

used in Zaire (the Congo). It is the Roman rite "in the Zairean mode". It still belongs within the great fellowship of the apostolically rooted Roman rite, but that rite is now, so to speak, clad in Congolese garments, with the addition—this seems to me to make perfect sense—of certain elements from the Christian East. For example, in line with what is said in Matthew 5:23–25, the sign of peace is exchanged, not before Communion, but before the Presentation of the Gifts, which would be desirable for the whole of the Roman rite, insofar as the sign of peace is something we want to retain.

Chapter 2

The Body and the Liturgy

I. "Active Participation"

TO EXPRESS one of its main ideas for the shaping of the liturgy, the Second Vatican Council gave us the phrase *participatio actuosa*, the "active participation" of everyone in the *opus Dei*, in what happens in the worship of God. It was quite right to do so. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* points out that the word "liturgy" speaks to us of a common service and thus has a reference to the whole holy People of God (cf. CCC 1069). But what does this active participation come down to? What does it mean that we have to do? Unfortunately, the word was very quickly misunderstood to mean something external, entailing a need for general activity, as if as many people as possible, as often as possible, should be visibly engaged in action. However, the word "part-icipation" refers to a principal action in which everyone has a "part". And so if we want to discover the kind of doing that active participation involves, we need, first of all, to determine what this central *actio* is in which all the members of the community are supposed to participate. The study of the liturgical sources provides an answer that at first may surprise us, though, in the light of the biblical foundations considered in the first part, it is quite self-evident. By the *actio* of

the liturgy the sources mean the Eucharistic Prayer. The real liturgical action, the true liturgical act, is the *oratio*, the great prayer that forms the core of the Eucharistic celebration, the whole of which was, therefore, called *oratio* by the Fathers. At first, simply in terms of the form of the liturgy, this was quite correct, because the essence of the Christian liturgy is to be found in the *oratio*; this is its center and fundamental form. Calling the Eucharist *oratio* was, then, a quite standard response to the pagans and to questioning intellectuals in general. What the Fathers were saying was this: The sacrificial animals and all those things that you had and have, and which ultimately satisfy no one, are now abolished. In their place has come the Sacrifice of the Word. We are the spiritual religion, in which in truth a Word-based worship takes place. Goats and cattle are no longer slaughtered. Instead, the Word, summing up our existence, is addressed to God and identified with *the* Word, the Word of God, who draws us into true worship. Perhaps it would be useful to note here that the word *oratio* originally means, not "prayer" (for which the word is *prex*), but solemn public speech. Such speech now attains its supreme dignity through its being addressed to God in full awareness that it comes from him and is made possible by him.

But this is only just a hint of the central issue. This *oratio*—the Eucharistic Prayer, the "Canon"—is really more than speech; it is *actio* in the highest sense of the word. For what happens in it is that the human *actio* (as performed hitherto by the priests in the various religions of the world) steps back and makes way for the *actio divina*, the action of God. In this *oratio* the priest speaks with the I of the Lord—"This is my Body", "This is my Blood." He knows that he is not now speaking from his

own resources but in virtue of the Sacrament that he has received, he has become the voice of Someone Else, who is now speaking and acting. This action of God, which takes place through human speech, is the real "action" for which all of creation is in expectation. The elements of the earth are transubstantiated, pulled, so to speak, from their creaturely anchorage, grasped at the deepest ground of their being, and changed into the Body and Blood of the Lord. The New Heaven and the New Earth are anticipated. The real "action" in the liturgy in which we are all supposed to participate is the action of God himself. This is what is new and distinctive about the Christian liturgy: God himself acts and does what is essential. He inaugurates the new creation, makes himself accessible to us, so that, through the things of the earth, through our gifts, we can communicate with him in a personal way. But how can we part-icipate, have a part, in this action? Are not God and man completely incommensurable? Can man, the finite and sinful one, cooperate with God, the Infinite and Holy One? Yes, he can, precisely because God himself has become man, become body, and here, again and again, he comes through his body to us who live in the body. The whole event of the Incarnation, Cross, Resurrection, and Second Coming is present as the way by which God draws man into cooperation with himself. As we have seen, this is expressed in the liturgy in the fact that the petition for acceptance is part of the *oratio*. True, the Sacrifice of the Logos is accepted already and forever. But we must still pray for it to become *our* sacrifice, that we ourselves, as we said, may be transformed into the Logos (*logisiert*), conformed to the Logos, and so be made the true Body of Christ. That is the issue, and that is what we have to pray for. This petition itself

