christ took his flesh from Mary, it is difficult to see how this could be universal human nature in some abstract sense, and, in the light of his preaching taken as a whole, it is more likely that Leo thinks in terms of a kind of reciprocal process whereby the Word assumes an individuated human nature from Mary as representative of the human race, and communicates that flesh to us in a suitably healed form through the sacrament of baptism. Accordingly, if we are one body with Christ it is not so much because he has assumed *our* flesh in the incarnation as because we have received *his* in baptism.

All this means that the incarnation has value primarily as an object of faith. Undoubtedly, the incarnation and its prolongation in baptism exercise upon us a certain physical effect in so far us they purify us from the concupiscence of the flesh and so render us capable of heavenly contemplation. However, they do this only when we appropriate them through an act of saving faith in the incarnation which is presented to us as an object of belief, and, with this in mind, Leo stresses in a number of sermons that, without certainty concerning the reality of the humanity of Christ, we shall not benefit from the incarnation, passion, and resurrection - either in as much as these

communicate healing as *mysteria* or exemplify God's merciful love and the human response which this should elicit as *exempla* - and accordingly shall have no business taking part in the Easter celebration.

For Leo the goal of the Christian life is unanimity with God. Leo writes that

> "love of the world is not in agreement with the love of God. Those who have not separated themselves from a carnal age will not come to the society of the children of God. But those who are careful to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace are always in union with the mind of God. They never depart from the eternal law, saying with sincere prayer: 'Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven'" (Sermon 95,9,174-179).

In the present life, unanimity with God is worked out not only in loving what God loves but in believing the truth about the incarnation that God proposes for our belief. Thus it is the case that

> "those who depart in professing the faith from what they had uttered at the time of rebirth cannot be in accord with God. Forgetful of that divine promise, they manifestly adhere to what they had renounced, demonstrating that they have fallen away from what had been believed" (Sermon 66,3,66-70).

Fidelity to the baptismal profession of faith is the benchmark of unanimity with God, and such concord is lost by those who do not retain right faith in what has been revealed.

This object of faith refers primarily to the reality of Christ's human nature, and in order to benefit from the saving mysteries we need more than anything else to acknowledge that they are accomplished in our own flesh. If we wish to benefit from the transformation of our flesh in virtue of the cycle of incarnation, passion, resurrection, and ascension, it is necessary first of all that we have faith in the truth of the human flesh of Christ at each and every stage of that process. Thus Leo writes that

> "some do not believe that Jesus Christ rose with that same flesh in which he had been born, in which he suffered, in which he died, and in which he was buried. Some do not confess that the first fruits of our nature have been raised up again in him. In vain do such as these arrogate to themselves the name of Christian. Let them not think that they celebrate the Lord's Passover in any way" (Sermon 66,3,70-74).

This last point implies that we benefit from the liturgical celebration of the

saving mysteries only in so far as we do so in a spirit of faith, and that these mysteries achieve absolutely nothing at all for those whose faith in the reality of the incarnation is in any sense lacking. Leo speaks of a kind of resurrection of the human heart which comes about through recognition of the genuineness of the flesh in which Jesus Christ suffered, died, and rose again, and writes that

> "true worshippers of the Lord's passion should look at the crucified Jesus with the eyes of their heart in such a way as to recognise him as being of their own flesh. Let the earthly substance tremble in the punishment of its redeemer. Let the rocks of unfaithful souls be broken. Let those on whom the tombs of mortality lie heavy break and leap over the shattered mass of obstacles. Let the proofs of the coming resurrection appear now in the holy city as well - that is, in the church of God. Let what must be done in the body come about in hearts" (Sermon 66,3,74-82).

As we have remarked, Leo's rôle as preacher is to make accessible to the laity a suitably adapted version of the life of monastic contemplation, and here he does this by describing how, in contemplating the various phases of the history of Christ's human flesh, our own hearts are accorded the grace of a kind of resurrection experience.

The incarnation and all that follows on from it yield no benefit to mankind in general, but are of use only to those who appropriate them through an orthodox conception of what they entail. If we are Eutychians and Nestorians the incarnation will do for us precisely what Eutyches and Nestorius postulate that it will do for us - which in practice is little or nothing. If we are Catholics it will do everything! To put it crudely, for Leo what you believe is what you get, and you get the purification of the whole man - body and soul - only if you believe in the assumption of a genuine and complete human nature. Without the virtue of faith, the incarnation will do absolutely nothing whatsoever to benefit us. The incarnation took place firstly in order to purify our flesh through the sacraments and so render it governable by the mind, and secondarily to purify the mind by subordinating it to God. As regards the latter point, it is almost as if the incarnation operates specifically by giving us something objective - the genuineness of the flesh of Christ - to *believe* in, in as much as it is through belief that the mind is ordered towards divine things and enabled to engage in the life of contemplation.

This emphasis on the revelatory dimension of the incarnation is not without

its problems. In particular we might ask: if the incarnation has to do with revelation, why not posit an effectively all-divine Christ after the fashion of Apollinarius and Eutyches? And if salvation is about knowledge of the *Godhead*, would not a monophysite Christ serve just as well? The answer to this is "no" (at least not after the fall) - partly because a monophysite Christ would not heal our flesh of the concupiscence that disrupts the upward ascent towards contemplation, and partly because a monophysite Christ would not lead us in gradual stages from corporeal to spiritual ways of thinking. Revelation of the Godhead is not sufficient for the elevation of our souls from earth to heaven, for the ascension of the mind must be preceded, as we have seen, by that resurrection of the heart which depends on our acknowledgement of the reality of Christ's human flesh.

## Veiling and Unveiling

From all that we have seen it will be clear that, on the one hand, the incarnation brings about a healing infusion of inviolability and immortality into the individuated human nature which is assumed by the Word, and that, on the other hand, it has the function of revealing to us the same Word as an object of contemplation. We see a suggestion of this in Sermon 22 where Leo writes that

> "he was brought forth in an unusual manner because, though invisible in his own nature, he has been made visible in ours; because, though incomprehensible, he willed to be comprehended" (Sermon 22,2,35-37).

This "epiphanic" aspect of Leo's theology whereby the invisible God becomes visible to the human gaze by way of incarnation is further developed in Sermon 25, where the kenosis of Philippians 2:5-8 is presented in terms of a "veiling":

> "on account of our infirmity . . . he made himself smaller for the benefit of those who did not have the capacity to receive him, and covered the splendour of his majesty - which human sight could not bear - with the veil of his body (*velamine corporis*). In this way is he said to have 'emptied himself' (*exinanisse*)" (Sermon 25,2,39-42).

Like Hilary, Leo does not see the kenosis as involving a local descent on the part of the Word, although, as we have argued, Leo offers a far more realistic picture of the Son's assumption of that punishment of servitude which is due to sin. According

to both Hilary and Leo the Word remains in heaven with the Father, for the divine essence is ubiquitous in time and space. The incarnation involves a "grafting" of the Word into the human nature by which the former is able to act transformatively on the latter. The human nature is a "step" by which we can ascend to the divinity, and this step represents an ascent of contemplation. Leo explains that

> "in taking on our nature he became for us a step (*gradus*) whereby we might rise up to him through him. That essence (*essentia*) - which exists everywhere (all the time and in its entirety) - did not require a descent with respect to place (*locali descensione*). It was every bit as compatible with this essence to be grafted whole into a human being as it was for it not to be separated even in part from the Father. As a result, it continues to be what in the beginning was the Word, and it could not in any way have the property of ceasing to be what it once was" (Sermon 25,3,62-68).

As we have noted, one aspect of this particular version of kenosis is that the union of the two "forms" brings about a kind of healing of the lower by the higher. Leo reminds us that

> "we understand it to be an aspect of omnipotence that he who becomes less with respect to our characteristics does not become less with respect to his own. Light becomes concerned with the blind, strength with the weak, mercy with the miserable. Consequently, it has come about through his great power that the Son of God took up human substance along with its need - to rebuild the nature which he created and to abolish the death which he did not make" (Sermon 25,2,46-52).

The kenosis on this account is not only a self-emptying of the divine but also an elevation of the human, and the assumption of a "form of a servant" represents not just a condescension and a humiliation but also a way of communicating divine immortality to mortal human nature.

However, it is in addition to this a "veiling" of the divinity which makes it possible for human minds to contemplate the Godhead in suitably accommodated form. The incarnation is a making visible of the mystery of the Trinity under the veil of human flesh, and Leo presents the relation of Son to Father in terms of the traditional image of the beam that emanates from light without being subsequent to it. When considered from the point of view of the Trinity's operations *ad extra*, this light is the light of the divine self-revelation. Leo explains that

> "the manifestation of this beam has been called a 'sending' - by which Christ appeared to the world. Although he filled all things

> with his invisible majesty, he came, nevertheless, to those who had not known him, as if from a very remote and deep seclusion. At that time, he took away the blindness of ignorance, as it has been written: 'For those sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death a light has risen' [Isaiah 9:2 & Matthew 4:16]" (Sermon 25,3,85-90).

The Christological themes of enfleshment and of the *forma servi* are specifically ordered towards this idea of epiphanic veiling, as is clear from a passage in Letter 59. Once again, Leo follows Hilary in portraying the kenosis not as a local descent which makes the ubiquitous Word to dwell where he did not previously dwell or to leave his heavenly dwelling upon the assumption of human flesh, but rather as a self-revelation of the Godhead. He writes:

> "he came not by local approach (*locali accessu*) nor by bodily motion (*motione corporea*), as if to be present where he had been absent or to depart where he had come, but he came to be manifested to onlookers by that which was visible and common to others, receiving, that is to say, human flesh and a human soul in the Virgin Mother's womb, so that, abiding in the form of God, he united to himself the form of a slave and the likeness of human flesh (*manens in forma Dei, formam servi sibimet ei similitudinem carnis peccati uniret*), whereby he did not lessen the divine by the human but increased the human by the divine" (Letter 59,3,870A).

Just as before, we see the twofold aspects of Leo's "form of a slave" soteriology, which teaches that the Word assumes human nature in order both to render his Godhead capable of being contemplated under a veil of humanity, and also to heal and exalt human nature in virtue of its association with the divine.

R.V. Sellers draws attention to the fact that in Letter 28,5 Leo presents Christ as repeatedly instructing the disciples to "see" (*videte; videtis*) his hands and feet.[11] The period between resurrection and ascension is designed "to make our faith entire and clear of all obscurity". Christ "shows" (*monstrabat*) his followers the wound in his side so that the properties of the divine and human nature might be "recognised" (*agnosceretur*) and that we might "know" (*sciremus*) the essential difference between the Logos and the flesh. In Sermon 54,1 we are taught to "know" (*noverimus*) two natures in Christ, and to "think" (*cogitare*) of him in the orthodox way. In Letter 28,5 Eutyches is criticised for his failure to "recognise" (*agnoscere*) our nature in Christ, to "see" (*videre*) what nature it was that was transfixed by nails, and to "understand" (*intelligere*) whence the blood and water flowed.

Sellers develops at some length this idea of the need to "recognise" the difference between the two natures. One might say that such a quest to "recognise the difference" is central to Leo's "epiphanic Christology" with its belief that the form of a servant is a kind of veil which leads us by way of an ascent of the mind to the contemplation of Christ's divinity. Leo is constantly exhorting us to look at Christ, to recognise the difference between the natures, and to meditate on the conjunction of divine and human. This meditation, which is most properly realised within the context of the liturgical sermon, enables us to raise our minds to the contemplation of God as loving and merciful, and accomplishes the spiritual goal of the "transference of desires" from earthly to heavenly - a transference which finds its paradigm in the contemplation of the ascended Lord by the apostles who

> "raised the whole gaze of their souls to the divinity of the one sitting at the right hand of the Father. No longer are they held back by any use of bodily sight which would prevent them from looking with sharpness of soul on that one who had neither been absent from the Father by his coming down, nor had departed from the disciples by his ascension" (Sermon 74,3,58-63).

Leo preaches a Christology which is directed towards a lay spirituality of liturgical contemplation of the essentially merciful God. The liturgical sermon itself becomes the context in which the mind of the Christian is directed through meditation on the real humanity of the Redeemer to the person of the Word, with the consequence that, as we observed during the course of our treatment of the mystery of the ascension, our minds ascend with Christ to dwell in heaven in the company of the divine Trinity.

# NOTES

1 See J. Lebon: "La Christologie de Timothée Aelure, archevêque monophysite d'Alexandrie, d'après les sources syriaques inédites", *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 9 (1908), 677-702.

2 See, for example, V.C. Samuels: *The Council of Chalcedon Re-examined*, Madras, 1977.

3 One might compare Leo with his near-contemporary, the Aquitainian writer Eutropius, who composed a treatise entitled the *de Similitudine Carnis Peccati*, which is an exegesis of Romans 8:3 that encompasses a discussion of the physical condition of Adam, fallen man, and Christ. See L. Tria: *"De similitudine carnis peccati." Il suo autore e la sua teologia*, Rome, 1936.

4 See F. de Beer: "Une tessère d'orthodoxie: le *Libellus emendationis* (ca. 418-421)", *Revue des études Augustiniennes* 10 (1964), 145-185.

5 See B. Speekenbrink: "Christ the 'medicus humilis' in St. Augustine", *Augustinus Magister: Congrès international augustinien*, Paris, Sep. 21-24, 1954, vol. 2, pp. 623-639; C.J. Eijkenboom: *Het Christus-Medicusmotief in de Preken van sint Augustinus*, Assen, 1960.

6 Augustine teaches these most especially in his *De Nuptiis et Concupiscentia Libri II*, particularly I, 20, 21, 27.

7 Mersch treats the subject historically in *The Whole Christ*, ET Milwaukee, 1938; however, his major systematic treatment of the idea is found in his *The Theology of the Mystical Body*, ET St Louis & London, 1955. On de Lubac, see P. McPartlan: *The Eucharist Makes the Church*, Edinburgh, 1993.

8 H. Denis: *La théologie de l'ascension d'après saint Léon le Grand*. Dissertation, Lyons, 1959, pp. 114-121.

9 For example, J. Tixeront: *History of Dogmas* (3 volumes), ET St. Louis, 1914, vol. 3, p. 341-342.

10 This is my interpretation of *Summa Theologiae* 3a,80,1 (on sacramental and spiritual communion) taken in conjunction with 3a,61,4 (which teaches that that faith in the incarnation and passion of Christ which results in grace is made accessible through the means of the sacraments as efficacious signs).

11 R.V. Sellers: *The Council of Chalcedon*, London, 1961, pp. 241-243.

# Chapter Seven

# REDEMPTIVE REVELATION

## The Devil as Deceiver

We have dealt so far with the relation of Christology to spirituality, but we need also to examine the way in which Leo's theology of the "transference of desires" fits in with his controversial theory of the deception by Christ of the devil, and with his preoccupation with man's ongoing battle against the forces of darkness. It may be said at once that Leo's doctrine of the atonement represents a movement away from the legalism of the earlier Latin tradition as exemplified by Cyprian and Tertullian in favour of a more "Greek-style" doctrine of the reparation of the human race.[1] From what we have seen it will be clear that Leo's soteriology is a "liturgical" theology[2] and also a "sacramental" theology in which the Christian year "sacramentalises" the saving events of the life of Christ and mediates their virtue to Christians here and now.[3]

The Christmas celebration, as we have suggested, "sacramentalises" the re-creation of human nature that takes place in virtue of the incarnation, and this is reflected not only in Leo's own preaching (which is Christological in subject-matter and Christological in the sense of being "Christophanic") but in the Roman sacramentary that is associated with his name.[4] The principal "sacrament" or "mystery" is the Paschal mystery,[5] for Leo is an Easter preacher as well as a

Christmas preacher,[6] and within this context certain interpreters have concentrated on his treatment of the passion,[7] while others have emphasised the function of the priesthood of Christ.[8] J.-P. Jossua, as we noted earlier, underlines the balance between incarnational and paschal dimensions, presenting the former as being ordered towards the latter, and this, from a general point of view, probably represents the best way forward for understanding Leo's vision of the interconnection between Christology and soteriology.

We have discussed certain of the paschal aspects of Leo's soteriology during the course of our consideration of his "ascension Christology", but, not without trepidation, we need now to turn to another equally important facet of his paschal theology. Leo's doctrine of the atonement is set out in terms of man's redemption from captivity to the devil. Such models of atonement are unpopular nowadays, partly because of the unattractive way in which some fathers such as Gregory of Nyssa present Christ as first doing a deal with and then deceiving the devil, and partly because liberal theologians tend to regard all talk of Satan and the demons as being at best metaphorical and at worst crudely mythological. During the course of this chapter we shall be showing that Leo offers a number of insights into this controversial theory of Christ's saving work which, provided we are prepared to follow the consensus of biblical and patristic authors in believing in the literal existence of diabolical beings in the first place, serve to present the idea of redemption from Satan in a new and more readily accessible light.

For Leo, as for St John the Evangelist, the devil is more than anything else the deceiver and the "father of lies". The question of his possession of man has to be seen in terms of deception; the question of the transference of man from the old creation to the new has to be seen in terms of deception; and the question of the devil's continuing assaults on re-created men as individuals and on the re-created Church as a whole has likewise to be seen in these colourful terms. These are not the legalistic categories of traditional portrayals of the "rights of the devil" theory of atonement, but are rooted simultaneously in the bishop's acute observation of the condition of fallen man and in the idea that human beings have freely given themselves over to the devil and must freely choose to be restored.

The work of restoration has to respect the double aspect of freedom whereby Satan freely elects to deceive us and we freely choose to follow him. Of course, Adam's initial sin, committed in absolute freedom, diminishes the freedom of his descendants, and means that in a sense they are no longer absolutely free to choose God rather than the devil. Christ restores to us this freedom in such a way that we become free to opt for God or for Satan in an absolute way, and not in a way that is restricted by that condition of constraint of our wills that is one of the consequences of original sin. Leo inherits little or none of Tertullian's heavily juridical approach to theology, but reflects the concerns of the pastor of souls who sees evil as an observable phenomenon in the midst of his flock, and who relates it to more urgent questions of human spirituality and the theology of the divine mercy.

The emphasis on deception rather than law in the various discussions of the devil's rights underlines this pastoral character of Leo's preoccupations, for it issues less from abstract theology (or mythology) than from a perception of the condition of the common Christian as ordered towards an absolute freedom of choice between vice and virtue which is fundamentally restricted before the advent of Christ. This, then, is the context of the crucial passage in Sermon 9,1 where Leo describes the conflict between the salvific will of God and the desire of the devil to deceive us into disbelieving the divine mercy. The devil's own sin is a falling into falsehood, and his aim is to lead human beings into the error of despairing of the hope of obtaining what he had previously lost when he attempted to elevate himself. Leo writes that

> "because that instigator and author of sin whom pride first caused to fall and then envy caused to do harm did not stand fast in the truth, he has put all his effort into falsehood. He has manufactured from this most poisonous fountain of his craft every manner of deception. His aim is to shut off any hope that human beings might have of arriving through devotion at that good which he himself had forfeited by self-exaltation. He would like to draw them into a partnership with himself in condemnation, since he himself cannot have access to that reconciliation which could be theirs" (Sermon 9,14-21).

Through his own freely expressed self-aggrandisement Satan has thrown away the prospect of happiness, and is anxious that others should share in his fate. He therefore deceives us specifically in order to cut off our own hope of "devotion" through the medium of a free human act that will diminish all subsequent human

freedom. The key phrase is *spem humanae devotionis excluderet*. This must refer either to the hope which *springs from* devotion to God, or else the hope which *consists in* devotion to God. Literally, *devotio* possesses the connotation of paying vows to God, whether within a religious context or within a more political context. Whichever interpretation we choose, the term has to do with belonging and possession - that is to say, with freedom - and furnishes us with a clue as to the true sense in which God or Satan can be said to possess man and to have rights. It seems likely that this legal possession is conferred by the human will, in so far as the individual selects the overlord to whom he wishes freely to pay vows. Thus, paradoxically, servitude is a consequence of human freedom, although it remains radically opposed to it.

The devil's trick, on this understanding, would be to convince man of the pointlessness of freely paying vows to God by depriving him of hope. Cut off from that hope which leads to or proceeds from the paying of vows to God, man instead pays vows to the devil, with the result, as we shall see, that the devil exercises a certain legal right over man who has freely handed over his freedom.[9] The language of *devotio* suggests a verbal reference to the seminal Sermon 12,3 where the Pauline statement "This will of God is in all of you in Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:18) is described as a *devotio* in which we participate provided that we exercise constancy of mind and display a love of God which neither grows proud in favourable circumstances nor fails in adverse situations. This *devotio* of love contrasts with the *devotio* to the devil which is, by contrast, both self-elevating and despairing, as we shall in due course see. True "devotion" consists in a freely entered unanimity between our wills and the will of God, and the devil deceives us by offering us a false "freedom" from such vows which ultimately results in our enslavement.

The devil is portrayed as trying to cheat us out of knowledge of the truth concerning salvation, and the gospel counters this by enshrining the system of punishment and reward - a set of genuine alternatives between which we may freely choose - which God has instituted in order to encourage us to virtue. Leo explains that

> "our Redeemer and Saviour knew what great errors the devil had sown throughout the entire world by deception, and with how many superstitions he had subjugated to himself the greatest part of the human race. But he did not desire that the creature who had been formed in the image of God should any longer be driven onto the

> precipice of eternal death through ignorance of the truth, so he planted within the pages of the gospel the manner of his judgment - which was such as to call back every person from the snares of this most cunning enemy, since no one would any longer be ignorant of the rewards to be hoped for by the good and the punishments to be feared by the wicked" (Sermon 9,1,5-14).

This confirms the point that we have already made. The deception wrought by the devil consists in spreading ignorance concerning the system of reward and punishment offered in response to genuinely free choices upon which the whole scheme of the divine mercy is constructed. This in turn suggests that by removing hope (the promise of reward) and by excluding fear (the threat of punishment) - that is to say, the two polarities which motivate free choices - the devil effectively cripples all religious and moral activity. Without free choices ordered towards the alternatives of reward and punishment the internal dynamic of the spiritual life breaks down, and the inevitable consequence is moral confusion and captivity of the spirit to that relativism which represents an unreal freedom. Leo, one might reasonably conjecture, sees this double motive of hope and fear as crucial to the Christian ethic, and its dissolution by the devil is the ultimate falsehood through which man is enslaved.

As is made clear by the argument developed throughout Sermon 12, to be in the image of God means to love what God loves:

> "it is by loving that God re-fashions us to his image. That he might find in us the image of his goodness, he gives us the very means by which we can perform the works that we do - by lighting the lamps of our minds and inflaming us with the fire of his love, so that we might love not only him but also whatever he loves" (Sermon 12,1,20-25).

In the light of this, the loss of the image of God by means of diabolical deception must presumably consist in a loss of this tendency to love *with* God. We are speaking, then, of a "transference of our desires" away from desiring what God wants and towards desiring what the devil wants. After the fall and before Christ, such a transference of desires is not absolutely free. The "ignorance of the truth" which brings this about appears from what we have already said to be ignorance concerning the twin motives of hope and fear by which the whole system of living in the *imago Dei* is sustained. To love what God loves leads to reward, and it is through the incentive of reward that we are led to it. In removing the twofold incentives of hope and fear, reward and

punishment, the devil effectively deprives us of the image of God.

The result is that we stand on the edge of the "precipice" of death, by which Leo might mean any number of things. What Leo understands by death - which is above all the state that categorises the old creation - is perhaps most clearly shown in a passage in Sermon 24. Here Leo observes that

> "the just live by faith, and those who lose their faith through the devil's deception are dead while they live. As justification is gained through faith, so also eternal life is gained through true faith" (Sermon 24,6,152-155).

Thus death is portrayed not so much as a punishment for sin but as the state of ignorance which follows from diabolical deception. Basically, "faith" equals "life" and "ignorance" equals "death". These equations effectively mean that concepts such as redemption and vivification will be interpreted in terms of revelation and epiphany, for to be "dead" or "alive" represents what might be described as a fiducial or even noetic state. We can extend this by saying that death equals the absence of freedom, for it is that condition of ignorance concerning the divine mercy in which we do not possess the necessary information to will the good freely. The revelatory dimension of Leo's Christology is directed towards the empowerment of human beings to make free choices for good or evil in full knowledge of the system of reward and punishment, and accordingly to transfer their desires from earth to heaven and from flesh to spirit, or else keep them firmly fixed on that which is terrestrial and bodily.

## Adam as Deceived

Adam is punished by death because he believes the devil's lies about the impossibility of meriting the divine mercy and the consequent need for snatching it by force (thereby impugning God's liberty to bestow it freely); and, as a direct result of this freely chosen course of action, he returns to earthiness and mortality. Leo writes that

> "he rashly and unhappily believed the invidious deceiver and, giving in to the advice of pride, he preferred to seize the increase of honour set aside for him rather than to earn it. Yet is was not only he but the sum of his posterity in him as well that heard 'earth you are and unto earth you shall return' [Genesis 3:19]. Therefore 'as with this man from the earth, so too is it with us human beings from the

> earth' [1 Corinthians 15:48]. No one is immortal, since no one is of heaven" (Sermon 24,2,55-59).

As we have argued, the free sacrifice by Adam of his freedom involves the restriction of the freedom of his descendants, and the incarnation redeems this situation by offering us genuine alternatives of good and evil, reward and punishment, and by introducing truth and purity (which has a mental dimension closely related to faith and the knowledge of truth) in the "new man". Leo tells us that

> "he, the Creator and Lord of all things, saw fit to become one of the mortals, from a mother whom he had chosen for himself and made. She, without harm to her virginal integrity, was the provider of his bodily substance only, so that, with the contagion of human seed brought to an end, purity and truth inhered within the new man" (Sermon 24,3,65-69).

The introduction of purity and truth is in contrast to the deception wrought by the devil and to the lie that human beings are living in consequence of Adam's limitation of their freedom. Christ, as we shall see, restores that freedom by persuading the devil to give up freely any claim he exercises over us, and by subsequently enabling us to choose God rather than Satan.

Finally, returning to Sermon 12,1, we may note that the logical order of events in the sequence of reparation is divine mercy and love followed by dispersal of clouds of human ignorance followed by human love of God. Leo informs us that

> "the Saviour's grace re-fashions us (*reparat*) to this image [the image of God] on a daily basis. What fell in the first Adam has been raised up in the second. But our being refashioned has no other cause than the mercy of God. We should not love him but for the fact that he has loved us first and has dispelled the darkness of our ignorance with the light of his truth" (Sermon 12,1,5-10).

We can argue from this juxtaposition of ideas that the faith that equals life leads to the love that reflects the divine love from which mercy and reparation proceed, and we can further relate the peace that consists in unanimity with God to the saving warfare that, following the example of Christ, we conduct against the devil. Leo asks

> "what is it, dearly beloved, to be at peace with God except to will what he commands and to refuse what he forbids?" (Sermon 26,3,75-77).

Elsewhere, he remarks that

> "he fought the battle then so that we too might fight it afterwards;

> he has conquered so that we too might conquer in the same way" (Sermon 39,3,79b-81b).

On one hand, then, we have life which consists in faith and manifests itself in unanimity with God and in the struggle against Satan, and on the other we have death which consists in ignorance of the universal love of God and which manifests itself, as we shall argue, in a demonic orientation of a will which has been deprived of its original freedom.

