THEOLOGICAL TRENDS

Mastery and Mystery: Spirituality within Humanity's Mediating Role

This article is the text of the Cardinal Heenan Memorial lecture given at Heythrop College, University of London, on 29 November 1985

AROUND THE CONCEPTS of mastery and mystery, I want to develop in this lecture the framework for a balanced pattern of christian spirituality for our time.

I use the expression 'christian spirituality' with some hesitation. The hesitation has to do with the concept 'spirituality'. This concept, though widely used today, seems to me capable of misunderstanding, in two ways. First, the term should not be seen as in any sense opposed to materiality. Materiality is the necessary condition of human existence in time, humans being endowed with a material body. It is not a spiritual discipline that is divorced from materiality that we are after. We have in mind a very material spirituality for our bodies, minds and spirits. The second possibility of misunderstanding the term spirituality springs from its association with spiritual or mystical theology as distinguished from dogmatic and moral theologies. Medieval theology did make that distinction, relating dogmatic theology to doctrine, moral theology to canon law and mystical theology to the spiritual disciplines of prayer and contemplation. My vision of spirituality seeks to include human understanding, will and feeling, and not to separate them. What I mean by christian spirituality is the whole christian life in community, not a personal discipline of spiritual exercises for the individual.

I believe that the christian ecumenical movement needs a fresh vision of the processes by which christian persons are formed in community and grow together in union with Christ in his body, the Church. The attempt here is therefore to outline a unifying vision of Christ, the Church, humanity as a whole and the whole created order in relation to the triune God. Such a unifying vision of christian spirituality should break through not only the barriers that divide Christians from each other, but also the barriers between the Church and the rest of humanity, as well as between the Church and the whole created order.

The ecumenical movement, as it gropes for self-understanding, is sometimes seen too exclusively as the relation between Churches or between Church and world. Those are two important mediations where renewal is urgently needed. But our vision needs to clarify several dimensions that are often ignored. It is recognized that this lecture cannot

be fully comprehensive. What is attempted here is simply to sketch out a larger framework within which most of the concerns can be comprehended.

I *Humanity as frontier being*

One of the pillars of this ecumenical christian vision is a perception of humanity as a 'frontier being', a mediator between different aspects of reality. This is an eastern patristic insight, central to Gregory of Nyssa[1] and Maximus the Confessor[2] both of whom have expounded this theme at some length. The Greek word is *methorios*. Gregory of Nyssa, in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* says of the human soul:

> The soul is the frontier (*methorios*) of two entities—one intelligible, incorporal, incorruptible; the other corporal, material, vocational (333, 13,334).

This does not mean, however, that one's true being is the intelligible and that one has to escape from the corporal to be oneself. The context shows that this frontier existence is the basis of human freedom, with the possibility to turn towards the one or the other.

One must therefore distinguish between three types of frontier existence—one in which the human person is called upon to choose sides, another set in which he or she should remain in tension and balance keeping loyalty to both, and a third, quite unique, in worship.

Of the first type, one can give examples: between good and evil, between truth and falsehood, between beauty and ugliness, between faith and unbelief, between love and hate, between wisdom and folly and so on. Here there is no question of mediation or reconciliation; there is only clear choice of one over against the other. That is part of human freedom. In this aspect of humanity's frontier existence, the important thing to note is that the human person experiences both, and can *discern* the difference by *experience* unlike angelic beings or unfallen humanity, or even God himself (except in Christ). Here the human role at the frontier is not mediation or reconciliation, but experience and discernment.

The second type is of a different order. Humanity exists at the frontier between the sensible and the intelligible, between the seen and the unseen, between matter and spirit, between the corporeal and the incorporeal. Here humanity is not called upon to choose between the two, but to remain at the frontier, participating in both, and mediating between them.

The third type of *methorios* or frontier is not a type at all, because it is unique. This is Christ the Son of God Incarnate. As Cyril of Alexandria put it:

> Christ is like a frontier (*methorios*) between humanity and divinity, being the union (*sunodos*) or coming together of the two in some fashion as one.[3] By Christ as a mediator (*mesites*) we are conjoined (*sunaptometha*) with the Father. For Christ is like a frontier (*methorios*) between the divinity on high and humanity.[4] Just as Christ, as Logos, is one with the Father, and has become human, he is conjoined (*sunaptetai*) with those on earth, and he has become like a frontier (*methorios*), holding together (*sunechon*) in himself both in unity and harmony.[5]

The Christian has this frontier role by virtue of his or her participation in the body of Christ. But the Christian participates in the other two types of frontier existence—that between good and evil, and that between the sensible and the intelligible or corporeal and incorporeal. It is in the context of this threefold frontier existence that we have to look for a christian spirituality for our time. We do this by looking first at mastery and then at mystery. We will clarify the concepts as we go along.