is a way into the Incarnation and the Resurrection, the path that we take in the wayfaring state of our existence. In this real "action", in this prayerful approach to participation, there is no difference between priests and laity. True, addressing the *oratio* to the Lord in the name of the Church and, at its core, speaking with the very "I" of Jesus Christ—that is something that can be done only through sacramental empowerment. But participation in that which no human being does, that which the Lord himself and only he can do—that is equally for everyone. In the words of St. Paul, it is a question of being "united to the Lord" and thus becoming "one spirit with him" (1 Cor 6:17). The point is that, ultimately, the difference between the *actio Christi* and our own action is done away with. There is only *one* action, which is at the same time his and ours—ours because we have become "one body and one spirit" with him. The uniqueness of the Eucharistic liturgy lies precisely in the fact that God himself is acting and that we are drawn into that action of God. Everything else is, therefore, secondary.

Of course, external actions—reading, singing, the bringing up of the gifts—can be distributed in a sensible way. By the same token, participation in the Liturgy of the Word (reading, singing) is to be distinguished from the sacramental celebration proper. We should be clearly aware that external actions are quite secondary here. *Doing* really must stop when we come to the heart of the matter: the *oratio*. It must be plainly evident that the *oratio* is the heart of the matter, but that it is important precisely because it provides a space for the *actio* of God. Anyone who grasps this will easily see that it is not now a matter of looking at or toward the priest, but of looking together toward the Lord and going out to meet him. The

almost theatrical entrance of different players into the liturgy, which is so common today, especially during the Preparation of the Gifts, quite simply misses the point. If the various external actions (as a matter of fact, there are not very many of them, though they are being artificially multiplied) become the essential in the liturgy, if the liturgy degenerates into general activity, then we have radically misunderstood the "theo-drama" of the liturgy and lapsed almost into parody. True liturgical education cannot consist in learning and experimenting with external activities. Instead one must be led toward the essential *actio* that makes the liturgy what it is, toward the transforming power of God, who wants, through what happens in the liturgy, to transform us and the world. In this respect, liturgical education today, of both priests and laity, is deficient to a deplorable extent. Much remains to be done here.

At this point the reader will perhaps ask: "What about the body? With this idea of a word-based sacrifice (*oratio*), have you not shifted everything over to the spiritual side?" That charge might have applied to the pre-Christian idea of a *logos*-liturgy, but it cannot be true of the liturgy of the Word incarnate, who offers himself to us in his Body and Blood, and thus in a corporeal way. It is, of course, the new corporeality of the risen Lord, but it remains true corporeality, and it is this that we are given in the material signs of bread and wine. This means that we are laid hold of by the Logos and for the Logos in our very bodies, in the bodily existence of our everyday life. The true liturgical action is the deed of God, and for that very reason the liturgy of faith always reaches beyond the cultic act into everyday life, which must itself become "liturgical", a service for the transformation of the world.

Much more is required of the body than carrying objects around and other such activities. A demand is made on the body in all its involvement in the circumstances of everyday life. The body is required to become "capable of resurrection", to orient itself toward the resurrection, toward the Kingdom of God, in a word: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." Where God's will is done, there is heaven, there earth becomes heaven. Surrendering ourselves to the action of God, so that we in our turn may cooperate with him—that is what begins in the liturgy and is meant to unfold further beyond it. Incarnation must always lead through Cross (the transforming of our wills in a communion of will with God) to Resurrection—to that rule of love which is the Kingdom of God. The body must be trained, so to speak, for the resurrection. Let us remember incidentally that the unfashionable word *askēsis* can be simply translated into English as "training". Nowadays we train with enthusiasm, perseverance, and great renunciation for many different purposes—why do we not train ourselves for God and his Kingdom? "I train my body", says St. Paul, "and subdue it" (1 Cor 9:27, RSV adapted). He also uses the discipline of athletes as an image for training in one's own life. This training is an essential part of everyday life, but it has to find its inner support in the liturgy, in the liturgy's "orientation" toward the risen Christ. Let me say once again: it is a way of learning to accept the other in his otherness, a training for love, a training to help us accept the Wholly Other, God, to be shaped and used by him. The body has a place within the divine worship of the Word made flesh, and it is expressed liturgically in a certain discipline of the body, in gestures that have developed out of the liturgy's inner demands and that make

the essence of the liturgy, as it were, bodily visible. These gestures may vary in their details from culture to culture, but in their essential forms they are part of that culture of faith which has grown out of Christian cult. They form, therefore, a common language that crosses the borders of the different cultures. Let us have a closer look at them.