What we are dealing with, accordingly, is a process of "transfer" from the old, fallen creation (characterised by ignorance and death) to the new (characterised by faith, knowledge, and life). The old creation has become useless because is is so bound up with the devil's enslaving act of deception that the free appropriation of salvation is no longer possible within it. The new creation liberates us from the thralldom of ignorance concerning the economy of love by way of a revelation of that divine salvific will which we have already discussed. As we shall demonstrate, the incarnation teaches us the truth about Christ while concealing it from the devil, with the result that this time it is the devil who is deceived while we are set free through faith and knowledge.

Leo continues this discussion of Christ's work of redemption as a transfer from old creation to new in Sermon 9,2 by giving a curious twist to the doctrine of redemption. He informs us that the devil is overcome through God's vouchsafing to us of a picture of the future judgment. Leo explains that

> "because the ancient enemy makes use of these wiles, dearly beloved, Christ in his ineffable kindness wanted us to know what were to be the criteria for judging all humanity on the day of recompense. That way, while in this lifetime there is still available the medicine of legitimate remedies, while rehabilitation has not yet been denied to those who have been shattered, and while those who have long been sterile can still become fruitful before it is all over, the condemnation due in justice might be headed off and the reflection of God's criteria in judgment might never be removed from the eyes of our heart" (Sermon 9,2,29-36).

This preview of our last end promises a reward to the just but punishment to sinners - a punishment which will involve the wicked being cast into the fire prepared for the torture of the devil and his angels whose will they have chosen to do:

> "when the children of devotion have taken possession of the kingdom prepared for them after their works of mercy have been reviewed, a charge of barrenness (resulting from a hard heart) will be brought against the unjust. Since those on the left have nothing to do with those on the right, they will, by sentence of the almighty Judge, be cast into the fire devised for tormenting the devil and his angels - to have a partnership with the one whose will they chose to follow" (Sermon 9,2,42-48).

This passage does not suggest simply an eternal punishment, but an eternal punishment that is entirely voluntary. The idea of freely choosing to do the will of the demons stands in obvious contrast to that union of the human with the divine will in which the *imago Dei* consists. Reward and punishment, we may confidently conclude, are dependent on specific dispositions of the will - the will that is united with God's will, and the will that is united with the devil's. In short, our future end is inchoated and anticipated in this life by way of a kind of inaugurated eschatology which is manifested by the free transference of our desires from Satan to God or else by our free choice to continue desiring that which is earthly and fleshly.

Still more interesting is the notion of conquest of the devil through revelation of the future judgment. What precisely does Leo mean by this? He could conceivably be referring simply to the fact that Christ came to teach us the eschatological truth about reward and punishment - in which case Christ would be a somewhat apocalyptic figure rather after the manner of Albert Schweitzer's classic portrayal.[10] More subtly, he could mean that the cycle of incarnation, passion, resurrection, and ascension is an epiphanic revelation of the divine justice and mercy, which are realised as *mysterium* and *exemplum* in the various stages of Christ's incarnate life. According to this theory, the Christian mysteries would reveal the divine mercy and the universal salvific will, while at the same time threatening condemnation for those such as Manichees, Nestorians, and Eutychians who abandon the true faith about the person and natures of Christ. As we saw in a previous chapter, the real crime of Nestorius and Eutyches is that their respective Christologies effectively deprive us of *hope*, and undermine the ability of God to realise his salvific will for us. This explains why Leo sees such heresies as being essentially diabolical. In destroying our hope in God's ability to fulfil his saving intention, they plunge us into that despair about salvation which lies at the heart of the devil's work of deception. Christological orthodoxy

rebuilds that hope, and the gospel offers us the stick and carrot of eternal punishment and reward in order to incite us to a freely embraced life of faith and good works.

This revelation of the future judgment through the Christian mysteries achieves the conquest of the devil because, as we have seen, the devil wishes to deprive us of that hope which springs from and leads to a devotion rooted in human freedom. This ties in with the idea that those who are condemned to punishment are those who freely will what the devil wills. Basically, the damned are those who do not want there to be punishment and reward, heaven and hell. Mere sin does not consign us to eternal flames. The rejection of hope in the divine mercy and in a future life, and the embracing of theological opinions such as those of Eutyches and Nestorius which effectively render the operation of the divine mercy impossible, on the other hand, *do* consign us to perdition. It might be supposed that Leo would have regarded the tragedy of modern man as consisting primarily in his abandonment of hope in a life after death, and in his materialistic restriction of hope to the sphere of the amelioration of the present, rather than in any continuing proclivity to sinful behaviour.

## The Epiphanic Character of Redemption

In Sermon 22 Leo informs us that the virgin birth is responsible for overcoming the devil. He writes that God

> "announced to the serpent that the seed of a woman would, through his power, crush the arrogance of its poisonous head - meaning, of course, that Christ would do so: God and man in flesh. Born of a virgin, he would condemn with his undefiled birth that polluter of the human race" (Sermon 22,1,13-16).

How does the virgin birth "condemn" Satan? Leo describes the state of mind of the enemy, saying that

> "the devil was gloating over the fact that human beings, deceived by his craft, went without the divine gifts, and that, with the endowment of immortality stripped off, they were subject to the harsh sentence of death. He revelled in having found a certain comfort among his own evils from his companionship with the one who had gone astray. He also relished the fact that God, at the demands of strict justice, had changed his assessment of human beings, whom he had created in such honour" (Sermon 22,1,16-23).

The "divine gifts" which human beings have lost as a result of the devil's deception would seem to refer to that life-giving faith and freedom of choice which we noted in the previous section. Leo goes on to show that the fact that we have been tricked into a state of guilt demands a remedy, and concludes

> "as a result, dearly beloved, it was necessary by the designs of a secret plan for the immutable God (whose will cannot be severed from his goodness) to complete by a deeper mystery the first intentions of his love. It was necessary that human beings, tricked into guilt by the devil's wickedness, should not perish in opposition to God's plan" (Sermon 22,1,23-27).

Modern western theologians, conditioned by the vocabulary of Augustine and his scholastic and reformation admirers, tend to think of *culpa* either in juridical terms as denoting a forensic guilt in the eyes of God, or else in ontological terms as referring to the condemned state of a soul that is dead in the order of grace. Is this what Leo understands by the term? Certainly, one could read the phrase *diabolicae iniquitatis versutia actus in culpam* in such a way, but there remains an alternative interpretation. Is it not possible that Leo intends us to take *culpa* in what might be termed a "psychological" sense - that is to say, as denoting a *consciousness* of guilt or sinfulness?

This more subjective sense certainly represents how the word would be used by modern psychologists, and once again we must ask ourselves if the conventional theological understanding of such ostensibly "juridical" vocabulary is not overly conditioned by the subsequent triumph of Augustinianism in western theology. Might not Leo simply be arguing that the tricks of the devil's iniquity led us into guilt in the sense of a fundamentally deceptive consciousness or feeling of guilt and "alienation"? This, of course, is not to say that man is not genuinely guilty, but rather that he exaggerates the consequences of that very real guilt to the extent that he loses hope in the mercy of God. Such a conclusion would tally with what we have already said about the devil's deception of man. As we have seen, the devil deceives us into abandoning belief in the divine mercy and in the "punishment and reward" system of life after death. This would necessarily involve convincing us that we were inevitably damned, and an excessive (and falsely understood) Augustinianism founded on the idea of the the human race as a so-called *massa damnata* could be precisely the kind of

sense of guilt into which the devil lures us.

As Augustine's gentler disciples such as Prosper of Aquitaine are all too well aware, Augustinianism sometimes appears at first sight to offer a rigid double predestinarianism (though this was almost certainly not the intention of the doctor of Hippo, however much it might seem to be the corollary of certain of his positions as over-logically drawn out by later writers like John Calvin), and such a negative view of the divine mercy and universal salvific will corresponds with that diabolical abandonment of hope which for Leo constitutes unanimity of the will with Satan rather than unanimity of will with God. It would be going way beyond the evidence to suggest that Leo is deliberately contradicting a particular (and arguably inaccurate) interpretation of Augustine - though the existence of the *Commentarii in Psalmos* of Arnobius the Younger shows that specifically anti-Augustinian works were in circulation in Rome at around the time of Leo - but it certainly seems fair to posit a possible contrast between Augustine's doctrine of guilt and the one that is put forward in the Leonine corpus. For Augustine, it is probably fair to say, guilt is something radical and ontological. For Leo, it is a misplaced belief in one's own irredeemability which has been implanted by the deceiver. The comparison is instructive, even if it is not polemically motivated.

It is in the light of this that we need to go back to the earlier passage in the same sermon where Leo writes that the devil gloried in the fact that by his deception he had deprived man of divine rewards, and that, denuded of the gift of immortality, man had been subjected to the sentence of death, while he himself now had the solace of a companion in wickedness. Once again, the success of the devil lies in his having separated man from the heavenly reward that was due to him. That reward was immortality, which was lost when fallen man became subject to the *sententia mortis*. It may well be the case that Leo thinks in terms of the devil convincing us that there is no after-life, and that all there is to look forward to is annihilation, and the present passage would certainly seem to confirm such a conclusion. What does it actually mean to say that the devil denudes us of immortality and places us under sentence of death? One obvious interpretation is that, before the fall, man would have been immortal, but that after it he is corruptible and prone to death. But is this all that Leo has in mind?

As we have seen, the devil is above all a deceiver. This idea permeates Leo's thought, and surely the point is that anything that the devil does to man is a deception resulting in loss of freedom in addition to being something more "objective".

This being the case, we would expect the loss of immortality described by Leo as following on from the fall to be above all else a loss of *faith* and *hope* in immortality - especially as, as we have witnessed, Leo actually equates life with faith and death with ignorance during the course of Sermon 24,6. In other words, in line with what we have already argued, the devil convinces us that we face eternal destruction in the wake of a total and radical loss of freedom when in fact no such thing is the case. Likewise, the sentence of death, we may conjecture, exists in our own minds, and, indeed, could even be said to be a *state of mind*. We have shown that subjection to the devil is equivalent to unanimity with the diabolic will. This being the case, is it not possible that to be "under the sentence of death" means simply that we lose all hope in eternal life and accept, and even desire, a captivity which leads to final annihilation as inevitable, thus becoming companions of the devil in his fundamental hopelessness?

The purpose of the incarnation, we must conclude, was not only for Christ to inject life and incorruptibility into human nature in a more "mystical" sense, but also for him to reveal the reality of eternal life in order to restore us to a state of freedom and to facilitate the "transference of desires". The incarnation and what follows from it would then represent an epiphany of the divine mercy and the universal salvific will. This is made clearer in Sermon 72,2 (on the resurrection) where Leo tells us that

> "he offered himself (though free of debt) to his cruel taskmaster [the devil], allowing the violence of the Jews (as servants of the devil) to crucify his sinless flesh. He wanted his flesh to be subject to death until his speedy resurrection. That way, persecution might not be insuperable for those who believe in him, nor death frightening. As we must not doubt our participation in his glory, so we must not doubt his participation in our nature" (Sermon 72,2,48-55).

The point here, surely, is that the incarnation is a guarantee of future blessedness. Incarnation, passion, and resurrection all combine to prove to us one thing and one thing alone: that in the future we will share in the divine glory. The devil tries to persuade us that we will all share in his own condemnation, but the reality is otherwise - or at

least it is once Christ has restored to us the freedom to choose. However, as long as we believe in the falsehood, that falsehood will paradoxically be the reality, and we shall endure that fate of enslavement that we have freely chosen through union of will with Satan. Christ comes to deliver us from the falsehood, and to make it possible to believe in the promises of mercy and reward - and so to achieve true contemplation of the God whose nature it is to make these redemptive promises.

So far as Leo is concerned, the deception wrought by the devil consists in convincing human beings that death and corruption are eternal and irredeemable. The complex of incarnation, passion, and resurrection reveals that this need not be the case, and substitutes Christian hope for diabolical despair. It is in terms of this movement to a life of hope from a life of despair that the idea of the transference from the old creation is to be understood, for where the old creation had been plunged in lies and misapprehensions, the new creation is open to the illuminative grace of Leo's theology of contemplation - which is at heart a contemplation of God as merciful, loving, and saving.

This epiphanic character of Leo's theology of redemption and re-creation is further witnessed to in Sermon 23. Leo writes that

> "to recall us to eternal beatitude from our original chains and from earthly errors, he himself came down to us - he to whom we could not of ourselves rise up. Certainly there was a love of truth in many. Yet, among a plurality of uncertain opinions, they were being led astray through the cleverness of lying demons, and, by what is falsely called 'knowledge', human ignorance was being dragged into differing and contradictory ideas" (Sermon 23,3,66-72).

In the light of what we have already seen, it seems likely that "original chains" and "earthly errors" are actually synonymous, and that they are explicitly opposed to the freedom which leads to the reward of eternal bliss, for, as we have argued, the "earthly errors" which constitute the "original chains" in which Satan binds us are nothing other than a loss of hope in the reality of "eternal beatitude". Our inability to ascend to Christ denotes, surely, a failure of that ascent of the mind by which we focus upon the contemplation of God as merciful and upon our celestial future - the same celestial future concerning whose very existence the devil has sown seeds of doubt. We have suggested that the Christian life consists in an inchoation of future beatitude,

and in a kind of anticipated or inaugurated eschatology. The deception wrought by the devil denies the reality of the future which God intends us to anticipate, with the consequence that our minds cannot in the present ascend to where we shall dwell with our resurrected bodies in the future. Christ's descent is intended specifically to facilitate knowledge of the promised future, concerning which the demons have led us into "differing and contradictory opinions".

Leo goes on to say that

> "to take away the shame by which our captive minds served the overweening devil the teaching of the law was not sufficient. Nor could our nature be restored through prophetic exhortations alone, but the actual reality of redemption had to be added to moral precepts" (Sermon 23,3,72-76).

Our minds are enslaved to the devil, and the law is not sufficient to release them. As we have argued, slavery to the devil consists in our being deceived into thinking that there is no future reward, and the whole Pauline contrast between law on the one hand and grace and mercy on the other is sufficient to explain why for Leo the law is incapable of delivering us from such servitude. The inability of prophetic exhortation to restore our nature is to be understood in a similar fashion. For Leo the idea of restoration of nature is closely bound up with the doctrine of the *imago Dei* as outlined in Sermon 12 and elsewhere - a theme which is prominent in the writings of the Greek fathers and in books nine to fourteen of the *de Trinitate* of St Augustine.[11] The *imago Dei* in turn has to do with willing what God wills, and willing what God wills in turn has to do with participation in the divine mercy, both on a practical level and on the more exalted level of sharing in the universal salvific will. Accordingly, the restoration of nature which the prophetic exhortations cannot accomplish refers ultimately to that desire for the salvation of all in which unanimity with the divine will ultimately consists. As we have seen, this can be restored only by the perfect revelation of the divine mercy which is effected through the cycle of incarnation, passion, and resurrection.

"Moral injunctions" fall short of such a perfect revelation, with the result that they need to be supplemented by the *veritas redemptionis*. The most obvious sense of this phrase is that an exemplary doctrine of the atonement is inadequate, and that

Christ has to do something objective in a physical or mystical sense to human nature in order to transform it. However, there is no real evidence that *veritas redemptionis* denotes something objective as *opposed* to something moral or exemplary. Feltoe's translation interprets the phrase as "reality of redemption", but a more literal translation might be "the truth concerning redemption". Exemplarism may indeed be inadequate as a model of atonement when it exists at the level of a pattern of human activity or a moral exhortation to a better life, but Leo's own peculiar brand of exemplarism, like that of von Balthasar in our own age, is rather different. Leo's Christ exemplifies the divine mercy and the universal salvific will, thereby teaching us the truth concerning redemption (the *veritas redemptionis*) and releasing our minds from servitude to the devil. The law and the prophets are inadequate because they are restricted to furnishing us with ideals of human behaviour, and do nothing to restore our lost freedom. The revelation in Christ reveals to us not how to be human, but the ultimate and eschatological possibilities of human nature in the light of the divine mercy and universal salvific will as exemplified in incarnation, passion, and resurrection - in short, as manifested in the economy of the new creation.

Of course, the healing of flesh and spirit which the incarnate Word communicates through baptism and Eucharist and which enables us to order our bodies to our souls and our souls towards God is also an element in the liberation of human beings, for human freedom involves both the *possibility* of freely choosing God - which is brought about in an "objective" manner - and also the *option* of freely choosing God, which demands a "subjective" revelation of what it is we are to choose and how we are to go about choosing it. As we have seen, Christ fulfils all the various requirements of a liberating Saviour. To begin with, the healing which the incarnation brings through the medium of our physical contact with the Son of God made flesh is justificatory in the Thomistic sense of "justification" as the due orientation by grace of flesh to soul and of soul to God, and this corresponds with the idea that the incarnation, passion, resurrection, and ascension are *mysteria*. As well as being *mysteria*, though, they are also *exempla*, and as *exempla* they reveal both the divine mercy as an option to be freely chosen, and, at one and the same time, the human life of Christ as a paradigm for how we are to choose what is on offer. This is Leo's entire theology in a nutshell - a

theology of "mystery" and "example" by which we are restored to a state of lost freedom, and by which even the laity can aspire to the contemplation of merciful God.

## Justice, Mercy and Reason

Having discussed the way in which the devil deceives us into losing faith in the divine mercy, and having conducted a lengthy examination of Leo's treatment of the universal salvific will, we need to look at the manner in which the crucial themes of justice, mercy, and the "logic of redemption" are brought together to produce a coherent vision of Christ's saving work. In Sermon 92 Leo asks

> "how indeed will your justice be richer unless your mercy is even more so? What is so just and what is so worthy as that the creature made in the image of God should imitate its creator? He [God] has determined the restoration and sanctification of believers by the forgiveness of sins, so that, when the severity of judgment (*vindictum*) is withdrawn and all punishment (*supplicium*) ceases, the guilty might be returned to innocence and the end of wrongdoing might become the beginning of virtue" (Sermon 92,1,24-30).

Is it going too far to perceive in this forceful statement a direct rebuttal of some supposed contrast between mercy and justice? As we have noted, one of the major problems confronting Augustine - certainly as understood by his mediaeval and Reformation interpreters - is the difficulty of reconciling the divine mercy, which demands universal salvation, with the divine justice, which demands universal condemnation. Augustine's unsatisfactory conclusion that the whole affair is an impenetrable mystery merely serves to underline the numerous antinomies in which his system apparently lands us.[12] Of course, Augustine's actual teaching is infinitely richer than this, and, like that of Leo, centres around the revelation of the divine justice and love in the death of Christ, but we have seen that his system presents sufficient difficulties for Prosper of Aquitaine to feel the need to modify it quite substantially, and the fact that writers as far apart as Aquinas and Calvin can claim to be "Augustinian" is a fair indication of the opacity of the doctor of Hippo's thought. In some senses Leo is very close to Augustine, for both see the cycle of incarnation, passion, and resurrection as revealing the diptychs of justice and mercy, and of threat of punishment and hope of reward. However, *Augustinianism* bequeathes to us a

problematical synthesis to which Leo, with his emphasis on the quest for the liturgical contemplation of God as essentially loving and merciful, offers a viable alternative (though this motif, naturally enough, is by no means absent from Augustine's own world-view).

Mediaeval Augustinianism, we have asserted, sometimes tended towards a radical opposition between the demands of justice and the dictates of mercy (the one ruled over by Mary, according to some writers, the other by Christ). Such a view of things is entirely absent from Leo's presentation. On the contrary, in the passage under consideration he seems to be saying that justice is expressed *through* mercy - as when he asks *quomodo vero abundabit iustitia nisi superexaltet misericordia*? Leo has just said that without justice we cannot enter heaven, and what he means by justice appears to be practical works of mercy such as almsgiving, for one might say as a general rule that Leo understands human justice as consisting in the performance of works of mercy so as to imitate the divine mercy and thus attain the *imago Dei* - an idea that we shall be examining at greater length in our concluding chapter.

If, at the level of human beings, to act justly is the same as to act mercifully, is it not natural that Leo should likewise see divine justice not in legalistic terms (as did writers such as Pelagius and Julian of Eclanum)[13] , but more or less as a synonym for "mercy"? "Justice" for Leo seems to denote not acting towards men in accordance with their *due* (the definition of Thomas Aquinas) but acting towards men in accordance with their *needs* - an understanding which applies equally to human and divine justice. Of course, Leo's God does mete out punishment as well as reward, but one strongly suspects that he metes out the kind of purificatory and ultimately salvific punishment in which, say, Ambrose's God deals rather than the rather more punitive punishment implicit in Augustine's portrait of the next world. This is not to dispute the fact that Augustine's theology is, as much as Leo's, a theology of hope and love. Having said that, the punishment of hell after death according to Augustine is strictly punitive, though the punishment of purgatory is purificatory as well, whereas for writers such as Jerome and Ambrose the emphasis is more completely on purification. Be that as it may, it remains the case that, for Leo, justice is clearly subsumed into mercy and becomes more or less identical with it.

Even more significant in the passage under consideration is the remark that God "establishes the reparation and sanctification of those who believe in the remission of sins". The context makes it clear that "reparation" refers to the restoration of the divine image. The crucial point is that those who receive this restoration or reparation are those who believe in forgiveness. In other words, there is a direct correlation between objective reparation on the one hand and faith on the other - not so much faith in dogma (which is assumed) or faith as experience of grace (which would be an anachronistic Lutheran interpretation) as faith in forgiveness itself. Leo affirms belief in forgiveness pure and simple - not in the forgivability of sins if certain conditions are met (as in mediaeval Catholicism) and not in the mere imputation of forgiveness (as in Lutheranism) - though this, of course, is not to suggest that Leo has no concept of a penitential system.[14]

Accordingly, *vindicta* and *supplicium* are not really legal terms for Leo, whatever their etymological origins, but denote a fate that sinful man has, to coin a phrase, "believed into existence". It is not the near impossibility of salvation that creates despair (as in Luther's caricature of mediaeval Catholicism) but despair that creates the impossibility of salvation, and it is the despair which the devil deceives man into embracing that of itself generates *vindicta* and *supplicium*. We are not condemned to death (which, as we have seen, is in any case just a synonym for unbelief) for being sinful; we are condemned to death for believing that we are condemned to death (in a literal sense) and for failing to believe in the divine mercy. To put it as bluntly as possible, we get what we believe in, and if we do not believe in the divine mercy we will simply not be given it. If all we believe in is death and punishment, and if we allow our minds to become essentially material and earthy, then the punishment of death and of a return to the matter of earth is precisely what will happen to us. It is not our crimes that exclude us from heaven; it is the *belief* that our crimes exclude us from heaven that excludes us from heaven.

Again, *reus* ("condemned man") is a legal term, but does Leo intend it in a legalistic sense? Surely the point is that the *reus* in this instance is condemned not by God but by himself. We must remember that man's fall rests upon a deception. From a systematic point of view, one would have to say that a deluded Adam is not free to

merit eternal damnation (or anything else) for himself and for his descendants. In order to do that his sin would have had to have been an act of pure and free malice, and not an act born more of a duped will than of a wicked will. This, one suspects, explains why for Leo *iustitia* is not conceived in punitive or legalistic terms. One could say that Adam is more victim than criminal, more sinned against than sinning, and that he deserves the merciful justice of Leonine theology rather than the punitive justice of some of the more astringent versions of Augustinianism. (If we occasionally seem to be caricaturing Augustinianism we are doing no more than the various schools of the late fifth and early sixth centuries - particularly in Gaul where Augustinian rigorists like Fulgentius of Ruspe and semi-Pelagians like Faustus of Riez argued the toss concerning these issues with no little emotion.) The "condemned man" is a tragic rather than an evil figure - condemned in as much as he has condemned himself through lack of belief in the divine mercy to loss of freedom and to a future of earthiness, materiality, and final dissolution. With the advent of Christ, mercy is both revealed and exalted, and the *reus* returns to innocence - which is to say that the guilty man receives forgiveness simply by becoming one of the *credentium in peccatorum remissione*. The consequence of all this is that we can achieve that contemplation of the divine nature - which consists in mercy and love - which lies at the heart of Leo's spirituality of the "transference of desires" and towards which his Christology and soteriology are equally ordered.

In Sermon 64, which deals explicitly with the twofold process of creation and re-creation, Leo writes that it is the Son of God

> "who animated by the breath of rational life a man moulded from the mire of the earth. Consequently, it was he who restores (*restitueret*) our nature also - who restored to its lost dignity a nature fallen from the heights of eternity. Because he was the maker (*conditor*) of human nature it was fitting that he should be its restorer (*reformator*) it as well. Guiding his plan to completion, he used the justice of reason (*iustitia rationis*) rather than the power of force (*potestate virtutis*) to destroy the domination of the devil" (Sermon 64,2,34-40).

The Word originally animated us with "rational existence" (*hominem flatu vitae rationalis animavit*) and so ordered his saving plan that in destroying the domination of the devil he might use the "justice of reason" (*iustitia rationis*) rather than the

power of strength. Likewise, in Sermon 22,3 Leo informs us that

> "there were many means available to him [God] for restoring (*reparandum*) the human race in an ineffable way, yet he chose this way in particular for seeing to it. He would not use the force of power (*virtute potentiae*) to destroy the work of the devil, but the reasonableness of justice (*ratione iustitiae*)" (Sermon 22,3,130a-135a).

One very much suspects that *iustitia* is actually being used as a synonym for *ratio* in passages such as the one in Sermon 22,3 - where it is supposed that there would have been no "justice" - that is to say, no "rationality" or "reasonableness" in the devil's losing the slavery of the human race had he not been conquered by that which he subjugated. Leo writes that

> "it was not unjust (*inmerito*) for the pride of this ancient enemy to arrogate to himself a tyrannical rule over all people. Nor was that dominion beneath which he crushed them unwarranted (*indebito*). After all, he had induced them to come over of their own accord from the law of God to obeying his will. In all justice, the slavery of this race could not rightly be taken away from him once it had been surrendered - unless the very race which he had brought into subjection should overcome him" (Sermon 22,3,136a-143a).

In this passage, "justice" appears to denote a certain "logic". Human beings have freely given themselves over to Satan, so it is reasonable that God should allow Satan to exercise his tyranny over them. It is as much a case of our free right to be governed by the devil if we want to be as it is of Satan's right to govern us. It is, in short, a question of the "transference of desires", for in freedom we have transferred our allegiance from God to Satan and as long as we wish to remain with Satan - albeit through a free choice which has become fettered - is is both just and logical that we should be allowed to do so.

How are these passages to be interpreted? In the first of them we read that the Son animates us with rational (*rationalis*) life. The same sentence would have more power in Greek, where "Son" would be Logos and "rational" would be *logikos,* but the Latin remains clear enough in intention. Restoration and reformation, as we have seen, refer to the *imago Dei.* Here there is the additional implication of a return to rationality, which in patristic thought suggests more than the mere operation of reason, but encompasses, especially in Greek theology, the idea that man's logical structure somehow reflects the *Logos* in such a way that there is a relation of

proportion and likeness between the two. Man "images" the *Logos* through his own inherent logicality, so to speak. Again, the full force of the idea is lost in Latin, but the underlying theology appears to be the same. The *imago Dei* consists in a "rationality" which goes way beyond the mere possession of reason, and it is this rationality that is restored and reformed by Christ. Precisely what this "rationality" consists in we shall discuss in the following chapter.