2. *The Sign of the Cross*

The most basic Christian gesture in prayer is and always will be the sign of the Cross. It is a way of confessing Christ crucified with one's very body, in accordance with the programmatic words of St. Paul: "[W]e preach Christ Crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:23f.). Again he says: "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (2:2). To seal oneself with the sign of the Cross is a visible and public Yes to him who suffered for us; to him who in the body has made God's love visible, even to the utmost; to the God who reigns not by destruction but by the humility of suffering and love, which is stronger than all the power of the world and wiser than all the calculating intelligence of men. The sign of the Cross is a confession of faith: I believe in him who suffered for me and rose again; in him who has transformed the sign of shame into a sign of hope and of the love of God that is present with us. The confession of faith is a confession of hope: I believe in him who in his weakness is the Almighty; in him who can and will save me even in apparent absence and impotence. By signing ourselves with the Cross, we place ourselves under the protection of the Cross, hold it in front

of us like a shield that will guard us in all the distress of daily life and give us the courage to go on. We accept it as a signpost that we follow: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mk 8:34). The Cross shows us the road of life—the imitation of Christ.

We connect the sign of the Cross with confession of faith in the triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In this way it becomes a remembrance of Baptism, which is particularly clear when we use holy water with it. The Cross is a sign of the Passion, but at the same time it is a sign of the Resurrection. It is, so to speak, the saving staff that God holds out to us, the bridge by which we can pass over the abyss of death, and all the threats of the Evil One, and reach God. It is made present in Baptism, in which we become contemporary with Christ's Cross and Resurrection (cf. Rom 6:1-14). Whenever we make the sign of the Cross, we accept our Baptism anew; Christ from the Cross draws us, so to speak, to himself (cf. Jn 12:32) and thus into communion with the living God. For Baptism and the sign of the Cross, which is a kind of summing up and re-acceptance of Baptism, are above all a divine event: the Holy Spirit leads us to Christ, and Christ opens the door to the Father. God is no longer the "unknown god"; he has a name. We are allowed to call upon him, and he calls us.

Thus we can say that in the sign of the Cross, together with the invocation of the Trinity, the whole essence of Christianity is summed up; it displays what is distinctively Christian. Nevertheless, or rather for this very reason, it also opens the way into the wider history of religion and the divine message of creation. In 1873, on the Mount of Olives, Greek and Hebrew grave inscriptions bearing the

sign of a cross were discovered from the time of Jesus. The excavators inevitably assumed that they were dealing with Christians of the earliest times. In about 1945 increasing numbers of Jewish graves with the sign of the cross were being discovered and assigned to more or less the first century after Christ. The discoveries no longer left room for the view that these were first-generation Christians. On the contrary, it had to be recognized that signs of the cross were established in the Jewish *milieu*. How are we to make sense of this? The key is to be found in Ezekiel 9:4ff. In the vision described there, God says to his linen-clad messenger, who carries the writing case at his side: "Go through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark [*Tav*] upon the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it." In the terrible catastrophe now imminent, those who do not connive in the sin of the world yet suffer from it for the sake of God, suffering impotently yet at a distance from sin, are sealed with the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the *Tav*, which was written in the form of a cross (T or + or X). The *Tav*, which as a matter of fact had the form of a cross, becomes the seal of God's ownership. It corresponds to man's longing for God, his suffering for the sake of God, and so places him under God's special protection. E. Dinkler was able to show that cultic stigmatization—on the hands or forehead—was occasionally practiced in the Old Testament and that this custom was also well known in New Testament times. In the New Testament, Revelation 7:1-8 takes up the basic idea in Ezekiel's vision. The discoveries of the graves, in conjunction with the texts of the time, prove that in certain circles within Judaism the *Tav* was a widespread sacred sign—a sign of confession of faith in

the God of Israel and at the same time a sign of hope in his protection. Dinkler summarizes his findings by saying that, in the cross-shaped *Tav*, "a whole confession of faith is summed up in *one* sign." "The realities believed in and hoped for", he says, "are read into a visible image, but the image is more than a mere reflection; it is in fact an image in whose saving power one places one's hopes" (p. 24). As far as we know, Christians did not at first take up this Jewish symbol of the cross, but they found the sign of the Cross from within their faith and were able to see in it the summing up of their whole faith. But was Ezekiel's vision of the salvific *Tav*, with the whole tradition built upon it, not bound to appear to Christians later as a glimpse of the One who was to come? Was the meaning of this mysterious sign not now "unveiled" (cf. 2 Cor 3:18)? Did it not now become clear to whom this sign belonged, from whom it derived its power? Could they fail to see in all this a prophecy of the Cross of Jesus Christ, who has transformed the *Tav* into the power of salvation?

The Fathers belonging to the Greek cultural world were more directly affected by another discovery. In the writings of Plato, they found the remarkable idea of a cross inscribed upon the cosmos (cf. *Timaeus* 34ab and 36bc). Plato took this from the Pythagorean tradition, which in its turn had a connection with the traditions of the ancient East. First, there is an astronomical statement about the two great movements of the stars with which ancient astronomy was familiar: the ecliptic (the great circle in the heavens along which the sun appears to run its course) and the orbit of the earth. These two intersect and form together the Greek letter *Chi*, which is written in the form of a cross (like an X). The sign of the cross is in-

scribed upon the whole cosmos. Plato, again following more ancient traditions, connected this with the image of the deity: the Demiurge (the fashioner of the world) "stretched out" the world soul "throughout the whole universe". St. Justin Martyr (d. c. 165), the Palestinian-born first philosopher among the Fathers, came across this Platonic text and did not hesitate to link it with the doctrine of the triune God and his action in salvation history in the person of Jesus Christ. He sees the idea of the Demiurge and the world soul as premonitions of the mystery of the Father and the Son—premonitions that are in need of correction and yet also capable of correction. What Plato says about the world soul seems to him to refer to the coming of the Logos, the Son of God. And so he can now say that the shape of the cross is the greatest symbol of the lordship of the Logos, without which nothing in creation holds together (cf. *I Apol.* 55). The Cross of Golgotha is foreshadowed in the structure of the universe itself. The instrument of torment on which the Lord died is written into the structure of the universe. The cosmos speaks to us of the Cross, and the Cross solves for us the enigma of the cosmos. It is the real key to all reality. History and cosmos belong together. When we open our eyes, we can read the message of Christ in the language of the universe, and conversely, Christ grants us understanding of the message of creation.

From Justin onward, this "prophecy of the Cross" in Plato, together with the connection of cosmos and history that it reveals, was one of the fundamental ideas in patristic theology. It must have been an overwhelming discovery for the Fathers to find that the philosopher who summed up and interpreted the most ancient traditions had spoken of the cross as a seal imprinted on the uni-

verse. St. Irenaeus of Lyons (d. c. 200), the real founder of systematic theology in its Catholic form, says in his work of apologetics, the *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, that the Crucified One is "the very Word of Almighty God, who penetrates our universe by an invisible presence. And for this reason he embraces the whole world, its breadth and length, its height and depth, for through the Word of God all things are guided into order. And the Son of God is crucified in them, since, in the form of the Cross, he is imprinted upon all things" (1, 3). This text of the great Father of the Church conceals a biblical quotation that is of great importance for the biblical theology of the Cross. The epistle to the Ephesians exhorts us to be rooted and grounded in love, so that, together with all the saints, we "may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge" (3:18f.). There can be little doubt that this epistle emanating from the school of St. Paul is referring to the cosmic Cross and thereby taking up traditions about the cross-shaped tree of the world that holds everything together—a religious idea that was also well known in India. St. Augustine has a wonderful interpretation of this important passage from St. Paul. He sees it as representing the dimensions of human life and as referring to the form of the crucified Christ, whose arms embrace the world and whose path reaches down into the abyss of the underworld and up to the very height of God himself (cf. *De doctrina christiana* 2, 41, 62; *Corpus Christianorum* 32, 75f.). Hugo Rahner has assembled the most beautiful patristic texts relevant to the cosmic mystery of the Cross. I should like to add only two more. In Lactantius (d. c. 325) we read: "In his Passion God spread out his

arms and thus embraced the globe as a sign that a future people, from the rising of the sun to its setting, would gather under his wings" (81). An unknown Greek author of the fourth century, contrasting the Cross with the cult of the sun, says that *Helios* (the sun) has now been conquered by the Cross. "Behold, man, whom the created sun in the heavens could not instruct, is now irradiated by the sunlight of the Cross and (in Baptism) enlightened." Then the anonymous author takes up some words of St. Ignatius of Antioch (d. c. 110), who described the Cross as the cosmic hoist (*mēchanē*) for going up to heaven, and says: "O what truly divine wisdom is this! O Cross, thou hoist to heaven! The Cross was driven into the ground—and behold, idol worship was destroyed. No ordinary wood is this, but the wood that God used for victory" (87f.).