# NOTES

1 See, for example, M. Riber: *La reparación en san Léon Magno*, unpub. diss., Rome, 1973.

2 F. Vromen: "Sint Leo de Grote als liturgisch predikant", *Tijdschrift voor Liturgie* 45 (1961), 137-144.

3 See especially G. Rieux: "Le temps du salut chez Saint Léon", *Bulletin de littéraire ecclésiastique* 93 (1993), 95-111.

4 E. Alberich: "El misterio salvífico de la encarnación en el primer formulario navideno del sacramentario leoniano", *Revista española de Teología* 25 (1965), 277-317.

5 See V. Noe: "'Sacramentum Paschale'. La cinquantena pasquale in San Leone Magno", *Rivista Liturgica* 49 (1962), 101-106; J.A. Pascual: "El misterio pascual según San Léon Magno", *Rivista española de Teología* 24 (1964), 299-314.

6 See F. Hofmann: "Die Osterbotschaft in den Predigten Papst Leos des Grossen", *Paschatis Sollemnia*, Freiburg, 1959, pp. 76-86; A.P. Lang: "Anklänge an Orationen der Ostervigil in Sermonen Leos des Grossen, *Sacris Eridiri* 13 (1962), 281-325.

7 G. de Sanctis: "La teologia della passione in san Leone I il Grande", *La Sapienza Croce della Croce oggi. Atti del Congresso Internazionale*, Rome, Oct. 13-18, 1975, vol.1, Turin 1976, pp. 224-234.

8 D. Mozeris: *Doctrina s. Leonis Magni de Christo Restitutore et Sacerdote*, Mundelein, Illinois, 1940.

9 For the question of the "rights of the devil" in the thought of Leo, see J. Rivière: "La rédemption chez s. Léon le Grand", *Revue des sciences religieuses* 9 (1929) 17-42; 153-187; F. Carcione: "I 'diritti del diavolo' nella soteriologia di S. Leone Magno", *Rivista Cistercense* 2 (1985) 113-126.

10 Albert Schweitzer: *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, ET London, 1954.

11 See W.J. Burghardt: *The Image of God in Man according to Cyril of Alexandria*, Washington, 1957.

12 Sermon 27,7.

13 For an all-round view of Pelagius and his approach to questions of grace and legalism see R. Pirenne: *La morale de Pélage. Essai historique sur le rôle primordial de la grâce dans l'enseignement de la théologie morale*, Rome, 1961; S. Prete: *Pelagio e il Pelagianesimo*, Brescia, 1961. On Julian of Eclanum, who takes rationalism to its limits in his opposition to Augustine, see especially M. Abel: "Le Praedestinatus et la pélagianisme", *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 35 (1968), 2-25.

14 See E. Luveley: *The Doctrine of St. Leo the Great on the Ecclesiastical Forgiveness of Sin*, unpub. diss., West Baden, 1954.

# Chapter Eight

# THE LOGIC OF REDEMPTION

## Another Kind of Rationality

In destroying the domination of the devil, then, Christ uses another kind of "rationality" - the *iustitia rationis*. We have already argued that for Leo *iustitia* is not to be understood in a negative sense, but that it has far more positive connotations, and is almost equivalent to *misericordia* rather than opposed to it as it came to be in certain mediaeval schools. Thus In Sermon 69,3 Leo uses the term *misericordiae ratio* in much the same way as he employs *iustitia rationis* elsewhere. The implication is that *misericordiae ratio* and *iustitia rationis* are more or less synonymous. This "justice" possesses its own "logic" - its own *ratio*. Just as "rationality" in man indicates more than "being endowed with the faculties of reason", so we may assume that the *ratio* from which justice flows is rather more than just "reasonableness".

One might have supposed that the "justice of reason" meant simply that it was more reasonable, more fitting, more suitable for God to overcome the devil through "justice" rather than through strength. According to this interpretation it is as if the use of power would be a kind of "cheating" - or, to use a peculiarly English phrase, "just not cricket". The reality, one suspects, is infinitely more subtle than this. If it is true to say that human beings reflect the *imago Dei* through "rationality", is it not equally true to say that the "rationality" in redemption likewise owes more to the reflection

of the divine nature than to some manifestation of God's "good sportsmanship"? Surely, Christ does not use justice because it represents the more "reasonable" approach, but because it reflects the *ratio* of the divinity, which as we have seen consists in mercy and in that justice which is closely akin to mercy. In other words, the "justice of reason" effects an imaging or revelation of God in which the justice employed in the defeat of Satan somehow mirrors the divine nature, which as we have seen consists pre-eminently in *misericordia*.

This fits neatly with what we said in the previous section about Christ revealing the divine mercy and universal salvific will to man in such a way that man knows that merit leads to reward and so has genuine hope for life after death. Presumably Leo believes that the *iustitia rationis* by which Christ destroys the domination of the devil is that justice that proceeds from the divine mercy in which the *ratio* of God consists. It is the manifestation of the rationality of God as being essentially just - which in Leonine theology denotes that justice which is the object of Christian contemplation and which expresses itself in the restoration to man of the hope of mercy and forgiveness of which he has been deprived through the devil's deception. The "justice of reason" would then seem to have little or nothing to do with the more obvious or literal interpretation of the "rights of the devil" (whose reality Leo freely admits), but rather would concern God's justice to man who has been deceived into losing his birthright of hope. One might argue that what is "just" is not that Christ should play fair with the devil, but that he should play fair with human beings (whom the devil has deceived) by showing them mercy while at the same time observing that additional rationality of freedom by which we need to be be saved. This justice has a logic or *ratio* which we would expect to be understood in terms of a reflection of the divine nature, which is to be merciful and universally salvific.

Leo writes that

> "in the conflict undertaken on our behalf, battle was joined on the most remarkably fair terms (*in quo conflictu magno pro nobis inito, magno et mirabili aequitatis iure certatum est*). The omnipotent Lord engages this most savage enemy not in his own majesty but in our lowliness, bringing against him the very same form and the very same nature [that had been overcome]" (Sermon 21,1,14-18).

Are we really to assume that in this passage he is referring to God's sense of "fair

play" in his dealings with the devil? Is it not possible that in Leo's eyes Christ is contending against the devil with an (untranslatable) "great and wonderful lawfulness of equity" (according to the Feltoe translation) or with "most remarkably fair terms" (according to the Freeland and Conway translation) which are directed not towards Satan but towards *us*? Surely the point is that the devil has acquired certain rights, but that he has cheated in order to get them. Christ's struggle does not oppose divine good sportsmanship to diabolical cheating, but offers justice to man who has been cheated. To continue the metaphor of "cheating" and "fair play", Christ is not so much the "clean" sportsman who overcomes the "dirty" sportsman by means of "fair play", but the just referee who by his equitable administration enables man to overcome the dirty sportsman himself.

Assuming that we are right, how exactly does Christ achieve this? In all probability the answer lies once again in Leo's characteristic exemplarism. When Leo writes in Sermon 21,1 that Christ contends with Satan not in our humility but rather in his own majesty, and that he opposes the devil with the same form and nature that participates in our humility, his intensely human struggle is an exemplary one that enables us to contend successfully against the devil ourselves. This point is demonstrated by a passage in Sermon 39,3 where Leo tells us that

> "he fought the battle then so that we too might fight it afterwards; he has conquered so that we too might conquer in the same way" (Sermon 39,3,79b-81b).

In the light of this it seems much more likely that Christ confronts the devil in his humility with the "logic of justice" not in such a way that these are mere "sporting tactics" employed in order to defeat Satan "fairly", but in as much as they furnish us with, firstly, that ultimate revelation of the divine mercy which promises that Satan's deceptions concerning the future blessing are false, and, secondly, an example of how we as individuals are to overcome the devil. We must continually recall what we said earlier about Christ defeating the devil by his revelation to us of the reality both of the divine mercy and of the truth of the system of merit and reward. This would suggest that the promise of future blessing based on this system of merit and reward is the real *iustitia rationis* - the real "logical structure of justice", as we might paraphrase it - and that the cycle of incarnation, passion, and resurrection

reveals the nature of the reward (glorification), the guarantee of the reward (the divine mercy), and the attainability of the reward (by human merit).

This interpretation is supported by a passage from Sermon 56,1. Here Leo tells us that

> "if divinity alone had stood forth on behalf of sinners, the devil would have been conquered not so much by reason (*ratio*) as by power (*potestas*). On the other hand, if mortal nature alone had pleaded the cause of the fallen, it would not have been divested of its condition or free of [the punishment due to] its race. It was necessary that both the divine and the human substance should come together into the one Lord Jesus Christ, so that, through the Word made flesh, both the birth of the new man and his suffering should come to the aid of our mortality" (Sermon 56,1,27-34).

The incarnation makes possible a conquest of Satan which is "logical" in so far as it is achieved in virtue of human nature which is free of the "logical" consequences of being human - that is, the illogicality of servitude to Satan and of liability to death and punishment which flow from our irrational rejection of the divine promise of mercy. In Sermon 40,3 we find once again a reference to the opposition between "power" and "mystery", and Leo writes that Christ could have turned stones into bread in accord with the devil's command, but that

> "here it was more in keeping with his plans for salvation that the guile of the most proud enemy should be overcome by the Lord not with the power of his divinity (*potentia Deitatis*) but by the mystery of his lowliness (*humilitatis mysterio*)" (Sermon 40,3,63b-68b).

The reference to "the mystery of his lowliness" recalls the Christological motif of the "form of a servant", which as we have seen is a device for explaining how the Word communicates objective graces to the sacred humanity. Here these graces are what makes this humanity "free of [the punishment due to] its race" and so renders it "logically" capable of delivering us from demonic captivity. It achieves this, within the parameters of the "logic" of being human, primarily by revealing for our contemplation the "logic" of the divine nature as merciful and loving in such a way that, no longer deceived by the devil into thinking that there is no hope, we are free to effect the "transference of desires" away from servitude to Satan and in the direction of a proper (or "logical") subjection of the flesh to the government of the soul and of the soul to the government of God.

The theme is taken up again in Sermon 63,1 where Leo explains that

> "God's Son, in his omnipotence (equal to the Father through the same essence), could in fact have rescued the human race from the devil's sway by nothing more than a command from his will. It was especially in conformity with his divine work, however, that the hostility of the enemy's wickedness should be overcome by what he had conquered, and that the liberty of one nature should be restored through the same nature by which the captivity of all had been brought into effect" (Sermon 63,1,4-10).

The emphasis here is on the contrast between "liberty" and "captivity", and the underlying theme is that, because it was in freedom that we consigned ourselves to demonic captivity, it is in accordance with the divine logic that we should be liberated in a way fully consonant with that human freedom. However, man under sin is not free, so the incarnation produces a man who enjoys freedom from concupiscence and freedom from slavery of the mind to the world, the flesh, and the devil. This man - Jesus Christ - operates by way of mystery to render human beings free from this slavery of the mind by applying to us in the sacraments the fruits of his incarnation, passion, resurrection, and ascension, and he operates by way of example to reveal to us the divine mercy and its attendant rewards as a viable choice, and to demonstrate the way which we must follow if we are freely to embrace the choice that has been offered.

Finally, we may note in this regard a passage in Sermon 55,3 which suggests a contrast between the kenotic logic of the incarnation and passion which achieves exaltation through humiliation, and the diabolical logic of pride which seeks to snatch exaltation through self-aggrandisement. Thus Leo writes that on the Cross

> "the blood of a spotless Lamb effaced the pact of that ancient transgression. There the whole perversity of the devil's mastery was abolished, while humility triumphed as conqueror over the vaunting of pride" (Sermon 55,3,50-53).

Once again the emphasis is on the triumph brought about by Christ's humility - which as we have seen is the "aspect" that he puts on in order to make us able to contemplate his divine attributes of mercy and love. This in turn brings about the "transference of desires" which the mysteries have made possible and which represents a "logical" and "just" way for us to withdraw ourselves from slavery to the devil in whose servitude we freely and willingly entered on the basis of a deception. Accordingly, the

preference for "logic" or "mystery" over "power" as a means for conquering the devil has, one strongly suspects, nothing to do with ideas of what might be termed "Olympic sportsmanship", but relates instead to the revelatory character of the redemption. Because enslavement to the devil depends on man's freely believing the devil's deceptions concerning the impossibility of mercy and merit, a mere act of transfer ordered by the divine power would succeed in delivering man from bondage, but would not take account of human freedom and would in any case leave him prone to re-enslavement through future deception. It is quite simply not good enough for the Word to transfer us from captivity to the devil to servitude to God. The real slavery is a slavery of ignorance concerning the divine mercy and the system of merit and reward, and a divinely disposed transference of man from demonic to divine possession would achieve nothing lasting or substantial.

Similarly, it seems likely that the inability of mortal nature to deliver us from the condition that was attached to our race also has to do with revelation. The condition in question is death, or, to be more precise, that loss of belief in the promise of life which inevitably culminates in death. The solution, it would be safe to say, goes well beyond the "mystical" aspect of atonement by which Christ heals our flesh and our minds in order to render the "transference of desires" possible, and encompasses (a) the revelation of resurrection and the hope of future reward based on free merit that this brings, and (b) the exemplification of the way in which we are to achieve resurrection and reward through the exercise of our newly restored freedom. When Leo denies that mortal nature could have delivered us from our condition, it appears probable that he means at least in part that man descended from Adam was in such a state of ignorance and deception that he could in no way reveal the truth about mercy and merit. Such a man could never have freely merited glorification either for himself or, by way of example, for others, and in any case could at best have revealed only perfect humanity and not the divine mercy. At the same time, a purely divine redeemer would have undermined the *ratio* of things - that is to say, the system of merit and reward - for, as is clear if one steps back for a moment and assesses the question from a systematic standpoint, God Himself cannot freely merit in any meaningful sense. A God-man is required because the divine element reveals the divine

condescension and hence the divine mercy and saving will, while the humanity is required in order to manifest the way of merit and free choice of the good. The two natures in Christ reflect the double aspect of revelation, which is a revelation firstly of the saving will of God and secondly of the way in which human beings can appropriate that salvation.

Leo does not underestimate the rôle played by Christ's divinity in all this, as is made evident when he argues that

> "the majesty of the Son . . . , clothing itself in the humility of a servant, had no fear of being diminished, nor was there any room for it to be increased. Through the power of the divinity, this majesty alone was able to accomplish the effect of its mercy (which it was expending on the restoration of humanity) - namely, to rescue from servitude under a cruel oppressor that creature which had been made according to the image of God" (Sermon 28,3,35-39).

The "form of a servant" Christology ensures that the divine power acts upon the conjoined humanity in such a way that Christ as man is able freely to transfer his own desires from Satan to God and at the same time reveal for our contemplation the divine attributes of mercy and love which are veiled under the servant's form. Leo adds that

> "since the devil had not dealt with the first human being so violently as to bring him over to his side without the consent of free will, that voluntary sin, along with the enemy's plan, needed to be destroyed in such a way that the standards of justice might not be violated by the gift of grace. In the general downfall of the entire human race there was only one remedy in the secrets of the divine plan that could help those who had been laid low - namely, if a son of Adam, with no part in and innocent of the original betrayal, should be born to profit others with both his example and his merits" (Sermon 28,3,40-48).

What is lost in the fall is the freedom of human beings to achieve the "transference of desires" and to merit the reward of final exaltation, and Christ's task is to restore this freedom by a free act of merit which is rendered possible by the incarnation. We in turn are enabled to imitate this free act of merit by the sacraments of the Church - in which we are put in touch with Christ's healing power - and by Christ's exemplification firstly of the divine mercy as an option for all, and, secondly, of the lifestyle required if we are to choose that option in our newly acquired freedom.

## The Overstepping of the Mark

Exactly how does Leo understand the divine justice? One could argue that for Leo *iustitia* denotes receiving not what one *deserves* but what one *desires*. This helps to explain how men can be said to be justly held captive by Satan, and, by extension, explains how Leo can write in a passage that we looked at earlier that

> "it was not unjust (*inmerito*) for the pride of this ancient enemy to arrogate to himself a tyrannical rule (*ius tyrannicum*) over all people. Nor was that dominion beneath which he crushed them unwarranted (*indebito*). After all, he had induced them to come over of their own accord from the law of God to obeying his will. In all justice, the slavery of this race could not rightly (*iuste*) be taken away from him once it had been surrendered - unless the very race which he had brought into subjection should overcome him" (Sermon 22,3,102b-110b; 136a-143a).

The devil's deception of man leads to a free and voluntary transference of desires from God to Satan with the result that it is "just" that man should have received the sentence of death in which he has come to believe and which he even wills to be true. Leo explains that a free decision to submit ourselves to servitude could be reversed only by a free decision for God - which after the fall was impossible because we were no longer free. This paradoxical situation is resolved by Christ, and Leo adds that

> "in order that this might happen, Christ was brought forth without the seed of a man - from a virgin whom no human intercourse but rather the Holy Spirit had made fruitful. Although no conception takes place in mothers, as a rule, without the stain of sin, this mother derived cleansing from the very source that gave her to conceive" (Sermon 28,3,110b-118b).

In other words, it was "just" that man should escape captivity to the devil only if he actually came freely to desire such an escape, for the conquest of the devil that mankind must accomplish is achieved through knowledge of the divine mercy and the practice of the meritorious life which leads to heavenly reward. Only a sinless man with sinless flesh born of a virgin and a sinless soul governed by the Word could achieve this freely willed "transference of desires" and could make the divine mercy known to others in expectation of their own free response - for which reason the "conquest of Satan" is very much dependent upon orthodox Christology.

In an important text in Sermon 22,4 Leo describes how Christ effectively deceives Satan into losing dominion over human beings. This deception is rooted in the

Christology of the "form of a servant", and Leo writes that

> "the merciful and omnipotent Saviour controlled the process through which he first took on human nature in such a way as to veil under our weakness the divinity that was inseparable from his humanity. As a result, the shrewdness of the complacent enemy had been circumvented. He thought that the birth of this boy (begotten for the salvation of the human race) to be no less subject to himself than that of anyone else who happens to be born" (Sermon 22,4,144-149).

The devil tried to work out who or what Christ was, and Leo describes how

> "he inflicted outrages, multiplied injuries, brought curses, insults, blasphemies, and reproaches against him. In short, he poured out onto him all the violence of his rage, and exhausted every kind of trial. Knowing the poison that he had injected into human nature, in no way did he believe him to be free from original sin (*trangressionis exortem*), since he had ascertained his mortality from so many indications of it. Consequently, this wicked plunderer and greedy collector held out against someone who of himself had done nothing by way of rebellion. In following up on the presumption of a corrupt origin (*vitiatae originis*), he uproots the decree (*chirographum*) upon which he was relying, and he exacts a penalty for iniquity (*iniquitatis poenam*) from someone in whom he found no fault (*culpam*)" (Sermon 22,4,153-163).

The key points here are that the devil, who has duped man into thinking that salvation is impossible, is himself duped into thinking that Christ is not a potential saviour. His dupes have effectively condemned themselves to death by their diabolical decision in favour of death and away from belief in the divine mercy, and Satan duly assumes that Christ has done the same. In other words, he carries out a sentence to which he supposes Christ has himself willingly agreed. Crucially, the devil is not deceived into thinking that Christ is sinful, but only into thinking that he is mortal. His mistake consists in arguing from visible mortality to supposed sinfulness rather than from visible sinlessness to consequent immortality. He presumes that anyone who is mortal may justly be slain, but reckons without the fact of someone whose desires are freely and perfectly ordered towards God and yet who voluntarily embraces the penalty of death in order to reveal the divine mercy and the reality of resurrection.

Leo goes on to contend that, because the devil committed an injustice in seeking more than he was owed, the whole debt is cancelled. Satan is "bound by his own chains", and all his evil devices "recoil upon his own head". The prince of this world

is bound, and all whom he held in captivity are released. Here the legal language serves to express strictly theological truths. The devil is owed nothing by God, but is owed allegiance by man who has freely transferred his desires from God to Satan. Man's debt to the devil, in an inversion of the unanimity with God in which the *imago Dei* consists, is expressed through union of will with Satan. The devil's injustice consists in putting to what he regards as eternal death someone who - uniquely - desires not what Satan desires but who freely wills for himself only temporary death followed by eternal life; for as we have seen, in Leo's soteriology one gets what one wants and wants what one thinks one is going to get.

In what sense does that injustice result in the cancellation of the whole debt? The key may well lie in the statement that Satan is "bound by his own chains". It is certainly arguable that, for Leo, Satan's chains are the ignorance of the divine mercy and of the system of merit and reward by which he keeps the desires of man orientated in his own direction. However, when he himself comes to believe, against all the evidence, that human merit (in the person of the God-man Christ) is a sheer impossibility, then *he* is the one who is duped, and *he* is the one who comes to disbelieve the divine mercy. More importantly, we could postulate that the injustice done by Satan is so manifest that the divine mercy becomes clear to all, with the result that every one of Satan's captives is now free to transfer his desires back to God in full knowledge of the divine mercy and the system of merit and reward.

Finally, we must remind ourselves that what these captives are released from is loss of human freedom and, in consequence, a tendency towards eternal death, and that they are delivered from this mortal captivity by the incarnate Word - who by way of "mystery" applies the fruits of his birth, death, and resurrection to them in the sacraments in order to subordinate their flesh to their souls and their souls to God, and who by way of example reveals the choices that they are now free to make and demonstrates what they have to do in order to make those choices. Some of this may sound somewhat speculative, but it seems the best way to account for the claim that one injustice on the part of the devil results in the cancellation of the whole debt. We are, after all, interested not only in the content of Leo's thought, but also in how it all hangs together.

Indeed, our argument finds support in Sermon 62,3 where Leo argues that

> "in order that he might release humanity from the chains of baneful deceit, he [Christ] hid the power of his majesty from the furious devil and also put forward the weakness of our lowliness. If, however, the cruel and proud foe had been able to know the plan of God's mercy, he would rather have been eager to calm the spirits of the Jews with gentleness than to fire them with unjust hatred - in order to save himself from losing the servitude of all his captives through persecuting the liberty of someone who owed him nothing" (Sermon 62,3,58-65).

What emerges from this is that the devil is ignorant of God's merciful plan for our salvation. In consequence of this ignorance he persecutes Christ's liberty - that is to say, his freedom to choose temporary death leading to everlasting life in preference to eternal death. Christ owes the devil nothing; in other words, he does not owe the devil that companionship in his terrible fate which Satan initially sought from man when he deceived him into losing hope in the divine mercy and universal salvific will. But how does this bring about the release of all the devil's captives? Leo goes on to describe how

> "as a result his malice failed. He inflicted punishment upon the Son of God - punishment that was to turn into healing for every human being. He poured out that righteous blood which was the price and the cup for reconciling the world. Our Lord undertook what he chose according to the design of his will. He allowed the wicked hands of persecutors on himself. These, bent on their own crime, were serving the Redeemer's purpose" (Sermon 62,3,65-71).

This would seem to imply that the devil's loss of his captives in virtue of his slaying of Christ has nothing to do with legality as such, and that the language of the loss of rights is not to be taken too literally. On the contrary, Satan loses his captives because in killing Christ he is unwittingly contributing to Christ's saving activity.

Ironically, the devil actively enables Christ to heal us - by which term, in this particular context, Leo is surely referring not only to the healing activity of the Word upon the flesh of Christ which takes place in virtue of the hypostatic union and which is communicated to us through baptism and the Eucharist, but also to the healing knowledge of the divine mercy as manifested in incarnation, passion, and resurrection which the crucifixion makes possible. This, we must emphasise, is *not* to say that Leo's soteriology operates solely at the level of saving knowledge, for the theology of the "transference of desires" involves both the purification of the flesh

and the healing of the will which is re-orientated by the grace of the Word from earthly to heavenly considerations - as well as Christ's work of revelation which unveils divine contemplation as an option and shows us the best way to opt for it.

Of more immediate interest in the passage under consideration, however, is the way in which the devil duly facilitates the pouring out of Christ's blood - which becomes a reconciliation, a *pretium* and a *poculum*. The word "reconciliation" suggests our favourite themes of the right orientation of the mind and the transference of desires, in so far as it marks a kind of return of the affections to a former object. The word *pretium* is probably to be understood not in its primary sense of a "price" (a price paid to the devil or even to God), but in its other sense of a "reward". It is more in keeping with the general tenor of Leo's thought to regard the shedding of Christ's blood as a free meritorious act that obtains the reward of glorification for Christ himself, and, by extension, as a reward that is offered to us in return for faith in the divine mercy. This would in turn explain the reference to *poculum*, which sounds highly eucharistic, and suggests in this particular context that Leo regards the Eucharist (a) as a means to reconciliation and (b) as a means both to obtaining our heavenly reward and to experiencing that reward proleptically in the present.

Thus, when we come across a statement such as the one in Sermon 61,4 where Leo writes that the terms of our sale to the devil are wiped out, and the pact which led to our captivity is transferred (*transiit*) to the jurisdiction of the Redeemer, we should be very wary of over-literal interpretations. Leo writes that

> "the universal edict of death (*chirographum*) which proclaimed our sale into bondage (*venditionis*) has been made void, and the contractual rights have been transferred to the Redeemer (*pactum captivitatis in ius transiit Redemptoris*)" (Sermon 61,4,77-79).

As before, it is what comes next that qualifies and explains the vocabulary of ransom and exchange. Leo writes that

> "those same nails that pierced the hands and feet of the Lord transfixed the devil with perpetual wounds, and the punishment of holy limbs was the slaying of the inimical powers, in as much as Christ so consummated his victory that in him and with him all who believe may triumph" (Sermon 61,4,79-83).

There are two things to note here. Firstly, the language of ransom and exchange has given way to the language of conquest - as if certainly the former and possibly the

latter were intended in a more or less metaphorical manner. Appropriation of Christ's victory depends on faith, and the consummation of Christ's conquest finds its corollary in the triumph of those who believe. As we have seen, captivity to Satan consists in believing his lies about the impossibility of salvation, and the work of Christ comprises a grand revelation of the divine mercy and of the system of merit and reward. It makes sense, then, that Leo should qualify a statement about the transference of jurisdictions couched in the strong legal terminology which characterises the ransom-theory with a reference to triumph through belief.

It would probably not be going to far to say that the vocabulary of ransom and exchange really is little more than rhetoric and metaphor, and that Leo's true doctrine relates to the idea of salvation by revelation. The language of captivity, according to this understanding, is a metaphor for intellectual captivity or deception about the truth of the divine mercy, while the language of exchange is a metaphor for what Leo in Sermon 16 refers to as the "transference of desires", which the "undeceiving" of human beings by means of that revelation which is achieved through passion and resurrection renders possible. Such a conclusion does no violence to the text, and facilitates the reconciliation of what modern interpreters might regard as worryingly mythological vocabulary with the altogether more sophisticated content of Leo's overall world-view. Secondly, the victory of Christ does not once and for all transfer us out of servitude to the devil, but renders such a transfer *possible*. The conquest of the devil is an ongoing affair which the incarnation and passion of Christ inaugurate.

In spite of some of the terminology employed elsewhere, Leo does not think in cut and dried terms of a unified mankind which Satan possesses and which he is forced to hand back to God because he has simply gone too far in the case of Christ. Instead, he sees the battle against Satan as a continuing fight against ignorance and deception which is especially manifested in Leo's own time in the shape of the conflict with heresy. In the light of this we may probably conclude that the transference of jurisdictions of which Leo speaks refers merely to the fact that Christ's passion opens up the possibility of knowledge of the truth concerning the divine mercy and the system of merit and reward. The transference of jurisdictions is essentially a transformation of possibilities, and we must not allow literal interpretations of the

legal imagery to divert us from appreciating the underlying theology.

## Faith in the Divine Mercy

In Sermon 62,4 Leo introduces Judas Iscariot as a kind of type of the man who has lost faith in the divine mercy. God offers us the forgiveness of sins, but

> "Judas, the traitor, could not come to this forgiveness. That son of perdition, at whose right hand stood the devil, sank into despair before Christ completed the mystery of universal redemption. When the Lord died for all the sinful, Judas could perhaps have been able to profit by this healing as well, had he not hastened to the noose. In his evil heart, however, which was now given over to the fraudulent thefts of a criminal, now busy with hired killers, there remained nothing at all of the proofs of the Saviour's mercy. He had heard with his wicked ears the words of the Lord when he said 'I did not come to call the just but to call sinners', and 'the Son of man has come to seek and out save what has perished', but he had not understood the kindness of Christ" (Sermon 62,4,81-92).

In other words, damnation is coterminous with despair, and death is equivalent to ignorance concerning the mercy of God (Sermon 24,6), and this ignorance which Judas manifests is shared by the devil, who, in his diabolical pride, was ignorant of the mystery of Christ's saving love (Sermon 69,4). Judas is for Leo the type of the man-under-Satan who is radically unable to believe in the divine mercy and universal salvific will, and all sin is a reflection of his loss of faith in the economy of mercy and in the system of punishment and reward.

The corollary of this equation of death with ignorance and faith with life is that it is faith in the divine mercy that transfers us from captivity to freedom. Thus in Sermon 22,4 Leo writes that

> "purged from the ancient contagion, nature returns to its dignity, death is dispelled by death, birth restored to birth. All at once, redemption takes away slavery, regeneration changes the beginning, and faith justifies the sinner" (Sermon 22,4,175-178).

This passage implies a number of models of atonement which, it might reasonably be argued, are all subsumed under the heading of "salvation by faith". Thus the return from contamination to honour through purification refers most especially to that mental purification which proceeds from right belief. The reference to the destruction of death by death presupposes the idea that death equals ignorance, and means that

Christ's knowledge-bringing death destroys and replaces the old ignorance-based death, leading in due course to resurrection and life. The reparation of nativity by nativity refers to the new birth of baptism which is founded upon a profession of orthodox faith. Finally, the removal of servitude denotes our release from ignorance concerning the divine mercy and the liberty that comes through fiducial knowledge directed towards contemplation of God as loving and merciful.

Leo re-interprets the traditional legal vocabulary of redemption in terms of salvation by faith. Thus in Sermon 64,3 he tells us that

> "the shedding of just blood for unjust men had the power of a legal bill on behalf of defendants (*privilegium*) and the financial value of a payment (*pretium*), so that if the universality of captives were to believe in its Redeemer, the tyrannical chains would retain no individual in their grasp" (Sermon 64,3,55-58).

This passage seems to depend on a *non sequitur* in that it is not at all obvious what relation the act of faith has to the rendering effective of a legal transaction. After all, if a legal transaction has accomplished our redemption, what salvific role is played by faith? One suspects that the legal language in the first half of the sentence is more a rhetorical device than a serious model of atonement. Its real purpose is to underline the fact that the universal salvific will has been translated into universal salvific action (hence the reference to the *universitas captivorum*), and to teach that this salvation is appropriated through faith. Faith perfects the act of atonement because it is only when the divine mercy is believed in that redemption has taken place - though, as we shall see, Leo also insists on the rôle of good works by which we reflect the *imago Dei* and imitate the mercy of God.

A similar point is made in Sermon 66,1. Here Leo writes that

> "the redemption wrought by the Saviour destroyed the work of the devil, shattering the chains of sin and so disposing the sacrament of his great loving-kindness that the prescribed plenitude of the generations might last until the consummation of the world, and the renovation of human origins through the justification obtained by a single faith might belong to all past ages" (Sermon 66,1,23-28).

We have already suggested that the words *sacramentum* and *mysterium* often have to do with the idea of revelation. That being the case, what we have here is a statement that the revelation of the divine mercy extends across time to all generations with a view to effecting universal salvation, and that it is appropriated in all periods of

human history through a faith which brings about the "renovation of human origins" - a re-origination which, we may safely assume in the light of Leo's overall doctrine, proceeds from that profession of faith at baptism which in turn leads to our benefiting from the "physical" effects of the mysteries of Christ's incarnate life.

The same idea is expressed again in Sermon 69, where Leo writes that Christ

> "drained the chalice of sorrow and death, thereby transforming the entire affliction into triumph. Error was overcome, and the powers of evil were suppressed. So the world received a new beginning in order that a condemned generation might not stand in the way of those whom regeneration was helping towards salvation. Old things have passed away, and all things have been made new. For through him and with him a share both in the passion and in the eternity of the resurrection belong in a similar way to all those believing in Christ and reborn in the Holy Spirit" (Sermon 69,4,93-100).

The "transference into triumph" is a transference from ignorance to knowledge, and is achieved by Christ's death which is revelation-bringing rather than ignorance-induced. This revelatory transference ends condemnation to capital punishment (*supplicium*), overcomes error, re-originates the world, and gives regeneration (that is, baptismal regeneration through baptismal faith) to a people freed from the perishability caused by ignorance. Finally, faith, and the baptismal re-birth which sacramentalises faith, lead to eternal life in union with Christ by way of participation in his passion, which, as we have seen, reveals and exemplifies the way to resurrection.

This last point is taken up again in Sermon 72,1 where Leo reiterates that

> "the Cross of Christ (which represents the cost of saving mortals) is both a mystery and an example - a sacrament whereby the divine power takes effect and an example whereby man's devotion is excited. To those who are rescued from the prisoner's yoke, redemption procures the additional power of following the way of the Cross by imitation" (Sermon 72,1,15-19).

The mystery of the passion works as sacrament, in so far as it represents a salvific revelation of the divine mercy, and as an example, in as much as it reveals the way in which we are to appropriate the mystery. Leo is telling us here that redemption works on the level of *mysterium* in that it heals and re-orders our flesh and our minds to God, and also on the level of *exemplum* in that it reveals in a saving way the true character of the divine mercy, and teaches us how to apply that saving mercy to ourselves

through the soul's government of the flesh and through its self-ordering towards God.

Later in the same Sermon Leo elucidates a theme on which we have already touched in this chapter, writing of Christ that

> "he offered himself (though free of debt) to his cruel taskmaster [the devil], allowing the violence of the Jews (as servants of the devil) to crucify his sinless flesh. He wanted his flesh to be subject to death until his speedy resurrection. That way, persecution might not be insuperable for those who believe in him, nor death frightening. As we must not doubt our participation in his glory (*consortio gloriae*), so we must not doubt his participation in our nature (*communione naturae*)" (Sermon 72,2,48-55).

The first part of this passage is cast in that conventional legal language which we have suggested Leo intends us to understand in a purely rhetorical manner. The second part expounds the idea that passion and resurrection reveal to us that persecution and death are essentially positive, and that the incarnation (whose reality the passion and resurrection prove) serves as a guarantee of that future glorification which the devil tried to snatch for himself and which he subsequently persuaded Adam to snatch, and whose attainability by merit the devil's work of deception categorically denied. The key thing about the paschal mystery, then, is that it removes doubt about the divine mercy. In other words, it has everything to do with a soteriology of revelation ordered towards a spirituality of contemplating the divine mercy and love, and very little to do with legal transactions.

Leo goes on to show how the ascension plays a part in countering the devil's deception. Through the ascension

> "we are not only established as possessors of paradise, but we have even penetrated the heights of heaven in Christ, prepared more fully for it through the indescribable grace of Christ which we had lost through the ill will of the devil. Those whom the violent enemy threw down from the happiness of our first dwelling the Son of God has placed, incorporated within himself, at the right hand of the Father" (Sermon 73,4,74-80).

Granted that, as we have argued, Leo does not intend such statements in a "physical" or "realist" sense, the only alternative is an interpretation in line with the theory of the "transference of desires". The exile from paradise caused by the devil constitutes a transference of desires from heaven to earth, from life to death, from God to Satan. Membership of Christ, as we have seen, is to be understood baptismally and hence in

terms of attachment to Christ through faith. Our being placed at the right hand of the Father denotes a re-orientation of desires from earth to heaven, from death to life, from Satan to God. Christ's ascension directs our desires to the heavenly paradise and relocates them there, in such a way that we possess an even greater perception of God's love than that which the devil deceived us into losing.

By way of conclusion we need to summarise briefly the nature of the relationship of the doctrine of redemption to the theology of the spiritual life. Spirituality is ordered towards the contemplation of God - and, in particular, towards liturgical contemplation of his mercy and love - but, owing to the fact that the devil has deceived us into losing hope in the divine mercy, we are effectively enslaved to the forces of darkness. The cycle of incarnation, passion, resurrection, and ascension acts upon us through the medium of the sacraments of the Church as *mysteria* in order to apply to us the healing and purification of our flesh and of our souls, and and acts upon us through revelation as *exemplum* to lead us to faith in the divine and human natures in Christ and in his promise of mercy - in short, in the kind of God to whom we are called to transfer our desires by way of contemplation. At the same time, the devil continues to be duped by his own lies, with the result that his slaying of Christ makes the manifestation of the "new creation" even more obvious to us and effectively transfers us into its ambit. With flesh and spirit healed and purified by the mystical aspect of Christ's work and with minds enlightened by the exemplary aspect, we are now free to choose the transference of desires from earthly to heavenly and from Satan to God, and are presented with clear knowledge of what the God of mercy is like and of how we can transfer our desires in his direction.

# Chapter Nine

# THE CHRISTIAN COMBAT

## The Ongoing Fight

One of the corollaries of Leo's doctrine of Christ's conquest of Satan is that we too must battle against the devil who, even after his defeat, endeavours to win back what he has lost by preventing us from pursuing the path of spiritual perfection and of the "transference of desires". True Christian spirituality - at the level of the layperson as well as at the level of the monk - demands an asceticism which constitutes the way by which we ascend in mind to God, and which represents the necessary preparation for that contemplation of the Trinity as merciful and saving in which the goal of the spiritual life consists. We have seen that Leo's doctrine of the atonement operates on two distinct but ultimately interrelated levels - in the first instance, the level of mystical healing of flesh and soul by which we are rendered free to choose the divine mercy, and, in the second instance, the level of exemplary revelation (by Christ as God) of the divine mercy which we are now free to choose and the exemplary revelation (by Christ as man) of the proper means of choosing it. Each of these processes must be duly accomplished if the mind is to be free to contemplate *spiritualia* and *caelestia*, and, during the course of the present chapter, we shall be describing how the ascetic life enables even the lay Christian to be set free for the contemplative life of the "transference of desires" and the *imago Dei*.

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A source of embarrassment for many modern interpreters of the fathers is the latter's preoccupation with the unceasing human struggle against the powers of darkness. In the west, Sulpicius Severus's "Life of Saint Martin" provides perhaps the most classic instance of a spirituality centred around our conflict with Satan and his minions, but the motif recurs throughout much of the monastic literature, and clearly represents an important part of the patristic conception of the spiritual life.1 However, the battle against the devil is not confined to the monastery, but extends to the lay experience as well, as is apparent, for example, from the sermons of the great Italian preachers of the period such as Maximus of Turin and Chromatius of Aquileia. Leo the Great, who as we have argued may be regarded as representing the high-point of such a tradition, develops a sober and profound spirituality based upon this theme, and it is this aspect of Leo's spiritual wisdom that we intend to discuss in this present chapter.

As we have suggested, the struggle of human beings against Satan does not cease with the triumph of Christ's resurrection, and the resurrection does not represent an absolute victory, but only the making *possible* of victory. Leo believes Satan sees that

> "the power of the eternal king is invincible, in as much as his death has extinguished the power of death itself. Therefore he has armed himself with all his skill to injure those who serve the true king, hardening some men by the pride that knowledge of the law engenders, debasing some by the lies of false belief, and inciting others to the madness of persecution" (Sermon 36,2,45-50).

In one way or another, then, the devil continues the fight against Christ's servants, and, though he has lost the servitude of humankind as a whole, he strives to regain that of individual human beings. Indeed, it is precisely *because* of his loss that he struggles so hard. Thus Leo says that

> "in his blasphemous fury the despoiled foe seeks new gains in order to compensate for the loss of his ancient right. Unwearied and ever-wakeful, he snatches at any sheep that he finds straying carelessly from the sacred folds, being intent on leading them over the steeps of pleasure and down the slopes of luxury into the abodes of death. For this reason he inflames their wrath, feeds their hatred, whets their desires, mocks at their continence, and arouses their gluttony" (Sermon 40,2,39-45).

Leo is convinced that everything that is harmful to the progress of the

spiritual life is of diabolical origin, and that this applies particularly to that which leads us away from orthodox faith. As we have seen, the devil deceives us most especially by causing us to lose hope in salvation, and this is best achieved by his proposing to us false Christologies of the sort put forward by Nestorius and Eutyches which effectively empty our faith of a realistic hope of redemption. Leo writes that

> "because that instigator and author of sin whom pride first caused to fall and then envy caused to do harm did not stand fast in the truth, he has put all his effort into falsehood. He has manufactured from this most poisonous fountain of his craft every manner of deception. His aim is to shut off any hope that human beings might have of arriving through devotion at that good which he himself had forfeited by self-exaltation. He would like to draw them into a partnership with himself in condemnation (*consortium damnationis*), since he himself cannot have access to that reconciliation which could be theirs" (Sermon 9,1,14-21).

All such error proceeds from Satan, who through his fostering of error and, in particular, of false teaching about the incarnation, diverts us from the "transference of desires" and the *imago Dei* and indeed encourages a kind of reverse transference of desires from the heavenly to the earthly, from the spiritual to the fleshly, from hope to despair, and, ultimately, from the divine to the demonic. Leo observes that

> "whatever is forced on you contrary to the Christian faith, whatever is presented to you contrary to the commandments of God, it comes from the deception of the one who tries with so many wiles to divert you from eternal life, and, by seizing certain occasions of human weakness, leads careless and negligent souls again into his snares of death" (Sermon 57,5,87-92).

In other words, the devil is prepared to use every means at his disposal in order to try to restore the servitude of as many as possible of the human beings of whom he has been deprived. We have argued that the saving work of Christ involves a transference of the human race from servitude to Satan to servitude to God, but this atoning transference does not in any sense violate human freedom, for each of us is required to effect his or her own transference of desires from Satan to Christ in order to benefit from an act of redemption which consists less in the communication of automatic effects to mankind than in the making possible of the transference of desires for individuals. This is implicit in Leo's remark that

> "although the cruel tyrant's depredation was undone through the power of the Cross of Christ, and the domination of the prince of the world was cast out of the bodies of the redeemed, in his malignity he

> continues, nevertheless, to lay traps for the justified, and in numerous ways attacks those in whom he no longer reigns, so that if he finds any soul behaving imprudently or negligently he entwines it in still more savage nets, and, having seized it, leads it from the paradise of the Church into a sharing in his own damnation" (Sermon 70,4,86-93).

In short, our transference from devil to Christ is not irreversible, but simply affords us the *opportunity* to attain final salvation through the medium of the "transference of desires", without necessarily ensuring that we shall not be duped once again into a transference of desires in the opposite direction. Christ restores our freedom, and genuine freedom inevitably involves an element of contingency which, by definition, means that those who have freely opted to embrace God can freely opt to reject him. For this reason Leo tells us that

> "Christians must take great care not to be caught once again by the devil's wiles and not to become entangled in the very errors which they have renounced. For the ancient enemy, transforming himself into an angel of light, does not cease from laying down everywhere the snares of deception, and does not stop trying to do whatever it takes to corrupt the faith of believers" (Sermon 27,3,57-62).

The correlation between the baptismal renunciation of error and transference away from the devil is further broached in Sermon 41,2 where once again the process is shown to be reversible. Leo observes that,

> "if the devil used his craft to try to deceive our Lord and Saviour, how much more does he presume to attack *us* in our characteristic fragility. Now that we have rejected him in baptism and have been transferred by the divine regeneration away from that origin as a result of which we lay under his diabolical domination and into the origin of a new creature, he pursues us with a particularly ferocious hatred and a more savage antipathy" (Sermon 41,2,53-58).

Leo takes up this point once again in Sermon 57 where he makes the point that the transference of desires which is effected in the sacrament of baptism is not a magical thing which guarantees the proper orientation of flesh and spirit towards God for all time, but is merely an inaugurated transference of desires which can in theory be lost and which, as we have already suggested, needs to be maintained by a lifestyle in which the transference of desires is constantly renewed at the level of Christian ethics. Leo tells us that

> "all who are all re-born through water and the Holy Spirit must remember whom they have renounced and by what [baptismal]

> profession they were liberated from the yoke of his tyrannical domination, lest they should turn to the help of the death-bringing devil either in prosperity or in adversity" (Sermon 57,5,92-96).

The threat posed by the devil to the re-created Christian is unceasing and universal. Once again, this threat is primarily a threat against our faith, and the exhortation to resist the enemy through "steadfast faith" is surely a direct reference to the importance of maintaining that right belief with regard to questions of Christology which will guarantee our hope of salvation through the healing of flesh and spirit and the ascent of contemplation. Leo warns us that

> "the crafty tempter is universally present and leaves nothing free from his snares. With the help of God's mercy - which is always extended to us in the midst of any adversity - we must resist him through steadfast faith. As a result, though the evil one never ceases to assail us, he may never succeed in his assaults" (Sermon 68,4,92-97).

Diabolical temptation comes primarily in the form of sins of heresy and sins of the flesh. However, from a strictly theological point of view, all sin, as we have demonstrated, is founded upon a basic ignorance of the divine mercy - an ignorance which is the medium through which Satan ensnared man in the first place. This explains the key passage where Leo remarks that the devil

> "was a liar from the beginning, and he thrives only on the art of deceiving, to lead astray human ignorance by a show of false conscience, and now to be the wicked instigator of those for whom he will afterwards be the wicked accuser" (Sermon 57,5,96-100).

It is the apparent hopelessness of salvation that lures human beings into committing sinful acts, and, most especially, it is the devil's success in persuading them out of belief in the divine mercy and in that system of merit and reward which is rooted in human freedom. The only remedy for this is an orthodox Christology which reinstates the hope of salvation and which reveals the truth of the universal salvific will in whose absolute reality Leo, following Prosper of Aquitaine, has a profound and unshakeable belief.

Within this context, the devil understands precisely how to deceive each of us on an individual basis - frequently going well beyond the more basic expedient of luring us into heresy. As Leo informs us in Sermon 27,3

> "he knows to which one he should apply the flames of desire, to

> which one he should suggest the enticements of gluttony, to which one he should offer the allurements of sensuality, into which one he should pour the slime of envy. He knows which one to disturb with sadness, which one to deceive with joy, which one to oppress with fear, which one to seduce with flattery. He dissects the character of each one, exposes their cares, and pries into their inclinations. Whenever he has observed an individual to be excessively taken with something, it is there that he looks for ways to do harm" (Sermon 27,3,63-69).

This last passage indicates that the devil's malign activity extends to every conceivable area of our lives. The inculcation of theological error in general and of Christological heresy in particular may be his most powerful weapon, but Leo presents him as possessing a frighteningly intimate knowledge of the inner psychology of each individual Christian, and leaves us in no doubt as to exactly what kind of enemy it is that we are up against.

## The Conquest of Self

Man in the new creation is engaged in a spiritual struggle to master himself, and Leo continually thinks, as in Sermon 16,1, in terms of a "transference of desires" from earthly to heavenly things, which incorporates the theory of a transference from fleshly living to spiritual or "logical" living in which the soul duly governs the flesh while in turn being itself properly ordered towards God. This transference is bound up with the struggle against Satan, in such a way that the struggle against Satan finds its expression in the battle of the soul to master the flesh. This theme is clearly expressed in Sermon 39,2 where Leo writes that

> "in order that we may be able to overcome all our enemies, let us seek divine help by observing the commands of heaven, knowing that in no other way can we hope to prevail over our foes except by prevailing over ourselves as well. We have many struggles within us, and the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh. If in this opposition the desires of the body are stronger, the soul will shamefully lose the dignity that is proper to it, and it will be calamitous for it to be a slave to what it ought to govern. But if the mind, submissive to its Ruler and to heavenly gifts, tramples on the lure of earthly indulgence and does not allow sin to reign in its own body, reason will hold a well-ordered leadership, and no deceit of spiritual evil will weaken its defences. There is true peace and true liberty for a human being when the flesh is ruled by the soul and when the soul is governed by God as director" (Sermon 39,2,28b-46).

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Here we have a summary of Leo's spiritual teaching whereby salvation works on the levels of flesh and mind. The flesh, as we shall see, is constantly battling against impurity, and, when it becomes impure, it drags the mind down from heavenly contemplation. The mind, meanwhile, is battling not only against the negative influence of the flesh, but against the deceptions of the devil, who tries to lead it into that falsehood which precludes contemplation of the spiritual. Leo speaks here of "peace", and, as we saw in a previous chapter, *pax* is equivalent to unanimity with the divine will. In Sermon 39,2 Leo presents us with an anthropological expression of this *pax*, in which the will of God "directs" (*gubernare*) the mind (*animus*), and the mind "rules" (*regere*) the flesh (*caro*). This leads in turn both to *pax* and to *vera libertas*, which presumably denotes freedom from Satan. Peace and liberty are directed to the subjection of the mind to its proper ruler (*rector*), by which we are probably to understand the divine will, and to the transference from earthly to heavenly. The "strategy" of the demons is to disrupt this due ordering of flesh to mind and of mind to God, and so to inhibit the transference of desires from earth to heaven.

It is our great misfortune, as Leo explains in Sermon 36, that

> "the frailty of the human condition easily slides into sin. Because there is no sin without taking pleasure in it, human fragility readily gives in to the deceptive enjoyment" (Sermon 36,4,96-99).

As we have seen, the transference of desires is never irreversible, and at the first indication that it has been reversed we need to transfer our desires all over again lest we allow the negative transference to go too far. Accordingly, Leo exhorts us to

> "retreat quickly from carnal desires to the spiritual shelter. Let the soul that has knowledge of its God turn itself away from the suggestions of the ill-advising enemy" (Sermon 36,4,99-101).

Leo makes is clear that the desires of the flesh are provoked by the devil, and that they are inimical to the mind which possesses true knowledge (*notitia*) of God. The result of this tension between mind and spirit is the state of perpetual struggle in which Christians find themselves. Consciousness that life is a spiritual struggle is itself essential if we are to resist the devil's blandishments. In Sermon 39,3 Leo writes that the wise, like Solomon, know that

> "the pursuit of religion brings on the suffering of strife. When they foresee the danger of a battle, they give warning ahead of time that

> they are going to fight, lest, if the tempter approach them when unsuspecting, he would the more quickly wound them unprepared" (Sermon 39,3,93b-98b).

The spiritual life as perceived by Leo is one in which we are constantly under threat of attack, and the entirety of Leo's preaching - whether he is warning his listeners against the Manichees, encouraging them to keep to the Lenten observances, or simply inculcating in them the orthodox teaching on the incarnation - is directed towards equipping the faithful with all that they need to resist these assaults whenever they arrive and whatsoever form they should take.

In this perpetual struggle we must depend not upon our own inadequate resources but upon the divine grace. Leo encourages us by proclaiming that Christ who is in us is stronger than the one who is against us (as we read in 1 John 4:4) and that

> "we are powerful through him in whose strength we rely, for the Lord allowed himself to be tempted by the tempter in order that we might be taught by his example as well as strengthened by his aid" (Sermon 39,3,70-73).

As Leo explains in Sermon 70,5 the enmity of the devil is actually something positive. Like John Cassian, Leo believes that the attacks of the demons do not exceed that which is permitted by God, though this does not mean that the demons are not dangerous, and it certainly does not allow us to become complacent about them. Leo writes of these evil spirits that

> "although nothing would be allowed beyond what divine justice permits, and beyond what serves the good of correcting God's people through the discipline or the teaching of patience, these spirits treat with the crafty art of deceit, that they might seem to harm or to spare through their own free will" (Sermon 70,5,131-135).

Leo is concerned by the fact that some people seriously fear the hostility of the devils and accordingly try to placate them, and he warns such Christians that

> "the benefits that come from demons are more harmful than the wounds that they inflict, and it is better to earn the enmity of the devil than to have peace with him" (Sermon 70,5,138-140).

The devils can actually accomplish very little, and are reduced to operating by deception. Unable to do any real harm, they attack the good intentions of the will, scheming continually against the saints either secretly or in the open.

The constant aim of the demons in all this is to seduce us from heavenly desires

to earthly desires. The purpose of the Christian life is set out by Leo when he appeals

> "let us freely raise the eyes of our hearts to that height where Christ is. Let not earthly desires hold down the souls called upwards. Let perishable things not hold those ordained for eternity. Let false pleasures not delay those who have entered the way of truth" (Sermon 74,5,99-103).

Unfortunately, this "transference of desires" is hindered by the enemy, as Leo goes on to illustrate through the medium of a rhetorical question:

> "for whom, if not for the devil, do the worldly pleasures make war? Who is it that delights in hindering, by the pleasures of corruptible goods, the souls reaching for heaven, and in leading them away from that home from which he himself fell? Against his snares all faithful souls ought wisely to keep watch, so that, from that which is made a temptation against them, they might be able to crush this enemy" (Sermon 74,5,112-117).

The purpose of the devil is to transfer our desires from *superna* to *corruptibilia* in order that we might share in his own fate. As Leo tells us in Sermon 89,

> "our enemy does not cease to try to deceive us with a variety of temptations, and the overall purpose of these deceptions is to lead away from the divine commandments those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ" (Sermon 89,3,40-43).

Indeed, we are warned that the more we strive to achieve the transference of desires the harder the spiritual life will become. This is because, as Leo outlines in Sermon 90,

> "the devil . . . does not relax his schemes even in the midst of our efforts. We, then must take care, at certain periods of time, to re-energise our strength" (Sermon 90,4,104a-109a).

Moreover, the deceptions of the devil do not end even in the midst of properly-observed fasts during the course of which we are most intent in effecting the transference of desires, with the result that

> "we never cease to stand in need of the divine assistance, and the strength of human devotion lies in the fact that we always have him for our protector without whom we could not be strong" (Sermon 90,4,114b-120b).