In his eschatological discourse, Jesus had announced that at the end of time "the sign of the Son of man" would appear in heaven (Mt 24:30). The eye of faith was now able to recognize that this sign had been inscribed into the cosmos from the beginning and thus see faith in the crucified Redeemer confirmed by the cosmos. At the same time, Christians thus realized that the paths of religious history converged on Christ, that their expectations, expressed in many different images, led to him. Conversely, this meant that philosophy and religion gave faith the images and concepts in which alone it could fully understand itself.

"[Y]ou will be a blessing", God had said to Abraham at the beginning of salvation history (Gen 12:2). In Christ, the Son of Abraham, these words are completely fulfilled. He is a blessing, and he is a blessing for the whole of creation as well as for all men. Thus the Cross, which is

his sign in heaven and on earth, was destined to become the characteristic gesture of blessing for Christians. We make the sign of the Cross on ourselves and thus enter the power of the blessing of Jesus Christ. We make the sign over people to whom we wish a blessing; and we also make it over things that are part of our life and that we want, as it were, to receive anew from the hand of Jesus Christ. Through the Cross, we can become sources of blessing for one another. I shall never forget the devotion and heartfelt care with which my father and mother made the sign of the Cross on the forehead, mouth, and breast of us children when we went away from home, especially when the parting was a long one. This blessing was like an escort that we knew would guide us on our way. It made visible the prayer of our parents, which went with us, and it gave us the assurance that this prayer was supported by the blessing of the Savior. The blessing was also a challenge to us not to go outside the sphere of this blessing. Blessing is a priestly gesture, and so in this sign of the Cross we felt the priesthood of parents, its special dignity and power. I believe that this blessing, which is a perfect expression of the common priesthood of the baptized, should come back in a much stronger way into our daily life and permeate it with the power of the love that comes from the Lord.

3. Posture

Kneeling (prostratio)

There are groups, of no small influence, who are trying to talk us out of kneeling. "It doesn't suit our culture",

they say (which culture?). "It's not right for a grown man to do this—he should face God on his feet." Or again: "It's not appropriate for redeemed man—he has been set free by Christ and doesn't need to kneel any more." If we look at history, we can see that the Greeks and Romans rejected kneeling. In view of the squabbling, partisan deities described in mythology, this attitude was thoroughly justified. It was only too obvious that these gods were not God, even if you were dependent on their capricious power and had to make sure that, whenever possible, you enjoyed their favor. And so they said that kneeling was unworthy of a free man, unsuitable for the culture of Greece, something the barbarians went in for. Plutarch and Theophrastus regarded kneeling as an expression of superstition. Aristotle called it a barbaric form of behavior (cf. *Rhetoric* 1361 a 36). St. Augustine agreed with him in a certain respect: the false gods were only the masks of demons, who subjected men to the worship of money and to self-seeking, thus making them "servile" and superstitious. He said that the humility of Christ and his love, which went as far as the Cross, have freed us from these powers. We now kneel before that humility. The kneeling of Christians is not a form of inculturation into existing customs. It is quite the opposite, an expression of Christian culture, which transforms the existing culture through a new and deeper knowledge and experience of God.

Kneeling does not come from any culture—it comes from the Bible and its knowledge of God. The central importance of kneeling in the Bible can be seen in a very concrete way. The word *proskynein* alone occurs fifty-nine times in the New Testament, twenty-four of which are in the Apocalypse, the book of the heavenly liturgy,

which is presented to the Church as the standard for her own liturgy. On closer inspection, we can discern three closely related forms of posture. First, there is *prostratio*—lying with one's face to the ground before the overwhelming power of God; secondly, especially in the New Testament, there is falling to one's knees before another; and thirdly, there is kneeling. Linguistically, the three forms of posture are not always clearly distinguished. They can be combined or merged with one another.

For the sake of brevity, I should like to mention, in the case of *prostratio*, just one text from the Old Testament and another from the New. In the Old Testament, there is an appearance of God to Joshua before the taking of Jericho, an appearance that the sacred author quite deliberately presents as a parallel to God's revelation of himself to Moses in the burning bush. Joshua sees "the commander of the army of the Lord" and, having recognized who he is, throws himself to the ground. At that moment he hears the words once spoken to Moses: "Put off your shoes from your feet; for the place where you stand is holy" (Josh 5:15). In the mysterious form of the "commander of the army of the Lord", the hidden God himself speaks to Joshua, and Joshua throws himself down before him. Origen gives a beautiful interpretation of this text: "Is there any other commander of the powers of the Lord than our Lord Jesus Christ?" According to this view, Joshua is worshipping the One who is to come—the coming Christ. In the case of the New Testament, from the Fathers onward, Jesus' prayer on the Mount of Olives was especially important. According to St. Matthew (26:39) and St. Mark (14:35), Jesus throws himself to the ground; indeed, he falls to the earth (according to Matthew). However, St. Luke, who in his