This theology of perpetual conflict between man and the demons underlies Leo's soteriology of redemption from the devil, which in turn influences his Christology. We saw in earlier chapters that salvation is a question of the Word's healing the flesh and the soul in order to facilitate liturgical contemplation of the divine mercy, and of the Word's self-veiling and unveiling in the cycle of incarnation,

passion, resurrection, and ascension in order to make such contemplation a reality. The devil and the demons, however, are perpetually waging war against flesh and soul in order to prevent the soul from being sufficiently pure and spiritual to contemplate the divine, and in order to deceive us into arriving at a false picture of what the divine nature is like. Accordingly, Leo's "form of a servant" Christology has the additional dimension of representing a likeness of servitude to Satan which is ordered towards overcoming him and towards making it possible for us to succeed in our battle against him. As always, this Christological emphasis is dictated by the demands of Leo's spiritual teaching, which are very much centred around the theme of constant warfare between man and the demons. The soteriological model of the conquest of Satan which the "form of a servant" Christology is at least in part designed to meet is itself dictated by a view of the world in which human beings are engaged in unceasing conflict with the demons, and Leo's Christology and soteriology - rooted as they are in the idea of the revelation of God's mercy and love - are conceived with a view to presenting this ongoing war as one that we are capable of winning.

In Sermon 77 Leo provides us with a summary of his entire theology of redemption - a summary which covers the divine mercy and salvific will, a Christological model which unites stainless flesh to the majesty of the Word, a soteriology of deliverance from captivity to the devil, and a spirituality of the transference of desires. We are told that

> "through the devil's ill-will, death entered into the world, and because captive humanity could be set free only if he would undertake our cause who without loss of majesty both became true man and alone had no taint of sin. For this reason the mercy of the Trinity divided amongst itself the work of restoration (*opus nostrae reparationis*) so that the Father was propitiated (*propitiaretur*), the Son performed the propitiating, and the Spirit enkindled (*igniret*). It was also necessary that those who were to be saved should do something on their own part, and that by turning their hearts to the Redeemer they should quit the dominion of the enemy" (Sermon 77,2,30-38).

Leo quotes St Paul (2 Corinthians 3:17) where he says that where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty, and (1 Corinthians 12:3) to the effect that no one can call Jesus "Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. Clearly, then, Christ's objective work of atonement demands a turning of the heart or transference of desires on the part of mankind. This

frees us from diabolical domination, and issues from the Holy Spirit who brings *libertas*. The couplet of references to St Paul's epistles to the Corinthians points to a corollary between the liberty that comes from the Spirit and the acknowledgement of Christ's Lordship that comes from the Spirit. The implication is that to have Christ rather than Satan as lord is to be liberated, and to be free from that eternal death which the devil brought into the world.

The necessity that man should do something on his own part also reminds us that Leo's theology presupposes a scheme of merit and reward. This system of merit and reward, de-merit and punishment, is summed up in Sermon 11,1 where Leo informs us that, at the last judgment, God will have mercy on the merciful:

> "only the quality of good works directed towards the destitute would determine the sentence (for the ungodly to burn with the devil, for the generous to reign with Christ)" (Sermon 11,1,9-1).

The "wicked" here are clearly those who do not practise charity and mercy. Extrapolating from this and from other texts relating to the subject of almsgiving, the underlying train of thought is fairly clear. Likeness to God leads to eternal life. God is merciful. Therefore to show mercy (through works of charity) is to imitate God and attain eternal life. By the same token, to fail to show works of mercy is to lose out on eternal life. For all Leo's emphasis on saving faith, at the end of the day those who are unmerciful will be punished. Indeed, as we have seen, Leo actually equates "life" with "faith", so the statement that only the merciful obtain life could, presumably, be reformulated in terms of the idea that only the merciful attain unto faith. Either way, the devil deceived man into denying the reality of the divine mercy and the system of merit and reward. Those who do not imitate the divine mercy will merit punishment and share the fate of the deceiver.

Leo takes this point further in Sermon 74,5 where he writes that we must keep watch so that we can crush the devil whenever he attacks us. He adds that

> "nothing is stronger, dearly beloved, against the wiles of the devil than the kindness of mercy (*benignitas misericordiae*) and the generosity of love (*largitas caritatis*), through which every sin is either avoided or conquered" (Sermon 74,5,117-120).

Such mercy and love constitute living in the *imago Dei*, and, represent both the substance of what the incarnation reveals about the divine nature and the way for us to

imitate that nature. Thus Leo is able to write that

> "through this way of love, by which Christ descended to us, we can also ascend to him" (Sermon 74,5,128-130).

Satan is aware of this, and tries to overcome these particular virtues of mercy and love. Leo describes this process when he asserts that, though the devil's normal practice is to deceive us into heresy, it is also the case that he corrupts our tendency to the operation of love. Thus we learn that

> "well aware of the fact that it is possible to deny God through actions as well as words, he [the devil] snatched love away from many of those whose faith he could not carry off. Since he had not deprived them of the confession made with lips, he robbed their works of fruit by causing avarice to take root in the soil of their hearts" (Sermon 9,1,24-28).

Satan operates on two fronts, luring us into loss of faith and loss of charity, which for Leo are the touchstones of the spiritual life and of the "transference of desires". The transference of desires involves the elevation of our contemplation from the earthly to the celestial (most especially within the context of liturgy and sermon), and this ascension of the mind is, as we have seen, facilitated by the ladder of intellectual ascent which is provided by the true doctrine of the incarnation. Moreover, as we have observed, and as is stressed again and again in Sermon 12, the divine nature that we are led to contemplate by means of the incarnation is characterised by mercy, love, and the universal salvific will, and leads ideally to the imitation of that mercy and love and zeal for the salvation of human beings in which life in the image of God consists. The message of Sermon 12 is that in order to love God we are to love what God loves, and the devil attempts to undermine this firstly by robbing us of the faith that enables us to know the divine nature and secondly by stirring up in our flesh and in our souls sinful desires which prevent us from being properly ordered to contemplating the divine nature through faith and to imitating it through works of love. The science of Christology is designed to reveal to us the truth concerning the divine nature, to present us with a Christ who can heal the sickness of flesh and soul, and finally, as we shall see later on in this chapter, to rescue us from the assaults of the evil one.

Leo returns to the theme of love and mercy in Sermon 15 where he portrays

almsgiving as one of the three medicines of the ascetic life - the others being prayer and fasting - which are effective in overcoming the enemy. Leo explains that

> "the medicine of three remedies in particular must be applied for tending to the injuries often incurred by those who clash with the invisible enemy: persistence in prayer, in the mortification of fasting, and in the generosity of almsgiving. When these are practised together, God is propitiated, fault is wiped out, and the tempter finds himself expelled" (Sermon 15,1,18-23).

Almsgiving is medicinal at a number of levels, but, most significantly, it represents a concrete expression of our human imitation of the divine mercy and so enables us to live in the image of God. A similar point about the value of self-discipline in the ongoing struggle with the forces of darkness is made in Sermon 87 where Leo observes that,

> "in every struggle undergone by the Christian, the virtue of continence is of enormous value. On occasion, certain spirits of fierce demons have not been driven out of possessed bodies by any commands of the exorcists, but have been expelled only through the power of fasting and prayers" (Sermon 87,2,32-36).

At the end of the day, as Leo remarks in Sermon 78,2, the devil can harm only the fleshly - which means that the more that we are successful in transferring our desires from earth to heaven and from the fleshly to the spiritual by practising the ascetic life and working towards the contemplation of God as revealed by the incarnation of the Word when this is understood according to orthodox Christology, the more we shall be free from the danger posed by demonic assaults. Thus Leo writes

> "the invisible adversaries and spiritual enemies will have no strength against us if we have not been swallowed up by any bodily desires. The will to harm is everlasting in the devil, but he will be disarmed and helpless if he finds nothing in us from which he might give battle against us" (Sermon 78,2,22-26).

However, the demonic assaults do not cease even when we have achieved the transference of desires, and indeed the ongoing character of the struggle possesses a positive dimension, in so far as it keeps us from the sin of pride (which would of course lead us to lose the contemplation of God and to transfer our desires back to the earthly and the fleshly). Leo concludes that

> "although divine grace may give daily victories to his saints, it does not take away the matter of the struggle. Indeed, this is another gift from the mercy of our protector, who wanted something to be left for our changeable nature to overcome, lest it should be proud concerning the completed battle" (Sermon 78,2,30-34).

There is a definite echo here of John Cassian with his recurrent teaching that God permits the demons to assault us lest we become spiritually lukewarm. For both Leo and Cassian, spiritual warfare is essentially a good thing, and false peace is something to be feared. However, there is a sense in which the war that we wage against the world, the flesh, and the devil, is ordered towards a more genuine kind of peace - the peace of unanimity with God which is the goal of the transference of desires - and it is this that we shall be looking at in the next section.

## War and Peace

As we have seen, to be standing in formal opposition to the devil is in itself a worthy state in which to find oneself, and not to be at war with him may very well be an indication of a dangerous spiritual condition. Thus Leo tells us in Sermon 70 that

> "the benefits that come from demons are more harmful than the wounds that they inflict, and it is better to earn the enmity of the devil than to have peace with him" (Sermon 70,5,138-140).

Leo defines true peace in Sermon 95,9, seeing it in terms of agreement with the divine will and with the love of God. He writes:

> "love of the world (*amor mundi*) is not in agreement with the love of God (*Dei amore*). Those who have not separated themselves from a carnal age will not come to the society of the children of God. But those who are careful to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace are always in union with the mind of God. They never depart from the eternal law, saying with sincere prayer 'thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. These are the peacemakers. These will be called eternally by the name of children of God, co-heirs with Christ. Love of God and love of neighbour will obtain this: that a person may feel no adversity, fear no stumbling block, but, when the struggle with all temptation is over, will rest in the quiet peace of God" (Sermon 95,9,174-184).

On this account, to earn peace with God rather than enmity towards the devil would seem to denote *disagreement* with the diabolic will, and a "transference of desires" from fleshly and earthly desiring *with* Satan to spiritual and celestial desiring *with* God. Such a transference of desires leads inevitably to an intensification of our spiritual wars, but, paradoxically, the fiercer the battle that we are fighting against evil, the deeper is the peace that we enjoy with God. Spiritual warfare and spiritual peace are not contradictory states, but go hand in hand. Indeed, one cannot have one

without the other, and the "quietist" approach to spirituality with its complete lack of what might be described as "combative asceticism" represents an entirely false understanding of the divine peace. Leo explains that

> "when we accuse ourselves by our own confession and deny a consent of the heart to carnal appetites we of course stir up against us the enmity of the one who gave rise to sin, but we build up an invincible peace with God. In rendering service to the grace of God we are not only made subject to our King through obedience but are even joined to him through the will. If we are of one mind with him (willing what he wills, disapproving of what he disapproves), he will himself bring us victory in all our battles. He who has given the will will bestow also the ability, and in this way we can co-operate with his works" (Sermon 26,4,110-119).

Peace consists in unanimity with God, and this unanimity is essentially a unanimity with the divine mercy, love, and universal salvific will which are revealed by the incarnation. When Leo writes that "he who has given the will will bestow also the ability, and in this way we can co-operate with his works", he is as always referring to the incarnation, for it is the incarnation that reveals the nature of God for our contemplation in order to furnish us with the will to enjoy the peace of unanimity with him, and it is the incarnation - mediated through liturgy and sacrament - that so heals the flesh and the soul that the latter is free to achieve the transference of desires, and is accordingly able not just to "desire God" as object but also to "desire *with* God" that which God desires.

This dimension of desiring *with* God takes the theory of the "transference of desires" one stage further, for the goal of the spiritual life is not contemplation for its own sake, but is a perfect union of wills with God so that, as we saw in the sermons for the feast of the Epiphany during the course of our study of the universal salvific will, we can become co-operators with God in his great work of salvation. As we shall shortly be learning, almsgiving in particular represents our participation in and our imitation of God's merciful love for our fellow human beings, and, so far as Leo is concerned, the love of neighbour is the inevitable corollary of an authentically contemplative love of God.

Genuine peace consists in unanimity with the divine will, but we always have to be careful to distinguish in all this between true peace and false peace. In modern times Hans Urs von Balthasar has emphasised the radical distance between God and

human beings which Christ comes to bridge by enabling us to accept the fact of that distance (as he did in his sacred humanity) instead of fighting against it (as Adam did when the devil persuaded him to try to seize glorification), but after Christ we can still choose to reject and rebel against this "distance" if that is what we wish to do. Leo likewise realises that the work of atonement creates new possibilities, but that it effects no magical transformation in humankind as a whole, and for this reason he explains that, despite the fact that it has been redeemed by Christ and renewed in baptism, human nature remains subject to mutability and death, which in effect means that, as we have shown, the "transference of desires" is a reversible process, and even the most holy are at risk of a relapse into demonic captivity.

Such an understanding of the condition even of saved humanity means that we can never cease from spiritual warfare, and Leo tells us that

> "nature indeed is changeable (*mutabilis*) and mortal because of the stain of sin, even though it is now redeemed and renewed in holy baptism. In so far as it is able to suffer, it inclines to degradation (*ad deteriora proclivis*). Nature will be corrupted by bodily desire (*carnali desiderio*) unless fortified by spiritual help (*spiritali auxilio*), for, as there is nothing lacking to make human beings fall, so there is always present help to support them" (Sermon 18,1,4-9).

The fact that Christ has overcome Satan and the world puts an end to fear but not to the ongoing struggle, and, in spite of the "spiritual help" mentioned above, we are actually in more danger when the battle appears to have subsided than we are when it is raging:

> "even though the Lord protects warriors, and he who is mighty in battle encourages his own soldiers, saying 'do not be afraid, for I have overcome the world', still we should know, dearly beloved, that even with this incentive the fear is lifted, not the struggle (*pugna*). After the sharp point of terror has been made dull, the cause of the struggle (*certamen*) remains, a struggle which is stirred up by the crafty enemy in the fury of persecution, but brought in all the more harmfully by the appearance of peace" (Sermon 18,1,12-18).

One can say in favour of the horrors of persecution that they keep Christians "on their toes", and, indeed, the cessation of such diabolical attacks leads to an assault of an altogether more insidious kind. Leo writes that

> "when the battles are out in the open, the crowns are also evident. This, too, nourishes and inflames the strength of patience, that, when disaster is nearest, the promise is also at hand. After the

> public attacks of the wicked ones cease, and the devil restrains himself from the slaughter and torture of the faithful - lest by the intensity of his cruelties there be a manifold increase of our triumphs - the raging adversary turns his bloodthirsty hatred to quiet treachery, and those whom he could not overcome with hunger and cold, with sword and fire, he will wear out with an easy life, snare with wilfulness, inflame with ambition, and corrupt with luxury" (Sermon 18,1,18-28).

The warfare waged by the devil is the consequence of the fact that he has lost possession of the human race. Previously Satan ruled in us, but, as we have witnessed, the complex of incarnation and baptism means that our minds are now able to rule over our flesh, while at the same time being themselves ruled over by God. This reordering of every aspect of our lives is what we mean by the "transference of desires", and it is this to which Leo's Christological teaching is directed. As we have seen, the incarnation is also responsible for the transference of human beings from demonic captivity to allegiance to God - a transference which is consummated on the Cross. The fact the the devil no longer rules in us as a race means that he has to fight to recapture each of us on an individual basis, luring us one by one out of our state of corporate salvation within the Church to a share in his perdition. Leo recounts how

> "when the vessels of that ancient theft have been snatched from a cruel tyrant by the power of the Cross of Christ, and the domination held by the prince of this world has been cast out from the bodies of the redeemed, the same malice continues nevertheless to ensnare the just, and attacks in many ways those whom it does not rule. If he finds any souls careless and imprudent, he fixes on them again with traps more ruthless still, and brings them, snatched from the Church's paradise, into the company of his damnation" (Sermon 70,4,86-93).

For this reason we need to fight to preserve the "transference of desires" by living the ascetic life - whether it is forced upon us by formal persecution, or whether, as will normally be the case, we have to discipline ourselves to follow the way of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Leo presents the transference of desires as an imitation of and a participation in the sufferings of Christ, which serve as a remedy for the disordered personality, and writes that

> "when anyone who belongs to the Christian observance, then, knows that he has exceeded the limits and that his desires tend towards something that makes him deviate from the right path, let such a one take refuge in the Cross of Christ and fasten the movements of his harmful will to the wood of life" (Sermon 70,4,93-97).

## THE CHRISTIAN COMBAT

Leo describes how we work out our own salvation through following the way of the Cross, which is conceived in terms of mortification of the flesh. He explains the idea of sharing in Christ's passion by asking

> "what does it mean to have the flesh pierced by the nails of the fear of God except to withhold the bodily senses from the pleasures of unlawful desire under the fear of divine judgment?" (Sermon 70,5,100-102).

Such asceticism implies a soteriology rooted in the imitation of Christ according to which by following Christ in his way of voluntary suffering we may each experience in our own individuated human nature the same exaltation of flesh and spirit that he experienced in the human nature that he received from us through Mary and that he shares with us through baptism. This seems to be what Leo has in mind when he writes

> "let Christians fasten themselves there where Christ has taken them with himself. Let them direct their every path to where they know human nature to have been saved" (Sermon 70,5,106-108).

Through the ascetic life the passion of Christ is extended in the lives of Christians till the end of time. When Leo says as he does that we have been crucified with Christ, what he means is that he has been crucified in the flesh that he took from us through Mary, and that now, within an ecclesial and liturgical context, we imitate his passion through the re-presentation of the paschal mystery in the Church's worship and through the mortification of the flesh that we take from him through the baptismal. Leo also makes the more general point that - especially when exercised within the locus of the Church - love of neighbour and acts of practical charity are directed towards Christ who is present in the recipients of these attentions. Leo writes:

> "our Lord's passion has been drawn out to the end of the world. He himself is honoured in his saints, he himself is loved; he also is fed in the poor, and he too is clothed. Likewise, in all those who bear adversities for the sake of justice, he himself suffers also - lest it might perhaps be thought that, now that the faith is spread over the entire world and the number of wicked people has diminished, all the persecutions and struggles which raged against the blessed martyrs are ended, and that the necessity of taking up the Cross (so to speak) applied only to those on whom the most cruel punishments were afflicted in order to break down their love for Christ" (Sermon 70,5,108-117).

Leo's soteriology, in short, teaches that the Word becomes flesh in order to reveal the divine mercy and love towards human beings, and at the same time to reveal the potential that exists in human beings for living divinely. By sharing in our humanity, the God-man not only lives a human life as God but also lives a divine life as man, and so provides us with a paradigm of human living which corresponds with the Greek idea of "divinisation" or "theiosis".[2] This "divinisation" is expressed by Leo in terms of the "transference of desires" and the *imago Dei*, in virtue of each of which we are elevated with the ascended Christ to enjoy even in the present something of the life of heaven that we shall enjoy more perfectly in the future. The classic definition of "grace" put forward by Thomas Aquinas is that it is a "certain participation in the divine nature by way of likeness", and this is certainly true for Leo, who understands the life of grace as a participation with God in his universal salvific will and a co-operation with God in his works of mercy and love towards our fellow human beings.

## Lenten Warfare

The time of Christian warfare *par excellence* is Lent, when the devil is at his most jealous of the souls that he has lost.[3] In Sermon 49,3 Leo writes that

> "it is well known to you that this is the time when throughout the world the Christian battle-line must combat the raging devil. If sloth keeps anyone lukewarm, or if cares keep them occupied, now is the time to be equipped in spiritual arms and, aroused by the heavenly trumpet, to enter the battle, for that one by whose envy death entered the world burns especially at this time with jealousy and at this juncture of the year is tortured by very great grief" (Sermon 49,3,59-65).

The result, as Leo tells us in Sermon 39 is a kind of "contest in good works" in which we fight against temptation, and in which we must realise that

> "as we are more zealous for our own salvation, so much the more violently will the adversaries attack us" (Sermon 39,3,68-69).

Fortunately, though, we have the power to resist these attacks, because

> "the one who is with us is stronger than the one who is against us, and we have power through him in whose strength we trust, because it was for this that the Lord allowed himself to be tempted by the tempter, that he might teach us by his example as he strengthened

> us by his help (*ut cuius munimur auxilio, eius erudimur exemplo*)" (Sermon 39,3,70-73).

We need to practise the "transference of desires" by subordinating our flesh to our souls and our souls to God, but such an ascetic spirituality is especially necessary in Lent. This is because it is during Lent that our spiritual enemies conduct their designs with greater craftiness than usual in order that they might make us unworthy of participating in the paschal celebrations of the Church, and that they might thereby cause us to participate in those celebrations in a manner that renders us liable to punishment rather than to mercy. Leo writes that

> "although this exercise, dearly beloved, may be undertaken profitably at any time in order to overcome with zeal the ever-watchful enemy, it is nevertheless the case that we ought to pursue it more carefully and more eagerly now when those very cunning adversaries are lying in wait with shrewder craftiness. For they know that the holy days of Lent are pressing on us, and that in Lent's observance all past sloth is chastened and all negligence repaired. They concentrate the whole power of their ill will on this, that those who are going to celebrate the holy Passover of the Lord may be found unworthy in some way, and that the clemency they had obtained may thus be changed to an offence" (Sermon 39,2,46-59).

In Sermon 40 Leo goes on to emphasise that, while we need to follow the way of the "transference of desires" at all times of year, we need to be particularly vigilant during Lent. Thus he writes that

> "you, Christian soul, have always to be alert against the adversary of your salvation lest any place lie open for the wiles of the tempter, but you must practise a greater caution and more careful prudence when this same enemy rages against you with keener ill will" (Sermon 40,2,27-31).

Leo's theology is deeply rooted in the Christian calendar, and just as he believes, for example, that the fruits of the incarnation are applied in special measure at Christmas when the incarnation is made liturgically present in a unique way, so also he believes that the assault of the devil on Christ which took place in the biblical episode of the temptations in the desert is reprised in Lent in such a fashion that what Christ underwent then we undergo liturgically and mystically in the present. The corollary of a theology in which we are re-born with Christ at Christmas, raised with him at Easter, and exalted with him at the Ascension, is that we suffer diabolical attacks with him in Lent, and must fight to resist the onslaught now as he did in the

past.

The fact that the devil attacked even Christ means that we can be certain he will attack us also. In Sermon 41 Leo warns

> "let none so trust in the purity of his own heart that he thinks that he is not always subject to the danger of temptation, for that watchful tempter may strike with more crafty devices especially those whom he sees refraining from sin. From whom will he withhold his wiles if he dared to tempt the Lord of majesty himself with the deceit of his craftiness?"(Sermon 41,2,41-47).

Being baptised Christians actually makes things harder for us, for it causes Satan to redouble his efforts against us:

> "he has pursued us with fiercer hatred and more savage jealousy from the moment we renounced him in baptism and passed by divine regeneration from that beginning over which he exercised dominion into a new creature" (Sermon 41,2,55-58).

As we noted earlier, the devil's aim is to prevent us from undertaking a due observance of the paschal mysteries, for it is in the paschal mysteries that we most particularly receive the fruit of Christ's work of redemption, and that we appropriate most fully the benefits of Christ's conquest of Satan. Thus Leo writes that

> "because we are clothed in mortal flesh the ancient enemy does not cease to put forward the snares of sin for us everywhere, and at this time especially to rage against the members of Christ when they are going to celebrate the sacred mysteries, and when the teaching of the Holy Spirit has so rightly imbued the Christian people with this instruction to prepare themselves for the Passover feast by the discipline of the forty days" (Sermon 41,2,58-64).

The devil even tries to turn our Lenten resolutions themselves into a form of temptation, for, as Leo observes in Sermon 42

> "the devil, who is the enemy of all virtues, hates these pursuits to which we entrust you prepared with a good will, and arms the force of his malignity for this purpose, that he may lay snares for the devout person in the form of the devotion itself and may try to overcome through ambition those whom he could not throw down by their want of confidence. The evil of pride is near to upright actions, and from this self-exaltation creeps in on virtues" (Sermon 42,3,91-100).

As well as being susceptible to sins of pride, we are also especially prone to the attacks of demonic heresy at a time when we are striving to understand the true nature of the Christian mysteries. For this reason, we are told that

> "the soul will keep a holy and spiritual fast when it casts out the food of wrong and the poison of falsehood, for the wily and skilful enemy introduces these all the more at this time when the Church in its entirety is reminded by the recurrence of the solemn feast to learn the mysteries of its salvation" (Sermon 46,1,15-19).

In spite of the ferocity of the devil's attacks during Lent, God vouchsafes to us the grace to withstand them if only we will implore his assistance to help us persevere with the task of preparing ourselves in mind and body for the paschal celebrations. Thus Leo tells us that

> "in order that the malice of the raging enemy might not have any effect arising out of his envy, we must cultivate a still more earnest devotion in following the Lord's commands. Let us use the time, in which all mysteries of the divine mercy converge (*omnia divinae misericordiae sacramenta concurrunt*), for a preparation of soul and body, begging the guidance and the help of God without whom we can do nothing, but with whom we are able to accomplish all things" (Sermon 49,4,79-85).

Related to what we have said above is the idea that Lent is a time of year when the devil loses power over mankind. Christ's work of atonement, as we have seen, liberated humanity as a whole from demonic captivity, but individual men have since been lured back under the lordship of the devil, so in some senses the question of the rights and power of the devil remains only partially resolved. Leo tells us that during Lent

> "throughout the world the power of his ancient domination is taken from him, and his innumerable vessels of captivity are seized" (Sermon 40,2,32-33).

As the Church prepares for the baptismal re-birth of new converts at Easter, and for the special renunciation of evil that all Christians undertake at the time of the paschal mystery, the battle is carried to Satan, and he is driven out of those whom he formerly possessed:

> "renunciation of barbarous pillage has come from people of all nations and of all tongues and there is now no race of humanity which does not struggle against tyrannical laws; while to the ends of the earth thousands upon thousands are being prepared for rebirth in Christ. With the appearance of a new creature, spiritual infamy is pushed out from those whom it possessed" (Sermon 40,1,33-39).

The same idea is expressed in Sermon 49 where Leo tells us that the devil

> "sees a new people from all the human race being brought into adoption as children of God, and, through the virginal fertility of

> the Church, the number of births to regeneration being increased. He sees that he is deprived of the power of his domination, and expelled from the hearts of those he once possessed; that thousands of the old, of the young, and of children (of both sexes) are snatched away from him; and that neither the sin of the individual nor original sin stand in the way of anyone when justification is not granted by merits but is given by the generosity of grace alone" (Sermon 49,3,65-73).

As we have observed, the devil wishes to keep us from proper observance of the paschal mysteries, for if we keep Easter in the right way he will be crushed by the power of the Cross which becomes particularly efficacious at that time of year. Even those who have fallen victim to the devil's deception may receive pardon and absolution during Lent and benefit accordingly from the coming celebrations, and this represents a massive setback for the powers of darkness. Thus Leo says of Satan that he

> "sees also that the lapsed and those deceived by the falsehood of his snares are washed in the tears of penitence and admitted to the healing of reconciliation, when the key of the apostles has opened the gates of mercy. He knows too that the day of the Lord's passion is coming soon, and that he will be ground down by the power of the Cross which in Christ, who is a stranger to everything owed to death, was the redemption of the world and not the penalty of sin" (Sermon 49,3,73-78).

Here Leo not only indicates that the liturgical celebration of the paschal mystery is efficacious for salvation, but emphasises two important theological points - that justification depends not on previous merit but on repentance, with the result that entry into the system of merit and reward is open to all in view of the divine mercy and irrespective of past crimes; and that Christ is not punished for our sins, but rather that he brings us that redemption which as we have seen consists in a revelation of the divine mercy which liberates us from captivity to diabolically induced ignorance.

However, this victory is not irreversible, and we must guard against relapses after the season of fasting is over. Leo admonishes us to keep hold of the spiritual benefits which we have received in consequence of our Lenten devotion, saying that

> "these gains must be preserved by constant watchfulness, however, lest, when the labour has been relaxed, the devil's ill will should stealthily draw back into idleness what the grace of God has given" (Sermon 71,1,9-12).

Just as Christ's victory over Satan does not mean that we are immune from further

attacks, so also our own triumph over the demons during Lent does not imply that we can relax our efforts and abandon the ascetic life. Lent may be a time for a more intense practice of asceticism, but the way of salvation demands constant warfare against the one who has been despoiled of his plunder by Christ and who seeks perpetually to reclaim what he has lost. Fortunately, though asceticism remains an ever-present necessity, there is one particular aspect of ascetic spirituality that virtually guarantees our ultimate success. This overarching virtue which gives form and meaning to all the others is the virtue of mercy as expressed in almsgiving, which as we have seen is viewed by Leo in a quasi-sacramental fashion, and it is this that we shall be exploring in greater depth in our next chapter.

# NOTES

1 See C. Stancliffe: *St. Martin and His Bigrapher. History and Miracles in Sulpicius Severus*, Oxford, 1983.

2 On the idea of "divinisation" in the Greek fathers, see J. Gross: *La divinisation du chrétien d'après les Pères grecs, contribution historique à la doctrine de la grace*, Paris, 1938; M. Lot-Borodine: *La déification de l'homme selon le doctrine des Pères grecs*, (Bibliothèque oecuménique 9), Paris, 1970.

3 On the Lenten fast according to Leo, see V. de Rosa: "Il digiuno liturgico nei Sermoni di San Leone Magno", *Annali del Pont. Instituto Superiore di Scienze e Lettere "S. Chiara"* 11 (1961), 19-91; M. Subocz: "Die Bedeutung des Fastens nach den Predigten Papst Leos des Grossen zur Quaresima", *Mit der Kirche auf dem Weg durch die Zeit*, ed. K. Hillenbrand, Würzburg, 1980, pp. 107-110.

# Chapter Ten

# THE ECONOMY OF MERCY

## The Manifestation of Mercy

The modern reader of the great Latin preachers of the fifth century such as Maximus of Turin and Leo the Great in Italy and Augustine in Africa is immediately struck by the wealth of reference to the practice of almsgiving.[1] Leo, like others of his period such as Salvian of Marseilles, tends to concentrate on the charitable responsibility of the individual more than would be the case with most modern authors to the extent that personal spirituality becomes very much bound up with social ethics.[2] Leo has no concept of what we would now call "state welfarism", but he does have a highly developed understanding of the type of ecclesiology most commonly associated with John Chrysostom which sees a kind of "real presence" of Christ in the poor. As we shall argue, Leo's spirituality is centred upon the idea that man's being made in the image of God involves his reflecting in a very concrete sense the divine attributes, and for Leo the divine attribute *par excellence* (as the incarnation definitively reveals) is the attribute of *mercy* which finds its human reflection in the social responsibility of the Christian.

Leo's Christology sets great store by the kenosis of the Word - that is to say, by his self-emptying and self-communication to human beings in virtue of the incarnation and in virtue of the sacrament of baptism which represents a prolongation and an

application of the incarnation.[3] In this act of kenosis the nature of God as self-giving is made manifest, but Leo is not content simply for us to venerate the mystery of this self-giving in awed contemplation. Leo is very much a theologian for whom theory finds its corollary in praxis, and such praxis is always ordered towards the realisation of the image of God in man. The self-giving of the Word as exemplified by his assumption of human flesh becomes efficacious for individual Christians when they imitate the divine mercy that it reveals, and this is achieved through the intensely practical medium of almsgiving. When preachers such as Maximus and Leo propose what to modern ears is the somewhat shocking idea that almsgiving is in practice a second baptism which possesses all the efficacy of baptism for washing away sins, they do so for the very good reason that almsgiving makes the reality of the incarnation present in the lives of the faithful by way of imitation.

Membership of Christ's mystical body is useless to us as long as it remains on the conceptual level, and union with Christ is conceived by Leo less in strictly ecclesiological terms than in terms of Christ-like behaviour. For Leo there is no divorce between mysticism and ethics, for the mystical inclusion in Christ that is a consequence of the complex of incarnation and baptism becomes meaningful only when it is worked out ethically in the form of practical works of charity. Spirituality for Leo is not a matter of visions and ecstasies, but is the extension of the incarnational self-giving of the Word through the moral imperatives which inform the Christian life. Leo develops a whole range of these imperatives during the course of his preaching, but perhaps the most striking of them all is the call to give alms in such a way as to mediate Christ's mercy to others and to win our own salvation in the process.

This does not make Leo some sort of fifth century socialist - indeed, one could argue that modern-style "state welfarism" would tend to destroy the individual voluntarism which is so central to his system - but it is nevertheless true that his vision is a social vision, and that he would regard any spirituality which is separated from its proper social dimension as in some sense defective. For modern readers, "mysticism" tends to suggest someone like Gertrude of Helfta or Hildegard of Bingen engaged in ecstatic discourse with the hosts of heaven, but the trouble with mysticism of this sort is that it is very difficult to engage in if one is not a mediaeval nun! Leo's

spirituality is accessible to all classes of people in any given period of history, for his message is that that mystical union with Christ which is established by the incarnation and applied to us through baptism and Eucharist becomes genuinely meaningful only when it is translated into the sphere of ethical and social concern. Thus mysticism and ethics merge, and political philosophy becomes a means to an intrinsically theological end, in a way which renders Leo's sermons as relevant to human beings today as they were to the Romans of the fifth century.

Leo is more famous as the formulator of the Church's teaching that Christ consists of two natures in one person than he is as a master of Christian spirituality, but the fact is that his concern with Christological truth stems in large part from his commitment to an authentic lay mysticism. This lay mysticism consists in the contemplation of the divine attributes and their imitation by the faithful, and the purpose of the incarnation is to show forth the attributes that are to be imitated, to provide a paradigm for how we are to imitate them, and to communicate through baptism and Eucharist the grace which is required if we are to imitate them. In fact, the reason why Leo is so keen that we should maintain orthodox teaching on Christology is that it is only orthodox teaching on Christology that safeguards the view that the divine mercy has been authentically revealed in the assumption of human flesh by the Word. It is not the incarnation itself that saves, but belief in the incarnation (hence the saving power of Christ's self-revelation even in the Old Testament period) and the practice of an ethics in which the divine mercy revealed through the incarnation is duly imitated. Christological heresies such as those espoused by Nestorius and Eutyches are dangerous because they prevent the incarnation from presenting us with an imitable revelation of the divine mercy, as in neither case is the enfleshment of the Word depicted in such a way as to allow us to believe in a genuine self-communication of God to his creatures.

Although the incarnation is the apotheosis of God's self-disclosure to the world, human history as a whole is the history of the same self-revelation of God as loving and merciful, and of the successes and failures of human beings in imitating the divine compassion which is constantly being revealed. The incarnation is undoubtedly the high-point of this process, and is the point at which the divine mercy is

manifested most perfectly and most intensely, but God's saving self-revelation has always been at work, and the Old Testament foreshadowings of the incarnation receive from the truth about the divine mercy that they foreshadow an efficacy which renders them truly salvific. In so far as the Old Testament is ordered towards the fuller revelation of the divine mercy in the New, it communicates to us that knowledge of God's nature as loving and merciful which it is necessary for us to possess if we are to appropriate it by way of imitation.

If the Old Testament prepares for the New in its unfolding of the truth concerning the mercy of God and the universal salvific will, so also the life of liturgical contemplation and social and ethical action in the contemporary world fulfils the mystery which the New contains and realises the example to which it points. The incarnation stands at the centre of history as the pre-eminent manifestation of the divine mercy in both mystery and example, but the Old Testament which presages it and the Christian life which extends it in time and place are integrally related to it. The economy of mercy is contemplated in liturgy and prayer and further incarnated (so to speak) in that social and ethical action which reflects the *imago Dei* as essentially loving and merciful, and "ortho*praxis*" is the crucial complement to "ortho*doxy*" if the latter is to have any value or meaning.

All history is ordered towards the incarnation, and is invested with significance by the incarnation even when the incarnation lies in the future. The key to salvation - before or after the birth of Christ - is to believe in the incarnation of the Word in which the divine mercy is revealed. Leo explains that, even when it remains an unfulfilled promise, the incarnation has the power to save, and this is because it saves by manifesting the mercy and other attributes of God in such a way that we can imitate them. Leo writes

> "let them stop complaining, those who speak up against the divine arrangements (*divinis dispensationibus*) with disloyal murmuring and object to the lateness of our Lord's nativity - as if that which was done in the last age of the world was not applied to previous eras as well. For the incarnation of the Word accomplished by being about to take place the very same thing that it did by having taken place - as the mystery of human salvation (*sacramentum salutis humanae*) never ceased to be active in any earlier age. What the apostles preached, the prophets had also announced. Nor was it too late in being fulfilled, since it has always been believed" (Sermon

23,4,85-92).

The redemptive work of Christ is not merely reparative, but represents what St Paul calls "a plan for the fullness of time" (Ephesians 1:10). The implication may well be that, even without the fall, the incarnation would have been necessary in order to reveal to us the divine nature as loving and perfectly generous so that we might imitate it.[4] Be that as it may, Leo seems to view history as a progressive revelation of the divine mercy which is salvific at every stage due to the fact that at all points it derives its significance either from a looking forward to or else from a memorial of the central event of the enfleshment of the Word. Thus he is able to write that

> "it is not that God has just recently come up with a plan for attending to human affairs, nor that it has taken him this long to show compassion (*misericordia*). Rather, he laid down from the very foundation of the world one and the same cause of salvation for all. For the grace of God - by which the entire assembly of saints has always been justified - was not initiated at the time when Christ was born, but was augmented. This mystery of great compassion (*hoc magnae pietatis sacramentum*), with which the whole world has now been filled, was so powerful even in its prefigurations that those who believed it when promised attained to it no less than those who received it when actually given" (Sermon 23,4,100-108).

The whole history of the Old and New Testaments, then, is a history of the showing forth of God's salvific will. The Old Testament consists of signs and symbols of what will eventually be realised in Christ, and the incarnation of the Word is the fulfilment of the self-revelation of God as loving and merciful. Christ comes to teach us about the mercy and justice of God, and in doing so brings about the consummation of Old Testament history which had foreshadowed that teaching in less perfect and less explicit ways. Because the Old Testament signs point to Christ there is a sense in which the self-revelation of God in Christ is always present to the world, for the pre-significations of the incarnate Lord represent his own manifestation of the divine mercy to the ages which preceded his incarnational coming among us. Leo writes

> "God in his mercy (*misericordia*) and justice (*iustitia*), dearly beloved, has set out before us the plans of his recompense - just as they had been laid down since the foundation of the world - explaining them by an act of the greatest kindness through the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. [He did this] so that, in receiving through symbols the things that we believe are going to take place, we might get to know them as having already transpired" (Sermon 9,1,1-5).

This self-revelation of God as loving and merciful is recorded in scripture with a view to making us aware of the fact that salvation is based upon a system of reward and punishment. The devil's plan is to deprive us of hope, but God reveals himself in Christ as a just yet merciful God who offers the alternatives of punishment and reward in response to the behaviour of the individual. Thus Leo says of God that

> "he planted within the pages of the Gospel the manner of of his judgment (*iudicium*) - which was such as to call back every person from the snares of this most cunning enemy, since no one would any longer be ignorant of the rewards (*praemia*) to be hoped for by the good and the punishments (*supplicia*) to be feared by the wicked" (Sermon 9,1,10-14).

The devil, as has been suggested, operates by destroying in our minds the link between ethical behaviour and everlasting reward, and by undermining our faith that reward follows on from virtue. Leo explains that

> "his [the devil's] aim is to shut off any hope that human beings might have of attaining through devotion to that good which he himself had forfeited by self-exaltation" (Sermon 9,1,18-19).

Here Leo is concerned with his attempts to subvert our faith in the idea of salvation through merit, and to lure us away from good works. Hosea in the Old Testament and James in the New see faith that is not expressed in charitable activity as being worthless, and Leo here describe how the doctrinally orthodox can be seduced from the right path by embracing a kind of pharisaism in which right faith is not matched by the virtue of practical charity. As we saw earlier, Leo says of the devil that

> "well aware of the fact that it is possible to deny God through actions as well as words, he snatched love away from many of those whose faith he could not carry off. Since he had not deprived them of the confession made with lips, he robbed their works of fruit by causing avarice to take root in the soil of their hearts" (Sermon 9,1,24-28).

Clearly, faith on its own is insufficient for our salvation and sanctification, and liturgical contemplation of the divine nature as essentially loving and merciful is meaningless unless it finds expression in social and ethical action.

Leo does not hold with later writers such as Luther that the coming of Christ renders the Old Testament view of salvation as based upon punishment and reward redundant, but believes that the new dispensation, far from replacing the old fasts and almsgivings, invests them with new meaning and reveals to us their true significance.

Thus he writes with regards to the fasts and almsgivings of the old order that

> "the dispensation of God's mercy (*Dispensationes misericordiae Dei*), which our Saviour undertook for the restoration of the human race, has been divinely ordered, dearly beloved, in such a way that the Gospel of grace lifts the veil from the law, but does not destroy its purpose" (Sermon 20,1,1-4).

God is unchangeable, so there must necessarily be a fundamental continuity between the Old Testament and the New. God's original intentions towards us were of mercy and love, but the devil deceived us into believing that our intended reward could not be merited. Leo says of Adam that

> "he rashly and unhappily believed the invidious deceiver and, giving in to the advice of pride, he preferred to seize the increase of honour set aside for him rather than to earn it. Yet is was not only he but the sum of his posterity in him as well that heard 'earth you are and unto earth you shall return' [Genesis 3:19]. Therefore 'as with this man from the earth, so too is it with us human beings from the earth' [1 Corinthians 15:48]. No one is immortal, since no one is of heaven" (Sermon 24,2,55-59).

Adam's sin is to believe Satan when he tries to convince him that the goal of human exaltation cannot be merited and must therefore be seized. The long-term consequence of Adam's fall is that we are deluded into thinking in an earthly way that there is no hope of future glorification, and so have no theological reason for following the path of ethical rectitude which will bring us to the heavenly reward in which we no longer truly believe. For this reason the economy of the divine mercy has to be revealed to us, as Leo makes clear when he writes

> "it was necessary - by the designs of a secret plan (*secreti dispensatione consilii*) - for the immutable God (whose will cannot be severed from his goodness) to complete by a deeper mystery the first intentions of his love (*primam pietatis suae dispositionem sacramento occultiore compleret*); it was necessary that human beings, tricked into sin's by the devil's wickedness, should not perish in opposition to Christ's plan" (Sermon 22,1,23-27).

The incarnation is the ultimate self-communication of a self-communicating God. As we have said, history is the history of this ongoing process of self-giving, but in Christ the divine attributes of mercy, truth, and life are nor just revealed but actually incarnated. In becoming thus incarnated they become imitable, for attributes which were at one time unapproachably divine are now human attributes which, with the assistance of grace, may be imitated by the faithful. The gulf that separates man

from God is bridged in Christ who is the great mediator between heaven and earth.

This is what Leo has in mind when he tells us that

> "the goodness of God (*bonitas divina*) has always looked after the human race - in various ways and to many degrees, and God has imparted very many gifts of his providence to ages past. But, in these last days, he has surpassed all the abundance of his usual generosity. At this time, mercy (*misericordia*) itself came down in Christ for sinners, truth itself for the straying, and life itself for the dead. As a result, the Word (the one that is co-eternal with and equal to the Father) takes up our lowly nature into the unity of his divinity. God born of God becomes a human being being born of a human being" (Sermon 24,1,1-10).

The trouble with the Old Testament dispensation was that it contained "distant and hidden promises" which benefited only a few, and it is only with the incarnation that the divine mercy has been revealed in a way which is widely accessible. The coming of Christ broadens the scope of the self-manifestation of God as loving and merciful, and is a revelation out of all proportion to anything that had gone before. Leo says of God's work of salvation that it

> "had been promised from the foundation of the world, and had been continually heralded with many signs of deeds and words. But how great a portion of humanity would those figures and shrouded mysteries save if Christ by his coming were not fulfilling those distant and hidden promises, and if what at that time profited only a few believers (as something yet to be done) were not now (fully accomplished) bringing real advantages to innumerable faithful? (Sermon 24,1,10-16).

The incarnation, then, is a revelation of the divine attributes, amongst which the attribute of mercy is perhaps the most important. Leo's commitment to Christological orthodoxy is explained by the fact that the errors of Nestorius and Eutyches effectively mean that the incarnation is not a genuine enfleshment of the divine attributes. If we follow Nestorius, then we have a graced man who is himself imitating the attributes of the divine nature to which he is in a special sense morally united, and who is not in any real sense the theandric self-expression of those attributes. If we follow Eutyches, we are left with a God-man whose humanity is so unreal that it neither reveals the self-communication of God by means of a genuine incarnation, nor offers us a human enfleshment of those attributes that we can imitate.

The assumption of flesh by the Word is the climactic act of divine self-

communication by which God goes to extraordinary and unprecedented lengths to reveal his various attributes to his creation, and as such it is both a supreme manifestation of the divine mercy and also an incarnation of the divine mercy in imitable form. But the revelation of the divine mercy is only part of the equation, and such mercy will be appropriated only if we reproduce its likeness in our own lives. This spirituality based upon the imitation of the divine mercy represents Leo's interpretation of the traditional theme of man as made in the image of God, and it is with this motif that we shall be dealing in the next section.

## In the Image of a Merciful God

In Sermon 12 Leo explains that to be made in the image of God is to imitate the God who has designed that image.[5] Human beings are mirrors in whom the goodness of God is to be reflected, as Leo makes clear when he writes

> "if we reflect upon the beginning of our creation with faith and wisdom, dearly beloved, we shall come to the realisation that human beings have been formed according to the image of God precisely with a view to their imitating their designer. Our race has this dignity of nature, so long as the figure of divine goodness (*divinae benignitatis forma*) continues to be reflected in us as in a kind of mirror" (Sermon 12,1,1-5).

In his mercy God is constantly restoring the divine image within us, and through his self-revelation of his love for us in Christ he makes it possible for us to love him in return:

> "the Saviour's grace refashions (*reparat*) us to this image on a daily basis. What fell in the first Adam has been raised up in the second. But our being refashioned has no other cause than the mercy of God (*misericordia Dei*). We would not love him but for the fact that he has loved us first and has dispelled the darkness of our ignorance with the light of his truth" (Sermon 12,1,5-10).

The love of God which is produced in us by the divine self-revelation is what recreates us in the image of God, for the reflection of God's goodness in which being in the image of God consists involves both our loving him who has loved us first and our loving what he loves in union with him:

> "it is by loving (*diligendo*) that God refashions us to his image. In order that he might find in us the image of his goodness, he gives us the very means by which we can perform the works that we do - by

> lighting the lamps of our minds and by inflaming us with the fire of his love so that we might love not only him but also whatever he loves" (Sermon 12,1,20-25).

Such love of God demands that we be entirely conformed with the divine will. Even when God's will appears to involve us in temporal distress it remains the case that God is fundamentally good and that everything proceeds from his justice and mercy:

> "let the faithful soul take upon itself the unfading love (*caritas*) of its Maker and Ruler. Let it subject itself entirely to his will. In the works and judgments of God, nothing exists devoid of true justice and compassionate mercy (*miseratione clementiae*). Even if some should be worn out by great labours and many trials, there is good reason for undergoing these when they know that they are being either corrected or proven by adversities" (Sermon 12,2,35-41).

However, love of God as expressed in submission to the divine will goes beyond the mere acceptance of the vicissitudes of our own lives, and extends to sharing in God's willing of the good of our neighbour, and to our doing something practical about the vicissitudes that affect *his* or *her* life. Thus Leo writes that

> "the filial devotion (*pietas*) that comes from this love (*caritas*) cannot be perfected without love of neighbour (*nisi diligatur et proximus*)" (Sermon 12,2,41-42).

The proper worship of God consists in a conformity of wills which means that what pleases him likewise pleases us, and such conformity of will will lead to the twofold goal of the worship of God and the service of our neighbour:

> "let the soul remember that she owes her first love (*primam dilectionem*) to God and her second to her neighbour, and that all her affections (*affectus*) must be directed by this rule, in order that she might not withdraw from the worship of the Lord nor from usefulness to the fellow servant. How is God worshipped unless what pleases him pleases us also, and unless our affections never resist his rule? If we want what he wants our weakness will take strength from the one from whom we receive our very willpower" (Sermon 19,3,60-66).

This kind of worship finds expression in the ascetic life, which for Leo embraces the triple way of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. This asceticism restores us to the image of God, as is clear from the fact that

> "propitiation of God is sought by prayer, concupiscence of the flesh is extinguished by fasting, and sins are redeemed by almsgiving. Through all of them at the same time the image of God is renewed in

> us - provided that we are ready to praise him, are concerned about our purification without respite, and are constantly intent on supporting our neighbour" (Sermon 12,4,104-109).

The complex of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving creates within us the "image and likeness of God" by way of right faith, purity of life, and kindness towards others. Each of these represents a way in which we imitate one of the attributes of God - the three attributes in question being God's truth, God's purity, and God's mercy. Other ways of imitating God (which we do not have time to study here) consist in the humility which imitates the self-humiliation of God's incarnational kenosis, and the peace which comprises conformity of will with the divine will. These other two are not strictly speaking imitations of permanent divine attributes but are consequences of the divine mercy as manifested in the incarnation - whereas the faith, innocence, and kindness which are exemplified and fostered in the virtues of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving involve us in an actual imitation of the divine nature which the incarnation has revealed. Leo writes that

> "this three-fold observance (*triplex observantia*), dearly beloved, encompasses the effects of all virtues. It brings us to the image and likeness of God, and makes us inseparable from the Holy Spirit. Prayer sustains a correct faith, fasting an innocent life, and almsgiving a kind disposition (*in elemosinis mens benigna*)" (Sermon 12,4,109-113).

If the "three-fold observance" is to have the effect of recreating in us the image of God, it must transport us beyond a narrow self-absorption with the mechanics of the fast and order us towards a more heavenly, God-like way of living. Leo is adamant that we do not fast just for sake of proving our spiritual virility, but that we do so in order to transform ourselves from being "earthly" people to being "heavenly people". Throughout Leo's sermons we find recurrent contrasts between the fleshly and the spiritual, and between the earthly and the heavenly, and these tensions are expressed in the notion of the "transference of desires" by which, though we remain bodily on earth, we begin to dwell with our hearts and minds in heaven. This "transference of desires" demands that we cease to long for that which is worldly and transitory, and fix our attention upon celestial goods:

> "let us flee harmful pleasures, dangerous joys, and desires which perish right away. What fruit is there, what use is there in wanting these things incessantly - things that we must abandon even if they

> do not abandon us? Let the love of ephemeral things be transferred to incorruptible ones. Let hearts called to lofty things find their enjoyment in heavenly delights (*caelestibus*)" (Sermon 35,4,122-127).

We saw earlier that being in the image of God consists in conformity with the divine will, but here it becomes clear that it is more than a mere acceptance of divine dispositions. Such conformity involves both a desiring God and a desiring *with* God, so that our minds are effectively located in heaven where God dwells as object of desire and where the world can be viewed from God's heavenly and merciful perspective.

This necessarily means that we must look upon the poor and disadvantaged as God looks on them, and that, sharing in God's compassion, we must become mediators of the divine blessings to those less fortunate than ourselves. Thus it is the case that

> "full compassion and full justice require (*plenum pietatis et iustitiae est*) that we too should help others from the things which the heavenly Father has mercifully (*misericorditer*) bestowed upon us" (Sermon 16,1,21-23).

Because the "transference of desires" means that we regard the deprivation of others from a heavenly perspective, the result of our almsgiving will be to strengthen us in our heavenly way of looking at the world, and to transform our earthly wealth into celestial riches:

> "part of those physical resources which are used to help the poor become transformed into eternal riches. Born from this generosity (*largitas*) are funds which will not be able to be diminished through use or damaged through decay. 'Blessed are the merciful, for God will have mercy upon them' [Matthew 5:7]. He who constitutes the very exemplar of this precept will also be the sum of their reward" (Sermon 16,2,46-51).

This last sentence brings us back to the theme of the image of God, and suggests that, in imitating God who is the exemplar of mercy and loving kindness, we shall attain the very same God as the final reward for the liturgical contemplation and social and ecclesial reflection of the divine mercy that comprise our principal religious duties in this present life.

This aspect of meriting future blessing is one that we shall be examining in more detail a little later, but for the present it is sufficient to observe that, in imitating the divine mercy, we receive mercy ourselves by way of reward, and that we who are to be judged by God are given the opportunity to determine our own fate in the

light of the mercy that we exhibit towards others. Thus Leo explains that

> "by having mercy (*miserendo*) on his poor we might deserve the mercy (*misericordia*) of God. The most effective prayer to make requests of God is that which is supported by the works of mercy, since those who do not turn their hearts away from poverty quickly turn the Lord's ear to themselves; thus the Lord says 'be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate' [Luke 6:36], and 'pardon and you will be pardoned' [Luke 6:37]. What is kindlier (*benignius*) than this justice? What is more merciful (*clementius*) than this reciprocity where the decision of the one to judge is placed in the power of the one to be judged?" (Sermon 17,1,19-26).

The idea is that God has blessed us temporally, but that what we really long for in virtue of the transference of desires is eternal blessing, and we can achieve eternal blessing by imitating God's temporal blessing of ourselves through the means of sharing that temporal blessing with those who have not been so fortunate.

As we observed a little earlier, Leo's mysticism is an ethical mysticism, and the traditional patristic idea that man is "deified" in virtue of the incarnation is worked out by Leo in terms of an imitation at the level of practical charity of the divine mercy that we have received as temporal in the present and that we hope to transform into something spiritual and eternal in the future. Leo writes that

> "you, dearly beloved, who have believed the promises of the Lord with your whole heart, flee the foul leprosy of avarice, and make a holy and wise use of God's gifts. Since you enjoy his generosity, take care that you may be able to have companions in your joy. The things that are supplied to you are lacking to many, and in their need the material has been given to you for imitating the divine goodness, so that through you the divine goodness might pass over to others. As you give out your temporal goods well, you are acquiring eternal" (Sermon 17,4,75-83).

As we shall argue, almsgiving affords us the opportunity to become co-workers with God in his merciful activity in the world, and so cements our mystical union with him in virtue of the transference of desires and our reflection of his likeness.

Indeed, in being companions in God's merciful work we in a sense transcend our own nature and participate in the Creator's essential goodness:

> "human beings, made in the image and likeness of God, have nothing in their dignity that is so especially their own as that they can match the goodness of their Creator - who, just as he is a merciful donor of his own gifts, is also a just creditor who is willing for us to be companions in his work" (Sermon 20,2,45-50).