whole work (both the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles) is in a special way the theologian of kneeling prayer, tells us that Jesus prayed on his knees. This prayer, the prayer by which Jesus enters into his Passion, is an example for us, both as a gesture and in its content. The gesture: Jesus assumes, as it were, the fall of man, lets himself fall into man's fallenness, prays to the Father out of the lowest depths of human dereliction and anguish. He lays his will in the will of the Father's: "Not my will but yours be done." He lays the human will in the divine. He takes up all the hesitation of the human will and endures it. It is this very conforming of the human will to the divine that is the heart of redemption. For the fall of man depends on the contradiction of wills, on the opposition of the human will to the divine, which the tempter leads man to think is the condition of his freedom. Only one's own autonomous will, subject to no other will, is freedom. "Not my will, but yours . . ."—those are the words of truth, for God's will is not in opposition to our own, but the ground and condition of its possibility. Only when our will rests in the will of God does it become truly will and truly free. The suffering and struggle of Gethsemane is the struggle for this redemptive truth, for this uniting of what is divided, for the uniting that is communion with God. Now we understand why the Son's loving way of addressing the Father, "Abba", is found in this place (cf. Mk 14:36). St. Paul sees in this cry the prayer that the Holy Spirit places on our lips (cf. Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6) and thus anchors our Spirit-filled prayer in the Lord's prayer in Gethsemane.

In the Church's liturgy today, prostration appears on two occasions: on Good Friday and at ordinations. On Good Friday, the day of the Lord's crucifixion, it is the

fitting expression of our sense of shock at the fact that we by our sins share in the responsibility for the death of Christ. We throw ourselves down and participate in his shock, in his descent into the depths of anguish. We throw ourselves down and so acknowledge where we are and who we are: fallen creatures whom only he can set on their feet. We throw ourselves down, as Jesus did, before the mystery of God's power present to us, knowing that the Cross is the true burning bush, the place of the flame of God's love, which burns but does not destroy. At ordinations prostration comes from the awareness of our absolute incapacity, by our own powers, to take on the priestly mission of Jesus Christ, to speak with his "I". While the ordinands are lying on the ground, the whole congregation sings the Litany of the Saints. I shall never forget lying on the ground at the time of my own priestly and episcopal ordination. When I was ordained bishop, my intense feeling of inadequacy, incapacity, in the face of the greatness of the task was even stronger than at my priestly ordination. The fact that the praying Church was calling upon all the saints, that the prayer of the Church really was enveloping and embracing me, was a wonderful consolation. In my incapacity, which had to be expressed in the bodily posture of prostration, this prayer, this presence of all the saints, of the living and the dead, was a wonderful strength—it was the only thing that could, as it were, lift me up. Only the presence of the saints with me made possible the path that lay before me.

Secondly, we must mention the gesture of falling to one's knees before another, which is described four times in the Gospels (cf. Mk 1:40; 10:17; Mt 17:14; 27:29) by means of the word *gonypetein*. Let us single out Mark 1:40. A leper comes to Jesus and begs him for help. He falls

to his knees before him and says: "If you will, you can make me clean." It is hard to assess the significance of the gesture. What we have here is surely not a proper act of adoration, but rather a supplication expressed fervently in bodily form, while showing a trust in a power beyond the merely human. The situation is different, though, with the classical word for adoration on one's knees—*proskynein*. I shall give two examples in order to clarify the question that faces the translator. First there is the account of how, after the multiplication of the loaves, Jesus stays with the Father on the mountain, while the disciples struggle in vain on the lake with the wind and the waves. Jesus comes to them across the water. Peter hurries toward him and is saved from sinking by the Lord. Then Jesus climbs into the boat, and the wind lets up. The text continues: "And the ship's crew came and said, falling at his feet, 'Thou art indeed the Son of God'" (Mt 14:33, **Knox version**). Other translations say: "[The disciples] in the boat worshipped [Jesus], saying . . ." (RSV). Both translations are correct. Each emphasizes one aspect of what is going on. The Knox version brings out the bodily expression, while the RSV shows what is happening interiorly. It is perfectly clear from the structure of the narrative that the gesture of acknowledging Jesus as the Son of God is an act of worship. We encounter a similar set of problems in St. John's Gospel when we read the account of the healing of the man born blind. This narrative, which is structured in a truly "theo-dramatic" way, ends with a dialogue between Jesus and the man he has healed. It serves as a model for the dialogue of conversion, for the whole narrative must also be seen as a profound exposition of the existential and theological significance of Baptism. In the dialogue, Jesus asks the man whether he