We cannot imitate God the Creator in terms of being creative ourselves, but in

imitating God in his generous and merciful disposal of created goods we elevate ourselves above the level of the beasts and become truly human, for to be graced humans in the image of God means nothing other than to be stewards of what God has created for the benefit of others in a totally altruistic way. It is this altruism that defines us as human beings, for the one thing that sets us apart from the animals and constitutes us as being in the image of God is a selflessness that involves us in living our lives for the sake of other people. Thus Leo writes

> "although we have no power to create nature, we can still use the material received from the grace of God, because earthly goods are not so collected for our use that they should serve the satisfaction and pleasure of our bodily senses only. Otherwise we would be no different to sheep, no different to other beasts, who do not know how to provide for the necessities of others, and can care only for themselves and for their own offspring" (Sermon 20,2,50-56).

Christian theology has traditionally seen the difference between human beings and animals as lying in the rationality of the former, but, just as the "rationality" of God in the deception of the devil is in reality the operation of his divine mercy, so also Leo sees "reason" as being expressed through that mercy which exemplifies love of God and neighbour.

To be rational is to be merciful, and Leo would regard "reason" that was not worked out in love of God and neighbour as fundamentally irrational. Thus he explains that

> "animals, lacking intellect, are instructed in no commandments. They who have received no power of reason have received no law. Where there is the light of reason (*inluminatio rationis*), however there there is the discipline of mercy (*disciplina pietatis*), which owes love (*dilectio*) to God and to neighbour. Human beings prove that they love themselves when it is evident that they love the Maker of their nature above themselves and the sharers of their nature as themselves" (Sermon 20,3,57-63).

God's self-communicative love for our fellow human beings is very often mediated through us, and we are called upon to be mediators of the divine mercy not only to our friends but also to our enemies. Leo writes that

> "we must love (*diligo*) God and we must love our neighbour in such a way that we take the form of love (*formam diligendi*) to our neighbour from that love with which God loves us - who is good even to the wicked, and supports not only his worshippers with the gifts of his kindness, but even his antagonists. We must love our

> neighbours, we must love strangers, and what is owing to friends must be paid over and above this to enemies" (Sermon 20,3,66-71).

Life in the image of God may be an idea that has its roots in mystical theology, but in the hands of Leo such mysticism finds its expression in the sphere of social ethics, and in that conformity of our wills with the will of God which brings us to co-operate with him in communicating his blessings to others. Such mediation of the divine temporal blessings will bring us the reward of eternal blessings in the next life - as we shall see in what follows.

## The Meritoriousness of Mercy

As we have seen, to be a co-worker of God in communicating his mercy to the underprivileged at a temporal level leads to the goal of heavenly rewards at an eternal level. In other words, Leo's theology is a theology of *merit*. This is by no means inconsistent with the Augustinian idea of grace with which Leo is familiar, but it is far closer to the Thomistic Augustinianism which teaches us that grace enables us to merit final glory than it is to the Lutheran Augustinianism in which grace obviates any salvific rôle for good works. At its simplest, the idea that underpins Leo's teaching on how we are saved is summed up when he writes that

> "we have learned from divine precepts, dearly beloved, as well as from things laid down by the apostles, that every human being situated among the hazards of this life must seek the mercy (*misericordia*) of God by being merciful (*miserendo*)" (Sermon 11,1,1-3).

Mercy conceived as an eternal spiritual blessing is the reward for the imitative practice of mercy conceived as temporal and corporeal charity, and the goal of the "transference of desires" is achieved through the medium of a strictly human and practical mercy which both mirrors and merits the divine and celestial mercy that we hope to receive in the future.

Leo shows that he has personal experience of the divine mercy, and emphasises that God has showered mercy on him without his first meriting it:

> "now that the day on which the Lord willed that I first hold episcopal office has come back in due course, I have true cause to rejoice for the glory of God. He has pardoned much so that he might be loved much by me [cf Luke 7:47]. In order to make his grace

> marvellous, God has bestowed his gifts on one in whom he found no endorsement of merits (*meritorum suffragia*)" (Sermon 2,1,8-13).

The mercy that God has shown him is that of the pardoning of his sins, and the Christian is required to respond to such mercy by exhibiting a corporeal and temporal mercy to his fellows which will result in his enjoying the reward of spiritual and eternal blessings in the future life.

Leo is keen that we should not trust in our own righteousness, and emphasises that our celestial reward is not in proportion to works as such. This is because our sins demand that we should be punished, and if there were a direct proportion between works in the present life and our reward in the next then punishment would inevitably ensue. Thus Leo writes that

> "no one should presume upon his own justice and no one distrust God's mercy, this mercy which comes all the more clearly into relief when the sinner is sanctified and the lowly one is raised up. Heavenly gifts are not in proportion with the quality of our works. In this world, where all life is a test, not everyone receives the compensation they deserve. Here, if the Lord were to take note of iniquities, no one would be able to bear his judgment" (Sermon 2,1,14-21).

As we shall see, this most emphatically does not mean that our reward in the next life does not depend on merit. What it means is that it does not depend on merit conceived absolutely and without the introduction of the factor of grace into the scheme of things. We do not attain celestial reward through the medium of ungraced merit, but only in virtue of a merit which is the consequence of the forgiveness of sins and a prior infusion of grace.

That the character of our particular judgment does indeed follow on from the nature of our works is demonstrated by the fact that those who have been guilty of hardheartedness will by sternly judged, while the virtuous will enter into the kingdom of heaven on the basis of their works of mercy. This does not contradict what was said earlier about heavenly gifts not being in proportion with our earthly works because Leo is now talking about Christians who have received grace through baptism and the Eucharist, and who have accordingly received both the forgiveness of their sins and the empowerment to merit a celestial reward through works of mercy. He writes:

> "when the children of devotion have taken possession of the kingdom prepared for them after their works of mercy have been reviewed, a charge of barrenness (resulting from a hard heart) will be brought against the unjust" (Sermon 9,2,41-44).

The threat of punishment is itself an inducement to those works of mercy which reconstitute us in the image of God, and encourages us to ever greater imitation of the divine mercy:

> "but this harshness has been disclosed so that mercy might be sought. We must therefore live this present life with an abundance of mercy" (Sermon 9,2,51-53).

Again, we have to stress that this doctrine of merit presupposes a theology of grace after a broadly Augustinian pattern whereby the ability to merit heavenly rewards is itself a gift of the mercy of God.

The message put forward by Leo is a stark one: if we want to receive mercy ourselves at the level of eternal and spiritual rewards, we must first show it to others at the more basic level of social concern. Thus we are exhorted

> "let those who want Christ to spare them have compassion for the poor (*misereantur pauperum*). Let those who desire a bond with the fellowship of the blessed be readily disposed towards nourishing the wretched" (Sermon 9,2,57-59).

It is almost as if God is grateful to us for our kindness to his creatures and rewards us accordingly. Leo writes

> "your fellow servant receives assistance, and the Lord returns thanks. Food for someone in need is the cost of purchasing the kingdom of heaven, and the one who is generous with temporal things is made heir of the eternal" (Sermon 9,2,62-64).

The reference to "purchasing the kingdom of heaven" is rather shocking to modern ears, but Leo wishes us to consider it seriously. Quite simply, through almsgiving we can buy our way into paradise by imitating the divine mercy and sharing with others those temporal blessings which God has vouchsafed to us.

This all ties in with what we said earlier about love of God involving loving what God loves. In imitating the divine mercy we effectively participate with God in his love for human beings and are in a sense mystically united with him so as to "pass over into his affection":

> "what brings it about that these paltry outlays should have deserved to be assessed at so high an appraisal? It could only have

> been that the values of charitable works are figured in the balance. When human beings love what God himself cherishes, they deserve to ascend into his kingdom, since they have already passed over into his affection" (Sermon 9,2,64-68).

In loving what God loves our affections are somehow conjoined with that of God, and mystical union with God - that is to say, life in the *imago Dei* - is expressed in loving what he loves and in working out this love in the practical form of charitable giving. The Latin *caritas* denotes both charity in the modern sense and also "charity" in the sense of that virtue which is characterised by love of God and neighbour, but with Leo the two meanings merge together, for love of God and neighbour results into an entry into the divine affection by which we love what he loves and act accordingly at the level of social and ethical behaviour.

The truth that we cannot love God without loving our neighbour whom God loves is brought home to us by the incarnation, in which God actually becomes our neighbour. There appears to be a sense in which the incarnation is prolonged in the persons of the poor, and in which the poverty which the Word assumes when he takes flesh continues to exist in relation to him in the persons of the poor even after his resurrection and ascension into heaven. Like John Chrysostom in the east, Leo takes very seriously the biblical idea that Christ is present to us in the poor, and that whatever we do for the poor we do for Christ. Thus he writes that

> "rightly indeed do we see the person of our Lord Jesus Christ in the poor and needy. 'Although he was rich', as the blessed apostle says, 'he became poor so that he might make us rich by his own poverty' [2 Corinthians 8:9]. So that his presence would not seem removed from us, he ordained the mystery of his glory and humility in such a way that we might nourish in his poor the very same one whom we worship as King and Lord in the majesty of the Father. Thereby are we to be freed from eternal condemnation on that terrible day. It is in return for our care of the poor so regarded that we are to be admitted into fellowship with the kingdom of heaven" (Sermon 9,3,88-96).

The theory seems to be that, because the Word took poverty upon himself, the poor exist in a special relation to him, with the result that in serving them we are in a mysterious way also serving Christ. Once again, such service will meet with a reward in the next life, in such a way that future blessings can be said to depend directly on our treatment of the poor.

Leo argues that those rich people who refuse to practise mercy and almsgiving

are "poor" in an absolute or spiritual sense, and that having failed to invest in heavenly goods they will be punished in the next life by being refused eternal blessings. Leo informs us that

> "rich people like these are poorer than any of the poor. They forfeit those eternal revenues that it is within their power to obtain. Resting upon a short-lived and not always unencumbered enjoyment of their possessions, they fail to nourish themselves at all on the savoury food of justice and mercy. They are dazzling on the outside but murky within. Abounding in temporal things, they are impoverished of things eternal. Those who from what they have consigned to earthly storehouses have put nothing into the heavenly coffers afflict their own souls with hunger and put them to shame with nakedness" (Sermon 10,2,35-42).

This is very much the kind of teaching that St Luke puts forward in the "Magnificat", where the idea is that those who are rich in temporal things will be overthrown and the blessings of God will be given to the poor. This of course is not to disparage wealth itself, but only the improper stewardship of wealth. An even more astringent version of this doctrine is found in the *ad Ecclesiam* of Salvian of Marseilles - a contemporary of Leo in Gaul who castigated the rich and insisted on almsgiving as obligatory to all Christians (including monks), and who echoes Leo when he teaches that the alms that one gives during the course of one's life on earth obtain the pardon of one's sins at the moment of death.[6]

The idea of Christ's fundamental solidarity with the poor is proposed in yet another passage where judgment is said to depend on those works of mercy which Jesus Christ will "reckon as rendered to himself". The self-abasement of the incarnation is seen as bringing into being a special association between the incarnate Word and human lowliness in general, and the corollary of this is that works of mercy are said to be done to Christ himself, while hardness of heart becomes all the more blameworthy in the sight of God. Leo asks

> "what will those who are destined to stand on the right be praised for if not the benevolent works and charitable services that Jesus Christ will reckon as rendered unto himself? That is because in making human nature his own he has not disassociated himself from any aspect of human lowliness. What accusations will be made against those on the left if not neglect of love, inhuman hardness, and denying compassion to the poor?" (Sermon 10,2,54-60).

This passage recalls the section in Matthew 25:31-46 where the Lord describes the

judgment at which the sheep will be placed on the right hand of God and the goats on the left, and when all will be judged on the basis that "as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren you did it to me".

Leo even goes so far as to suggest that the single virtue of mercy can atone for all other vices, while at the same time to exhibit the entire range of the virtues in the absence of mercy will do us no good whatsoever. Clearly Leo is not suggesting that the other virtues do not matter and that we can live as we please so long as we are charitable towards the poor, but rather he is saying that God in his mercy might *possibly* choose to have mercy on those who have reflected the divine mercy in their lives even though they have failed to reflect the other divine attributes. Leo observes that

> "but at that great and ultimate judgment the kindness of generosity (*largitatis benignitas*) or the ungodliness of avarice will receive an extremely high value. Despite perpetrating all manner of the greatest crimes, some are accepted into heaven on account of that one good. Despite possessing the fullness of all virtues, others are cast into eternal fire on account of that one evil" (Sermon 10,2,61-65).

Again, one has to stress that this most emphatically does not mean that Leo believes that virtues such as purity of life and complete fidelity to orthodox teaching on matters such as Christology are dispensable. What it does mean is that, as Aquinas might put it, these virtues are formed by charity, in such a way that they are useless in the absence of charity, but attain additional merit when charity is present.

Certainly it is the case that virtues such as sexual purity have value only if they are accompanied by works of mercy, for almsgiving is, so to speak, the ultimate purification, and any other form of purity is pointless without it. Thus Leo says

> "let none, then, dearly beloved, flatter themselves about any merits (*merita*) due to living a good life if they lack charitable works (*opera caritatis*). Nor should any be complacent about the purity of their bodies if they have not been cleansed at all by the purification of alms. Alms wipe away sins, do away with death, and extinguish the punishment of eternal fire" (Sermon 10,3,66-70).

This is how we need to understand it when Leo writes that it is almsgiving alone that will determine our future in the next life. It is probably true to say that doctrinal orthodoxy and sexual purity will contribute towards the degree of beatitude that we enjoy, but the plain fact of the matter is that whether we are to be punished or

rewarded depends entirely on our record in the field of charitable giving. Leo explains that

> "by saying 'blessed are the merciful, for God will have mercy on them', the Lord made it clear that the entire scale on which he is going to judge the whole world when he appears in his majesty would be tilted while hanging from the following balance: only the quality of good works directed towards the destitute would determine the sentence" (Sermon 11,1,6-10).

Accordingly, while it is true that other virtues determine the degree of blessing that will be ours in the future life, and that the accent on works of mercy does not excuse sin in other areas of the Christian life, it remains the case that, in the eyes of Leo, it is our record in almsgiving that is the ultimate benchmark of our status as Christians, and he reiterates that it is possible and indeed likely that the truly merciful will be judged generously whatever faults they may be guilty of in more general terms. Thus Leo writes that

> "since mercy will be exalted over condemnation, and the gifts of clemency will surpass any just compensation, all the lives led by mortals and all different kinds of actions will be appraised under the aspect of a single rule. No charges at all would be brought up where, in confessing the Creator, works of compassion have been found" (Sermon 11,1,14-20).

One would have to qualify this statement from a systematic point of view by saying that other categories of sin tend to vitiate the soul and so render us less merciful towards others, and that most types of sin involve harming other human beings in some way or another to the extent that they represent sins against charity when the latter is understood in more than simply material terms. Later Latin theology was to develop the idea of a distinction between corporeal works of mercy and spiritual works of mercy - the former representing works of practical charity, and the latter being ordered towards the conversion and sanctification of souls - and on this slightly broader reading sins such as adultery would be sins against mercy as conceived in the spiritual sense, whilst good works performed for the wellbeing of souls would be regarded as meriting salvation. Such a refinement of Leo's position is probably required if we are not to fall into the trap of seeing social ethics as the sole criterion according to which we are judged in a way which makes all other virtues and vices irrelevant (which would be contrary to Leo's overall intention, whatever the

rhetorical content of passages such as the one under consideration).

In spite of these qualifications, one cannot underestimate the extent to which Leo sees the imitation of the divine mercy as directly meritorious of the reward of eternal salvation. One of the most outspoken statements of the doctrine occurs in a passage where he speaks of works of mercy as a kind of holy "usury" by which we lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven. Thus he writes:

> "those who love money and hope to increase their wealth by immoderate growth should rather practise this holy investment and grow rich by this art of usury - in order that they might not lay hold of the necessities of labouring men or fall into the traps of impossible debts through deceitful benefits. Let them instead be creditors (*creditor*) and the money-lenders (*fenerator*) of someone who said 'give and it will be given to you' [Luke 6:38], and 'the measure with which you measure, the same will be measured back to you' [Luke 6:38]" (Sermon 17,2,39-45).

In assessing all such statements we have always to remember that they presuppose a doctrine of grace whereby God conforms our wills to his own and fills us with the gift of love. Although Leo may at times express himself in the almost crude terms of a financial transaction, what we have here is a highly developed theology of love and charity of the sort outlined by D. Polato in his important study of the subject.[7] However, as we have noted, *caritas* as "love" and *caritas* as "practical charity" are barely distinguished from each other in Leo's thought, for love of God that is not worked out in loving what God loves and hence in doing good to one's fellow human beings is not love of God in any meaningful sense. Such an insight lies at the foundation of Leo's perception that almsgiving is a spiritually therapeutic activity, and it is this that we shall be undertaking to examine in the final section of the present chapter.

## Mercy's Healing Power

We have seen that almsgiving has the effect of meriting eternal rewards in the future life, but in this section we shall be looking at the way in which it exercises a healing and cleansing function in the present. Leo perceives almsgiving as being a "medicine" and a "remedy" for the forgiveness of sins, and asks:

> "what hope would lift up the fallen, what medicine heal the wounded, if almsgiving did not remit faults, and needs of the poor did not become remedies for sin?" (Sermon 11,1,3-6).

Most importantly, Leo echoes his Italian counterpart Maximus of Turin in investing almsgiving with sacramental significance, portraying it as washing away post-baptismal sin:

> "you know that - apart from the baptism of regeneration in which all stain of sin has been washed away - this remedy has been granted by God to human weakness. If someone contracts any guilt while living on this earth, almsgiving wipes it away. Almsgiving (*elemosinae*) is a work of love (*opera caritatis*), and we know that love covers a multitude of sins [1 Peter 4:8]" (Sermon 7,1,8-13).

Leo juxtaposes texts from both Old and New Testaments in order to demonstrate his point that almsgiving has atoning value, and he accords it the same kind of power that later western authority assigns to sacramental confession and absolution. Thus he argues that

> "a certain power of baptism is set in almsgiving (*virtus quaedam . . . baptismatis*) because, 'just as water quenches a fire, so alms atone for sins' [Sirach 3:33]. It has also been said through the same Spirit: 'wash yourselves and be clean' [Isaiah 1:16], and 'give alms and all will be clean for you' [Luke 11:41]. Let no one be hesitant, let no one doubt that the brightness of regeneration will be restored, even after many sins, to the one who is eager to be cleansed by the purification of almsgiving" (Sermon 20,3,87-93).

Lest it should seem unfair that such a source of forgiveness for sins is available only to the rich, Leo emphasises that even the relatively poor can participate in almsgiving in accordance with their comparatively slender means. What matters is not the sum parted with but the "spirit of giving". Leo observes that

> "in this undertaking, even if not everyone has the same means, there ought to be equal devotion all round, since the generosity of the faithful does not depend on the value of the gift but on the amount of good will (*benivolentiae*) involved. Let the poor make some profit as well in this economy of mercy (*misericordiae commercio*) by setting aside from whatever possessions they have a sum that they can afford to part with to support those in need. While the rich should be more bountiful with gifts, the poor should not be outdone in the spirit of giving" (Sermon 8,2,22-29).

The crucial ingredient is the "goodwill" which motivates our almsgiving - that goodwill which involves willing what God wills and desiring what God wills in accordance with the "transference of desires" and with life in the *imago Dei*:

> "in aiding them [the suffering] there is no one who can fail to receive some portion of this kindness. No wealth is small if love is great, nor is the measure of mercy or devotion dependent on property. The

> riches of goodwill are rightly never lacking even with property which is insignificant. Donations of the rich are greater and those of the less endowed are smaller, but the fruit of their work is no different where there is the same goodwill in the workers" (Sermon 40,4,110-119).

As before, such almsgiving is ordered towards a future and eternal reward according to which we receive mercy in the sense of forgiveness of sins and final salvation in proportion to the extent to which we have practised mercy at the level of social ethics:

> "Christ our Lord wants us to care about the poor so that, on the day when payment will be portioned out, he might lavish upon the merciful the mercy that he has promised" (Sermon 8,2,32-35).

Leo reiterates the point that we made earlier about faith being dead without works, and anticipates the Thomistic doctrine that charity is the "form of the virtues" when he explains that

> "this virtue causes all other virtues to be worth something. It gives life even to faith itself - faith by which the just live and which is said to be dead without works - by mingling with it. While faith provides the basis for works, the strength of faith comes out only in works" (Sermon 10,3,76-80).

The ascetic life as a whole is rendered meaningful only if it is accompanied by works of mercy, for fasting without almsgiving is a perversion rather than a spiritual exercise:

> "fasting makes us stronger against sins, overcomes concupiscences, repels temptations, makes pride bow low, mitigates wrath, and rears all the inclinations of good will up to the maturity of complete virtue. Yet this happens only if it takes up into partnership with itself the benevolence of love, and if it exercises itself prudently in works of mercy. Fasting without alms does not so much cleanse the soul as afflict the flesh. It must rather be ascribed to avarice than to self-restraint when someone refrains from food in such a way as to be fasting from compassion" (Sermon 15,2,41-50).

Almsgiving, accordingly, gives form not only to the basic life of virtue but also to the higher calling of asceticism, and without almsgiving such asceticism is a pointless exercise. Fasting possesses no cleansing power of its own, but is purificatory only when allied with works of mercy. Works of mercy reconstitute us in the image of God whose divine mercy they imitate, and so represent a kind of second baptism whereby we are reborn and recreated in Christ all over again. The idea of the incarnation as a "new creation" into which we enter through the medium of baptism is integral to Leo's

thought, and this "new creation" is expressed through that imitation of the divine mercy in which life in the image of God consists. Almsgiving is the natural expression of that life, and is also the means by which the image is restored as if by a second baptism when we fall away from it due to sin.

Leo's achievement is to integrate mysticism and social ethics into a single spirituality which is intended not for monks (as is the case with the writings of someone like John Cassian) but for a lay audience. Such essentially "mystical" notions as the "transference of desires", life "in Christ", the *imago Dei*, the characteristically Greek idea of *theiosis* or "divinisation", and the like, are interpreted in terms of a social ethics whereby the divine nature which is the object of Christian contemplation is contemplated not just in the abstract but in the active imitation of the divine attributes. Foremost amongst these attributes is the attribute of mercy, and we are called upon to imitate the divine mercy, which is a fundamentally spiritual thing, in a fashion which is largely practical and corporeal.

Leo's theology is wholeheartedly incarnational, and the enfleshment of the Word finds its corollary in the translation by Christians of divine mercy understood as grace and forgiveness into a "fleshly" form of mercy which is manifested in the social ethics of almsgiving. Just as Leo's Christology and soteriology envisage the Word's kenosis and incarnation as leading to the exaltation of human beings, so the "incarnation" of the divine mercy in the form of our corporeal works of mercy leads to the exaltation of those who practise social mercy in such a way that they receive the spiritual, saving mercy of which their almsgiving is the incarnational imitation. In this way mystical union with the incarnate Christ is understood in terms of an "incarnating" imitation of the divine mercy whose reality he reveals, and a lay spirituality which is inseparable from social and ethical considerations merits that heavenly reward which is the proper goal of Christian mysticism.

# NOTES

1 For Leo's teaching on almsgiving, see R. Dolle: "Un docteur de l'Aumône, saint Léon le Grand", *La vie spirituelle* 96 (1957), 266-287; A. Guillaume: *Jeûne et charité dans l'église latine des origines au XIIième siècle, en particulier chez saint Léon le Grand*, Paris, 1961; P. Mikat: "Die Lehre von Almosen in den Kollektenpredigten Leos des Grossen", *Perennitas* (Festschrift for Thomas Michels, ed. H. Rahner & E. von Severus), Münster, 1963, 46-64.

2 On the idea of Leo as a "moral" theologian, see R. Dolle: "Les idées morales de saint Léon le Grand", *Mélanges de science religieuse* 15 (1958), 49-84.

3 Leo sees the entire sacramental and ecclesial order as a continuation of the incarnation. See M. Garrido Boñano: "Prolongación de Cristo en su cuerpo místico según San Léon Magno", *Studium*, 15 (1975), 491-505.

4 See our earlier discussion of the article by C. Burgio: "Le ragioni dell'incarnazione secondo san Leone Magno", *Studi Francescani* 37 (1940), 81-94.

5 For Leo's teaching on the *imago Dei*, see G. Hudon: *La perfection chrétienne dans les sermons de s. Léon* (Lex Orandi 26), Paris, 1959, *passim*.

6 The Four Books to the Church 1,1. See G.W. Olsen: "Reform after the Pattern of the Primitive Church in the Thought of Salvian of Marseilles", *The Catholic Historical Review* 68 (1982), 1-12.

7 D. Polato: *Aspetti di una teologia della carità nei sermoni di San Leone Magno*, unpub. diss., Padua, 1969.

# Chapter Eleven

# PREACHING & CONTEMPLATION

## Christology as Contemplation

We have seen that Leo's preaching is concerned with the proclamation of the divine mercy and universal salvific will. In our opening chapter we noted the evolution of the Italian sermon from Zeno to Leo and argued that Leo transforms the homily from something essentially hortatory and exegetical to something liturgical and theological. In Leo's hands the sermon becomes not only a medium for preaching the divine mercy, but also becomes an instrument of that divine mercy, for it represents an effective occasion for God's revelation of his merciful love - a revelation which, in facilitating contemplation of the divine mercy within a liturgical context, brings about that "transference of desires" from earth to heaven and from flesh to spirit which is the goal of the spiritual life. During the liturgical sermon - which is Christological not only with regard to subject-matter but in the sense that it is an "incarnation" or "epiphany" of Christ the incarnate Logos in the logos of the sermon - our minds are focused by the preacher on the saving mysteries of the life of the Word made flesh, and come to rest in the person of the ascended Lord and to meditate upon the mercy that he makes manifest.

The doctrine of the incarnation which Leo preaches is important because only a right understanding of the person and natures in Christ can enable us to move in an ascent of the mind from the humanity to the divinity which are conjoined in the Word,

and because only an orthodox Christology can offer a meaningful revelation of the divine mercy (in as much as Christ is truly God) and of the proper human response to that mercy (in so far as he is truly man). Of equal importance is the diptych of "mystery" and "example". Here the aspect of "mystery" refers to the healing power which the Word exercises upon his conjoined humanity and, through it, upon all who come into contact with that humanity either in baptism and Eucharist or in contemplation (especially liturgical contemplation) of the cycle of incarnation, passion, resurrection, and ascension. Meanwhile, the aspect of "example" refers to the twofold exemplification by which Christ as God reveals the divine mercy as an option for human beings through the medium of grace and merit, and by which Christ as man demonstrates how we can effectively opt for the rewards that are on offer.

The rôle of the devil in all this is to inculcate despair in human beings by persuading them that the offer of mercy is not a genuine option and that all they can hope for is to share in his own fate of punishment and damnation. The traditional theories of the conquest and deception of the devil are radically reinterpreted by Leo in such a way as to set them within the context of his overall theological perspective. Human beings were held captive to the devil in the sense that their minds were not free to appreciate the reality of the divine mercy, and the liberating work of Christ consists in his delivering us from the state of ignorance concerning the divine mercy that the devil had induced. Although much of the language of deception and legal contracts is retained, it is very much subservient to this determining emphasis on the idea that Christ sets us free from intellectual captivity by means of an act of revelation - an act of revelation which, as we have already observed, comprises a manifestation both of the merciful nature of God and also of the proper human response to the divine mercy.

This deliverance of man from captivity to Satan still has to be appropriated at the level of the individual, for each of us must respond to the reality of the divine mercy which has been revealed to us by ordering our lives towards God by way of the "transference of desires" and by reflecting the *imago Dei*. The "transference" of desires is effected by strict adherence to the ascetic life - notably the practices of prayer, fasting and liturgical observance - while the *imago Dei* is reflected by means of an

imitation in the social sphere of the divine mercy. In practice this means that the Christian imperative of almsgiving is elevated to an unprecedented status, to the extent that almsgiving is presented as the one virtue without which we cannot be saved. The goal of the spiritual life consists in that *pax* which represents perfect unanimity with God. This in turn demands not only that we love God as the object of the virtue of charity but that we love *with* God and work alongside him for the salvation of souls and the alleviation of the sufferings of the poor. Such a zeal for the spiritual and temporal well-being of our fellow human beings is what motivates the whole of Leo's preaching, and it witnesses to his own unanimity with the will of God as he labours to be a co-operator with the incarnate Word for the sake of proclaiming the gospel of the economy of mercy.

In recent years writers such as Edward Schillebeeckx and Hans Küng have argued that the Chalcedonian Christology needs to be redefined in the light of modern insights in philosophy and theology, and that the traditional portrait of Jesus Christ as taught by the Church down the centuries requires substantial reformulation. While some contemporary scholars such as von Balthasar have met this challenge by affirming the classical doctrine in up-to-date language that marks a significant break with the scholasticism of past centuries, others in both Catholic and Protestant churches have tended towards a radical reinterpretation of Christology which favours the idea that Jesus of Nazareth is a *revealer* who reveals to us what it is to be truly human.

During the course of this study we have argued that Leo's Christological teaching goes far beyond the standard formulae used to express the truth of the hypostatic union, and that it is ordered towards the spiritual life of the Christian which consists in knowledge and imitation of the nature of God as loving and merciful. Leo's Christ is also a revealer, but a revealer who reveals not only the possibilities of authentic human existence, but also the character of God as a God of mercy and love. Christology becomes a science which presents Jesus Christ as the focal point of this twofold revelation, and the "two forms" Christology - which is is more typical of Leo's preaching than is the "two natures" formula of Chalcedon - is designed to depict Christ as a revealer both of the divine mercy and universal salvific will and also of

the proper human response to God's offer of salvation. Schillebeeckx and Küng present us with a Christ who reveals to us a paradigm of human authenticity, but at the end of the day what they leave us with is not Christianity as such but Christian humanism. Leo, by way of contrast, anticipates writers as diverse as Aquinas, Barth and von Balthasar in showing us how we can understand classical Christology in a way which is thoroughly modern but which takes into account that divine causality which acts on us transformatively through the spiritual knowledge that follows on from revelation.

Much contemporary Christology portrays the "incarnate Word" as God's word to man about man, and so reduces the Christian faith to ethics and politics (as in the case of the later Schillebeeckx), and leads inevitably to a secularised, banal, and man-centred liturgy of the sort familiar to many modern Catholics and Anglicans. Leo offers us a Christ who is God's word to man about God, and who leads us by way of the "transference of desires" away from the fleshly and earthly to the spiritual and heavenly. In this way, and in particular through the medium of his spirituality of the ascension of the mind, he opens the door for a return to more "mystical" expressions of liturgy and spirituality of the sort that characterised Catholic life before the reforms of recent decades, and of the sort that the Orthodox churches have never abandoned, and so points the way forward for a rediscovery of Christian tradition which involves simultaneously a genuine "return to the sources" and a renewed openness to the reconciliation of east and west.

## Christian Asceticism: Demonic or Divinising?

The majority of contemporary writers would wish either to dispense with all reference to a personalised devil or else to demythologise such language so as to interpret it in ways more congenial to the modern mind. It is clear that the demonic has to be taken seriously by Christian theologians, for it is such a feature of the gospel accounts of the life and works of Jesus, who is portrayed as much as anything else as an exorcist who exercises complete authority over the forces of darkness in general. Colin Gunton regards the New Testament treatment of the demonic as metaphorical, and criticises the fathers for transferring such language from the realm of the "metaphorical" to the realm of the "mythical",[1] but there is very little argument

(apart from the wishful thinking of present-day exegetes) for thinking that the patristic perspective is significantly different from the biblical.

Many scholars (particularly those on the political left) like to interpret the demonic in terms of any force beyond the control of the individual - which usually boils down to those particular social, economic, and political structures which the writer in question happens not to agree with. The Welsh poet R.S. Thomas equates the demonic with technology and the culture of violence,[2] and in doing so echoes both Heidegger and the Greek Orthodox theologian and ethicist Christos Yannaras.[3] Yet surely it must be the case that when the evangelists speak of Christ casting out demons or when Athanasius speaks of St Anthony combating devils in the desert they are speaking of objective and personalised creatures rather than impersonal forces - for how on earth can Christ be said to cast an unjust socio-political structure out of a man and transfer it to a herd of swine? Moreover, the equation of the demonic with something impersonal and beyond our control would appear to undermine human freedom in the face of evil and replace the hopeful struggle of the individual against personalised demons with the hopeless struggle of the state against impersonal evil. The sheer powerlessness of human beings in the face of the demonic as conceived along these lines is surely contrary to the theology of hope proposed by Leo, and would appear liable to inculcate a level of despair which is itself demonic. In particular, the failure of political solutions of whatever kind in the face of "unjust structures" would imply that such problems remain effectively insoluble in human terms, and that a kind of Nietzschean despair or a kind of Sartrean nausea can be the only proper response to a world in which the demonic has triumphed over the divine.

If the equation of the demonic with unjust social, economic and political structures characterises scholars of the ideological left, intellectuals and commentators of the right appear to view the demonic as endemic in modern culture. Typical is the London *Daily Telegraph* columnist Peter Simple (real name Michael Wharton), who for over forty years has denounced what might be described as "pop-culture" and the type of philosophical, political, and religious liberalism which spawns it. Wharton writes that

> "When the Devil tempted Faust, he appeared in the form of an

> energetic and witty man of the world. To Ivan Karamazov he appeared as a slightly seedy minor official. To others he has appeared as an empty cupboard, or as a dirty sheet of newspaper blowing along the road. It might be possible to cope with these. But what can be done with a Devil so confident of being unanswerably with-it that he does not even trouble to manifest himself at all, but simply pervades the air we breathe?".[4]

Elsewhere he observes that

> "There are now animated toys, pop-singers, and other entertainers whose whole raison d'être seems to be a deliberately self-conscious repulsiveness of appearance, manners, and habits. . . . There is something deeper here than a stale old newspaper controversy about the war of the generations. It is the discovery that the perverted love of ugliness which is in everyone can be exploited, like any other impulse, for entertainment and profit. . . . Ugliness *is* fun. It is an infernal joke which we can all share only too well. If it were not it would have no power to corrupt us".[5]

The idea that the demonic consists in the love of ugliness which is latent in all of us and to which modern culture gives unprecedented expression finds its theological corollary in the teaching of Jonathan Edwards that the universe is intended to reflect the beauty and harmony of the Trinity and in the emphasis of Hans Urs von Balthasar on the aesthetic dimension of faith. In many senses, Wharton's theory of the demonic is open to the familiar objection that there seems on the face of it to be no hope for change, but one might reply to this charge that the liturgical life of the Church offers the world an oasis of harmony, beauty, and order within an ugly and chaotic world - though such a thesis is more difficult to sustain in view of the observable effects of liturgical reform in so many of our local churches - Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant.

An alternative approach canvassed by Gunton is to view the demonic in terms of psychological forces which undermine our proper relations with God.[6] Thus Paul Tillich writes that "[the] demonic is the elevation of something conditional to unconditional significance",[7] while Kierkegaard suggests that "Don Juan . . . is the expression for the daemonic determined as the sensuous; Faust, its expression determined as the intellectual or spiritual".[8] Gunton cites the psychiatrist Rollo May who defines the "daimonic" as "any natural function which has the power to take over the whole person", with prime examples being "sex and eros, anger and rage, and the craving for power".[9] If we really must demythologise the language of Satan and the

demons, this "psychological" approach seems much more in keeping with the thought of the biblical and patristic writers than does the "political" approach, for Leo's "transference of desires" from fleshly to spiritual and from earthly to heavenly is very much the proper ordering of "any natural function which has the power to take over the whole person" with the result that the mind is focussed not on things below but on things above. In revealing the divine love and mercy, Christ demonstrates that there exist for us options beyond "sex and eros, anger and rage, and the craving for power", and exemplifies the path of asceticism which will enable us to achieve such transcendence. This path of asceticism represents the way in which individual Christians overcome the "daimonic" and attain the "transference of desires", and it is this asceticism more, perhaps, than anything else that would tend to alienate the modern reader from Leo's preaching.

Contemporary spirituality tends to emphasise "affirmation" over and against "denial" - not least because it makes life a good deal more enjoyable! From an intellectual perspective, the widespread replacement of natural law ethics with a version of teleological ethics whose understanding of what constitutes a "good end" is in practice determined largely by liberal sentiment means that, from a moral point of view, Christians can no longer see any virtue in the rigorism of previous centuries. Furthermore, the stress on "experience" which was introduced into theology by nineteenth century romanticism has led to a reaction against an ascetic spirituality which appears hostile to the human desire to acquire and delight in experience (whether at the physical or the emotional level), and even tendencies such as the "Green" movement which advocate a level of material self-denial for the sake of the environment usually favour a highly experiential (not to mention experimental) attitude towards drugs, human sexuality, and the like.

Indeed, the principal apologist of "creation-centred" spirituality, Matthew Fox, turns everything on its head by identifying the demonic with asceticism. He paraphrases Meister Eckhart to the effect that

> "asceticism is of no great importance. . . . Because it creates more instead of less self-consciousness and ego",[10]

and appears to have traditional Christian asceticism in mind when he writes that

> "Dualism is the sin behind all sin and its expression in perverse creativity - i.e. sadism or masochism - is considered to be the most demonic use of the image of God: The use of human creativity to curse instead of to bless with".

Fox shares Leo's concern with the image of God, but sees life in the image of God not in terms of transcendence of the flesh but in terms of a kind of celebration of fleshliness and earthiness which rejects the value of contemplation of that which exists beyond the world. Thus he argues that

> "Passions are a blessing, and humility (from *humus*, earth) means to befriend our earthiness. Its explicit goal is not contemplation as such, but compassion",

where "compassion" is understood in terms of social justice.

While Leo understands asceticism as the way in which the image of God is realised within us, Fox regards it as demonic and inimical to the *imago Dei*, and transforms compassion from its Leonine status as a natural consequence of a life of contemplation that follows on from the "transference of desires" into an alternative to contemplation (viewed by Fox as something negative and harmful). This alternative consists in a "celebration" of our fleshly and earthy desires - a celebration which in turn refuses to seek God beyond our human experience of life in the world. Such a reinterpretation of the demonic, allied with a re-evaluation (not to mention devaluation) of that asceticism and an emphasis on transcendence of the purely earthly and fleshly, seems to the present writer to represent a radical and dangerous break with tradition, and a perversion of Vatican 2's desire to make the Church more "open" to the world. The distinction between "creation-centred" spirituality and panentheistic paganism is a small though subtle one, and illustrates the extent to which a spirituality rooted in asceticism and ordered towards contemplation which characterises Christianity from St Paul through patristic writers such as Leo right through to modern authors such as von Balthasar is currently under challenge. In much contemporary theology the Cross is marginalised - whether by eliminating its significance altogether (as in the case of Fox), or else by turning it into a kind of super-metaphor for the suffering of the poor and disadvantaged which serves as an imperative for a more or less radical version of Christian socialism (as in the case of Schillebeeckx and Moltmann, though both would probably regard such a summary of

their respective theologies of the Cross as over-simplistic).

For the fathers in general and for Leo in particular, the Cross is the *forma* of the Christian life, in the sense that, just as Christ enters into his glory by the way of the Cross, so also the Christian is called to seek glorification and divinisation by the same route. The Cross is not only a revelation of the divine mercy, but is a paradigm of the way in which human beings are required to respond to that mercy, and the rejection of asceticism by modern writers - whether direct as in the instance of Fox or indirect as in the instance of basically political theologians such as Schillebeeckx and Moltmann - undoubtedly represents a departure in Christian spirituality which is so radical that to all intents and purposes it implies a reinvention of the Christian religion (albeit one with which might prove attractive to many groups and individuals).

Leo's answer to those who substitute political and "creationist" ideas for traditional asceticism and the old natural law ethics is to replace (unconsciously, of course) the natural law ethics of Aristotelian philosophy with what might be termed an axiological ethics whereby we are called upon to live in a manner that is worthy of our status as constituted in the image of God. An age which might be described as "sensational" (in more than one sense of that word) may be reluctant to accept that culture, ethics, politics and every conceivable aspect of our lives have received a new formality which is the cruciform formality of the suffering Christ, and that the passion of the incarnate Logos has in turn become the inner logic that informs human existence, but if mankind at the turn of the millennium is scarcely attuned to Leo's message it is surely not Leo who is out of date but mankind who is out of step with the crucified God-man who extends through and beyond time and space. In past generations the hedonism of the world has usually been counterbalanced by the asceticism of the Church - of the desert fathers, of the Franciscan and Dominican friars, of the early Puritans - but in our own time the Church can sometimes give the mistaken impression that, having embraced the world in order to convert it, she has instead found itself converted to the world. A penitential spirit endures among enthusiasts, and is especially associated with the devotees of the various Marian apparitions such as those of Fatima, but it is arguable that recent decades have seen the baby of asceticism thrown out alongside the bathwater of a moribund legalism, and, to change the

metaphor, one is occasionally tempted to ask whether, at least in certain respects, we have lost rather more on the swings of *aggiornamento* than we have gained on the roundabouts of *Aufklärung*.

## Leo and Mediaeval Spirituality

In the earlier chapters of this study we drew attention to various points of similarity and dissimilarity between Leo's Christological teaching and that of various modern writers - particularly those of the Roman Catholic tradition. From what we have witnessed in this present chapter, it is more difficult to find direct comparisons in the field of spirituality, since in our own age the traditional approach to asceticism and contemplation which is such a feature of Leo's preaching has been downplayed not only by secular theologians but even within many - perhaps most - of the religious orders. This process has gone hand in hand with a transformation in the Church's understanding of the meaning of liturgy, which has ceased to be the *locus* for the contemplative ascent of the individual as it is for Leo and has become very much an expression of community and congregational participation (whatever those concepts may mean).[11]

Again, there are many who may view this as not necessarily an undesirable change of emphasis, though certain manifestations of it may well be open to serious question, but the fundamental discontinuity between the liturgical, ascetical and contemplative spirituality of the patristic period and that which we find in our own age is plain for all to see, whatever one's opinions as to its benefits. That what we are currently experiencing is very much a post-Enlightenment phenomenon rather than some *ressourcement* or return to Christian origins becomes clear when one seeks to compare Leo's preaching with the mediaeval spirituality associated with his intellectual descendents such as St Bernard of Clairvaux, St Francis of Assisi and St Dominic Guzman, and it is just such a comparison that we shall be attempting to make in our concluding section.

St Bernard (1090-1153) follows Leo in emphasising both the image of God in man and the failure of human beings to reflect that image.[12] He is preoccupied with

the quest for a loving contemplation of God for his own sake in which union with God and theiosis mean not absorption into the divine nature but unanimity with God's loving will - yet another Leonine theme. In mirroring the love of Father and Son we are restored to the divine image and achieve deification, and, as with Leo, we aspire to this through the medium of a devotion to the humanity of Jesus Christ which leads us onwards and upwards to a contemplation of his divine and eternal sonship. In line with the Cistercian tradition, Bernard rejects all false distinctions between "contemplation" and "action", and sees contemplation as finding expression in active love and compassion for the sake of the Church. The idea of a contemplative ascent from the humanity to the divinity of Christ which the liturgical sermon, in which the incarnate Word becomes so to speak incarnate again in the word of the preacher, presents to the worshipping community, lies at the very heart of Leo's "Christological mysticism", and is worked out in that merciful "praxis" which is itself an imitation of and a co-operation with the activity of the divine mercy.

St Francis of Assisi (1181/2-1226) was the inspiration for a varied but discernible spiritual tradition associated with the Franciscan order which he founded.[13] St Francis exhibits a profound sense of the transcendence, mystery, glory and love of God which manifests itself in the kenosis of incarnation and crucifixion, and understands the spiritual life in terms of following Christ's way of suffering and humility in order to receive the heavenly rewards which they promise. These ideas are developed by the Franciscan St Bonaventure (c. 1217-1274) who teaches the ascent of the mind to God through contemplation of the vestiges of God in the world and through the mysteries of the life of Christ which lead the mind - as in Leo's spirituality - from earth to heaven. As in the preaching of Leo, the ascent of the mind through contemplation of the incarnate Word in both his human and divine aspects is complemented by an asceticism which brings with it a configuration to the crucified Lord which Bonaventure sees most perfectly exemplified in St Francis. John Duns Scotus (c. 1265-1308) develops the idea of the primacy and predestination of Christ which we have already discussed with regard to Leo, and St Lawrence of Brindisi (1559-1619) develops this idea yet further, explaining in a way reminiscent of Leo's treatment of the "rights of the devil" model of atonement how God's redemptive love

in Christ overcomes the powers of evil.

Both St Francis and St Clare developed an approach to popular devotion which was centred around crib and Cross, and each of these elements is prominent in the sermons of Leo who presents the incarnate Word under the formality of the vulnerable infant and the man of sorrows in order to facilitate the contemplative ascent of the mind from humanity to divinity and in order to provide a paradigm or *exemplum* of the ascetic "transference of desires" which is related to this programme of contemplation both as inward preparation and as outward expression. The traditional Franciscan devotion to the Way of the Cross (as advocated especially by St Leonard of Port Maurice) is a logical development of Leo's teaching that the Cross is both a "way" to contemplation and also a "way" of life which the Christian contemplative, whether lay, priestly, or religious, is called upon to follow. The characteristic Franciscan devotion to the Mother of God echoes western fathers such as Leo, Augustine and Ambrose when Francis himself writes that

> "we are mothers to [our Lord Jesus Christ] when we enthrone him in our hearts and souls by love with a pure and sincere conscience and give birth to him by doing good,"

and Leo's explanations of the reasons why the Word needed to assume pure and sinless flesh from the Virgin may be regarded as a step in the direction of the typically Franciscan championing of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.

St Dominic (c. 1170-1221) is of particular interest to students of Leo because of his commitment to the ideal of preaching which lies at the very heart of Leo's own apostolate.[14] Dominican spirituality envisages the striking of a balance between the contemplative and active dimensions of the Christian vocation. Contemplation is undertaken with a view to handing on the fruits of contemplation to others - particularly in the form of the sermon - and theological study, which Dominicans such as Francisco de Victoria and Tommaso Campanella equate with contemplation, is likewise ordered towards the verbal communication of divine truths. St Dominic himself emphasised the twofold importance of a zeal for the glory of God and a zeal for the conversion of sinners, and contemplation - whether manifested as prayer or as study - is directed towards each of these ends. Leo, who sees the sermon as offering to the laity the opportunity to engage in contemplation in both these senses, likewise

envisages Christian contemplation as taking place through the articulation during the course of the liturgical sermon of the strictly dogmatic truths concerning Christology and soteriology which raise the mind from flesh to spirit and from earth to heaven, with the result that he, like St Dominic, blurs the destructive distinction between theology and spirituality which, it may be argued, has been growing wider and wider ever since the Reformation.

Like the Franciscans, mediaeval Dominicans were influential with developing the devotion of the Way of the Cross, and it was the Dominican Alvaro of Cordoba who introduced this observance into Europe. Although it is generally agreed that the story that the Virgin revealed the Rosary to St Dominic is legendary, it remains the case that since the fifteenth century this devotion has been especially associated with the Dominicans, and, in the manner in which it traces the life of Jesus from the incarnation of the Word to the glorification of his Mother (the archetypal contemplative), it recalls the desire of Leo to lead his congregation through a contemplative ascent of the mind which rests first on the humanity and then on the divinity of Christ to a kind of noetic union with the eternal Son of God. The Rosary, just like the liturgy and the sermon, presents an instance of a kind of microcosmic incarnation or "Christophany" (of the sort envisaged by Maximus the Confessor), and offers an extra-liturgical complement to the kind of contemplation and "Christological mysticism" which Leo sees as most perfectly manifested in liturgy and preaching. Above all, the Rosary constitutes an extended meditation on the overarching mystery of the divine mercy, which for Leo is not only the primary subject-matter of the sermon, but is the inner rationality or "logic" of the Logos who is incarnated in the logos (and in the "Christo-logic") of the patristic sermon.

# NOTES

1 C.E. Gunton: *The Actuality of Atonement*, Edinburgh, 1988, pp. 62-67.

2 See especially R.S. Thomas: *Counterpoint*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1993.

3 C. Yannaras: *The Freedom of Morality*, ET Crestwood, New York, 1984.

4 Peter Simple: *The Stretchford Chronicles*, London, 1980, p. 87.

5 *op. cit.* p. 97.

6 Gunton p. 70.

7 P. Tillich: *Systematic Theology: Combined Volume*, ET London, 1968, vol. 1, p. 155.

8 S. Kierkegaard: *Either/Or*, ET New York, 1959, vol. 1, p. 89.

9 R. May: *Love and Will*, London, 1970, p. 123.

10 M. Fox: "Creation-Centred Spirituality" in ed. G.S. Wakefield: *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, London, 1983, pp. 99-100.

11 For the modern emphasis on "participation" see Austin Flannery, O.P.: *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Dublin, 1987, pp. 1-282.

12 I have used the account of St Bernard by Rowan Williams in ed. G.S. Wakefield: *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, London, 1983, pp. 44-45. See also E. Gilson: *The Mystical Theology of St Bernard*, ET London and New York, 1940.

13 I have used the account of Franciscan Spirituality by Eric Doyle in ed. G.S. Wakefield: *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, London, 1983, pp. 159-161.

14 I have used the account of Dominican Spirituality by Simon Tugwell in ed. G.S. Wakefield: *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, London, 1983, pp. 119-120.

# Conclusion

We have seen that Leo is a firm believer in the Pauline doctrine of God's universal salvific will, and that in this respect he follows in the footsteps of Prosper of Aquitaine with his subtle development of the teaching of Augustine. Leo interprets his rôle as pope and preacher in terms of Prosper's doctrine, perceiving himself as having a duty (as preacher) to proclaim the gospel of God's will to save all human beings and (as Bishop of Rome) to exercise this function not only within his own see but for the entire Church. His Christological teaching emerges out of this twofold responsibility, for he sees God's universal salvific will as being accomplished in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and believes that heterodox Christologies undermine the fundamental promise of universal salvation. Leo is not a controversialist by nature, and the Tome - his seminal contribution to the debate ignited by the activities of Eutyches - was in fact compiled by Prosper from Leo's preaching on the Feast of the Nativity. Leo's primary concern in writing and delivering these sermons is not to develop or even to clarify Christological thinking for controversial or academic purposes, but is rather to provide a theological framework for for the lay spirituality which he is preaching to his flock. Much of the spiritual writing of the patristic period is written by monks for monks, and one only has to read the pages of the *Philokalia* to realise how impossible it must have been for lay Christians to aspire to the kind of lifestyle that was being proposed. If we look at the great Italian preachers of the first half of the fifth century - Chromatius, Maximus, Leo and Peter Chrysologus - we see that all of them are trying, in their own different ways and with varying degrees of success, to adapt the monastic spirituality of writers such as John Cassian to the requirements and capabilities of a lay audience, and it is within the context of this essentially pastoral enterprise that Leo's Christological teaching needs to be understood.

Spirituality and Christology are united in Leo's sermons in the central idea of the

"transference of desires", according to which the union of natures in the person of Jesus Christ - the incarnate Word - provides a kind of ladder which enables us to elevate our minds from the "earthly" to the "heavenly" and from the "fleshly" to the "spiritual". The infinite distance which exists between God and human beings in virtue of sin makes such an ascent of the mind impossible, but the advent of divinity under the veil of human flesh radically transforms all the potentialities of the human condition, and enables us, through grace, to accomplish the "transference of desires". The *locus* for the "transference of desires" is above all the liturgy and the liturgical sermon, for the liturgy itself elevates the mind from earth to heaven and from flesh to spirit, and the liturgical sermon, ordered towards the structure of the Christian calendar, traces Christ's movement from incarnation to ascension and so guides the heart of the listener on a spiritual ascent.

Leo is also concerned with the spiritual dimension of soteriology, and essays an at times highly original reinterpretation of the traditional "rights of the devil" theory of the atonement. Leo's contention is that the devil has deceived man into concentrating his desires on the earthly and the fleshly, and that he has done so by persuading him that there is no hope for salvation. The cycle of incarnation, passion, resurrection and ascension serves to illustrate that salvation is after all possible, and offers us an escape from the earthly and the fleshly through the medium of the "transference of desires". Leo does not neglect the sacrificial and expiatory dimensions of the atonement, but subordinates them to his theory that Christ liberates us from a captivity to the devil which is at heart a captivity of the mind. This, however, is not to say that Christ merely exemplifies the love of God in some Abelardian sense, for Leo believes that through faith in the incarnation and in the paschal mystery, and through a union of the soul with the incarnate Lord whom we encounter therein, we are justified, sanctified and ultimately transfigured into the likeness of Christ. This is because Christ is not only the ladder who enables us to accomplish the "transference of desires" but is also the God-man who, in his human nature, has realised the "transference of desires" in a pre-eminent manner which, in Thomistic terminology, is both formally and efficiently causal.

In order to gain access to this formal and efficient causality and attain to the *imago Dei* we need to change our lives and imitate Jesus Christ. Leo's reformulation of the eastern theory of salvation by "divinisation" consists in the idea that, if God is, above all else, mercy and love, then we approximate to his likeness when we reflect the mercy and love

which he reveals to us in Jesus Christ. Thus it is that, having participated in Christ's conquest of the powers of darkness by engaging in our own ascetic struggle with the demons, we are called upon to exercise ourselves in almsgiving and such other practical works of charity that mirror the love and mercy which Jesus Christ reveals as constituting the nature of God. Almsgiving is presented as being a kind of second baptism which unites us with Christ and brings us into contact with the efficacy of the saving mysteries. Through almsgiving the "transference of desires", which is facilitated by the liturgical contemplation of the life of Christ, finds concrete expression, and the transformation into the divine likeness which the "transference of desires" initiates achieves a certain completion. In this way Leo annihilates the tension (which one frequently encounters in modern theology) between ortho*doxy* and ortho*praxis*, and demonstrates that the two are in fact inseparable and indivisible. Orthodox faith is useless without practical charity, but practical charity needs to be grounded in orthodox faith if it is to lead to assimilation to the divine. In this way Leo succeeds in uniting the intensely spiritual theology of "divinisation" which we encounter in Greek writers such as Athanasius of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa with the penetrating social vision of a Latin author like Salvian of Marseilles, and so presents us with a theology - and a spirituality - which is simultaneously mystical, dogmatic and thoroughly practical.

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