believes in the Son of Man. The man born blind replies: "Tell me who he is, Lord." When Jesus says, "It is he who is speaking to you", the man makes the confession of faith: "I do believe, Lord", and then he "[falls] down to worship him" (Jn 9:35-38, Knox version adapted). Earlier translations said: "He worshipped him." In fact, the whole scene is directed toward the act of faith and the worship of Jesus, which follows from it. Now the eyes of the heart, as well as of the body, are opened. The man has in truth begun to see. For the exegesis of the text it is important to note that the word *proskynein* occurs eleven times in St. John's Gospel, of which nine occurrences are found in Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman by Jacob's well (Jn 4:19-24). This conversation is entirely devoted to the theme of worship, and it is indisputable that here, as elsewhere in St. John's Gospel, the word always has the meaning of "worship". Incidentally, this conversation, too, ends—like that of the healing of the man born blind—with Jesus' revealing himself: "I who speak to you am he" (Jn 4:26).

I have lingered over these texts, because they bring to light something important. In the two passages that we looked at most closely, the spiritual and bodily meanings of *proskynein* are really inseparable. The bodily gesture itself is the bearer of the spiritual meaning, which is precisely that of worship. Without the worship, the bodily gesture would be meaningless, while the spiritual act must of its very nature, because of the psychosomatic unity of man, express itself in the bodily gesture. The two aspects are united in the one word, because in a very profound way they belong together. When kneeling becomes merely external, a merely physical act, it becomes meaningless. On the other hand, when someone tries to

take worship back into the purely spiritual realm and refuses to give it embodied form, the act of worship evaporates, for what is purely spiritual is inappropriate to the nature of man. Worship is one of those fundamental acts that affect the whole man. That is why bending the knee before the presence of the living God is something we cannot abandon.

In saying this, we come to the typical gesture of kneeling on one or both knees. In the Hebrew of the Old Testament, the verb *barak*, "to kneel", is cognate with the word *berek*, "knee". The Hebrews regarded the knees as a symbol of strength; to bend the knee is, therefore, to bend our strength before the living God, an acknowledgment of the fact that all that we are we receive from him. In important passages of the Old Testament, this gesture appears as an expression of worship. At the dedication of the Temple, Solomon kneels "in the presence of all the assembly of Israel" (2 Chron 6:13). After the Exile, in the afflictions of the returned Israel, which is still without a Temple, Ezra repeats this gesture at the time of the evening sacrifice: "I . . . fell upon my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God" (Ezra 9:5). The great psalm of the Passion, Psalm 22 ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"), ends with the promise: "Yes, to him shall all the proud of the earth fall down; before him all who go down to the dust shall throw themselves down" (v. 29, RSV adapted). The related passage Isaiah 45:23 we shall have to consider in the context of the New Testament. The Acts of the Apostles tells us how St. Peter (9:40), St. Paul (20:36), and the whole Christian community (21:5) pray on their knees. Particularly important for our question is the account of the martyrdom of St. Stephen. The first man to witness to Christ with

his blood is described in his suffering as a perfect image of Christ, whose Passion is repeated in the martyrdom of the witness, even in small details. One of these is that Stephen, on his knees, takes up the petition of the crucified Christ: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (7:60). We should remember that Luke, unlike Matthew and Mark, speaks of the Lord kneeling in Gethsemane, which shows that Luke wants the kneeling of the first martyr to be seen as his entry into the prayer of Jesus. Kneeling is not only a Christian gesture, but a christological one.

For me, the most important passage for the theology of kneeling will always be the great hymn of Christ in Philippians 2:6-11. In this pre-Pauline hymn, we hear and see the prayer of the apostolic Church and can discern within it her confession of faith in Christ. However, we also hear the voice of the Apostle, who enters into this prayer and hands it on to us, and, ultimately, we perceive here both the profound inner unity of the Old and New Testaments and the cosmic breadth of Christian faith. The hymn presents Christ as the antitype of the First Adam. While the latter high-handedly grasped at likeness to God, Christ does not count equality with God, which is his by nature, "a thing to be grasped", but humbles himself unto death, even death on the Cross. It is precisely this humility, which comes from love, that is the truly divine reality and procures for him the "name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Phil 2:5-10). Here the hymn of the apostolic Church takes up the words of promise in Isaiah 45:23: "By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall

bow, every tongue shall swear.'"

In the interweaving of Old and New Testaments, it becomes clear that, even as crucified, Jesus bears the "name above every name"—the name of the Most High—and is himself God by nature. Through him, through the Crucified, the bold promise of the Old Testament is now fulfilled: all bend the knee before Jesus, the One who descended, and bow to him precisely as the one true God above all gods. The Cross has become the world-embracing sign of God's presence, and all that we have previously heard about the historical and cosmic Christ should now, in this passage, come back into our minds. The Christian liturgy is a cosmic liturgy precisely because it bends the knee before the crucified and exalted Lord. Here is the center of authentic culture—the culture of truth. The humble gesture by which we fall at the feet of the Lord inserts us into the true path of life of the cosmos.

There is much more that we might add. For example, there is the touching story told by Eusebius in his history of the Church as a tradition going back to Hegesippus in the second century. Apparently, St. James, the "brother of the Lord", the first bishop of Jerusalem and "head" of the Jewish Christian Church, had a kind of callous on his knees, because he was always on his knees worshipping God and begging for forgiveness for his people (2, 23, 6). Again, there is a story that comes from the sayings of the Desert Fathers, according to which the devil was compelled by God to show himself to a certain Abba Apollo. He looked black and ugly, with frighteningly thin limbs, but, most strikingly, *he had no knees*. The inability to kneel is seen as the very essence of the diabolical.

But I do not want to go into more detail. I should like to make just one more remark. The expression used by

St. Luke to describe the kneeling of Christians (*theis ta gonata*) is unknown in classical Greek. We are dealing here with a specifically Christian word. With that remark, our reflections return full circle to where they began. It may well be that kneeling is alien to modern culture—insofar as it is a culture, for this culture has turned away from the faith and no longer knows the One before whom kneeling is the right, indeed the intrinsically necessary gesture. The man who learns to believe learns also to kneel, and a faith or a liturgy no longer familiar with kneeling would be sick at the core. Where it has been lost, kneeling must be rediscovered, so that, in our prayer, we remain in fellowship with the apostles and martyrs, in fellowship with the whole cosmos, indeed in union with Jesus Christ Himself.

Standing and Sitting—Liturgy and Culture

We can be considerably more brief in what we say about these two postures, because they are not very controversial these days, and the importance that each has is not hard to see. In the Old Testament, standing is a classic posture for prayer. Let us content ourselves with just one example—the prayer of the childless Hannah, who becomes, in answer to her prayers, the mother of Samuel. In the New Testament, St. Luke paints a portrait of Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, with colors reminiscent of Hannah. After she has weaned the child Samuel, the happy mother comes to the Temple, in order to hand over the child of promise to the Lord: “I am the woman”, she says, “who was standing here in your presence, praying to the LORD” (1 Sam 1:26). A whole series of New Testament texts show us that in Jesus’ time standing was

the ordinary posture for prayer among the Jews (cf. Mt 6:5; Mk 11:25; Lk 18:11ff.). Among Christians, standing was primarily the Easter form of prayer. The twentieth canon of Nicaea decrees that Christians should stand, not kneel, during Eastertide. It is the time of the victory of Jesus Christ, the time of joy, in which we show forth the Paschal victory of the Lord, even in the posture of our prayer. This may remind us once again of the passion of St. Stephen. Faced with the fury of his persecutors, he looks up to heaven, where he sees Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father [cf. Acts 7:55]. Standing is the posture of the victor. Jesus stands in God’s presence—he stands, because he has trodden death and the power of the Evil One underfoot. At the end of this struggle, he is the one who stands upright, the one who remains standing. This standing is also an expression of readiness: Christ is standing up at the right hand of God, in order to meet us. He has not withdrawn. It is for us that he stands, and in the very hour of anguish we can be sure that he will set off and come to us, just as once he set off from the Father and came to his own across the water, when wind and waves were overpowering their boat. When we stand, we know that we are united to the victory of Christ, and when we stand to listen to the Gospel, it is an expression of reverence. When this Word is heard, we cannot remain sitting; it pulls us up. It demands both reverence and courage, when he calls us to set off in some new direction, to do his will and to carry it into our lives and into the world.

Just one further reminder may help us here. We are familiar, from the painting in the catacombs, with the figure of the *orans*, the female figure standing and praying with outstretched hands. According to recent research,