II *The quest for mastery*

Let me first say that I intend no male chauvinist overtones by the concept of mastery. It means autonomy, freedom, being in control. It need not mean domination—male or female. Nor do we want to associate mastery with the male principle and mystery with the female principle. The notion of mastery has its roots in the original blessing and commission given to the human race, male and female, by the creator God:

> And God blessed them and God said to him and her: 'Bear fruit, become many, fill the earth. Master it, control fish of sea and fowl of air, and every animal that moves on earth' (Gen 1,28).

Here we will come at the notion of mastery from the perspectives of two contemporary german philosophers, Jürgen Habermas, formerly of the Frankfurt school of social research and later of the Max Planck Institute, and Martin Heidegger who died in 1976. We will use the evolutionary-phenomenological and philosophical-poetic perspectives of two non-Christians in order to avoid the pitfalls of theological speculation at this stage.

Habermas is not well known in the english-speaking world, though eminently deserving to be so known. In the range of his thought and in the comprehensiveness of his analysis, he has few peers today. Analytically inclined philosophers may be allergic to Habermas for he seeks to synthesize what he analyzes. Many of Habermas's works are now available in English.[6] We shall touch upon some of his insights in order to clarify our concept of mastery.

Habermas's analysis of the knowing process is of seminal significance. He starts with Marx's perception that the knowing process of a human person begins with the handling of things. Michael Polanyi, my revered teacher, has already drawn our attention to this *tacit* or touch dimension in all knowledge. In fact it is an ancient patristic insight that the hands are essential to reason. Gregory of Nyssa, for example, insists that 'the hands exist for the sake of reason', for if we had used them to support our body as quadrupeds do, we would never have developed the capacity for language and reason. The co-ordination of head and hands (theory and practice) is necessary for the human child to grow up to be an adult.[7]

It is through handling things that we learn to exercise the mind. Marx calls this *Stoffwechsel* or material exchange, and he sees the specificity of the human species in the human capacity to extend the power of the hands through tool-making. It is as *homo faber,* as fabricating human person, that one becomes *homo sapiens,* the knowing human person. Out of practice comes theory or knowledge. For Marx, labour thus becomes not only an epistemological principle, but also the constitutive principle of human formation. It is in the context of work that thought arises.

But Marx focussed too unilaterally on the instrumental or technical interest of reason. Even in dealing with the material world, the mind has a more than technical interest. The human person finds the environment as a limiting and conditioning factor on his will. He changes or transforms the environment through technical reason, in order to free himself from the limitation that the outside world imposes on us. This is the other side of mind or reason, this quest for emancipation from conditioning. The instrumental interest of reason goes side by side with the emancipatory interest.

But human self-formation is not a solitary process. Labour is social labour, socially learned and socially exercised. The human child is born helpless and grows by handling things with hand and mouth, but in that very process relating itself to persons, to the mother first and then to others. For Marx, human formation is the result of handling things in relation and interaction with others. Here too the child has an emancipatory interest, that of growing from the dependence of heteronomy to the emancipation of autonomy. In both processes, in dealing with the world and with other persons, contradictions and conflicts arise which spur the human child or person to further mental activity to overcome these contradictions and negations.

The interest that dominates is that of emancipation and freedom, the striving for autonomy and self-determination, over and against the constraints imposed by the material environment and by society or family. Marx saw the relations as constituting the two realms in which human formation takes place. The first is the realm of material exchange, which has two constituents: (a) to know how things work, i.e. sciences; and

(b) how to work on things, i.e. technology. They interpenetrate. By working on things we learn how things work. And by learning how things work, we learn how more efficiently to work on things to suit our needs. Developments in science are necessary for progress in technology. Developments in technology (the microscope, the internal combustion engine, the particle accelerators) make further progress in science possible. This world of science-technology, constantly progressing, means growing forces of production. It is a dynamic world powered by the growth of science-technology leading to greater and greater forces of production.

But the realm that controls this development is the organization of social labour or political economy. If the political economy is badly managed and organized, constraints and contradictions will occur in the development of the forces of production. At a certain stage the patterns of political economy, i.e. property relations, power distribution and the institutions not only of the state, but also of agriculture, industry, services and information, will also have to be revolutionized and reconstituted in order to remove the constraints and contradictions within the world of science-technology and political economy.

So far, Marx and Habermas agree. But there is another third realm, says Habermas, above the realms of science-technology and political economy. This is the realm of norms and values for both realms, and the process by which a society comes to agree on these values and to validate or legitimate these norms. Communication without constraint, leading to consensus, is the only way. One can set up, by communication and consensus, validation criteria for the physical sciences, related to theoretical reflection and empirical confirmation. But these criteria of the physical sciences cannot be applied to the human sciences where human freedom shows reluctance for experimental manipulation. In political economy for example, criteria for normative action cannot be drawn from the physical sciences. There, unconstrained communication leading to social consensus seems the only way. We cannot arrive at values like justice, dignity of all human persons, and the unity of humanity, extrapolating from the physical sciences.

Habermas disagrees with Marx in proposing tool-making or *homo faber* as the specificity of the human species. If he has to set up one principle of specificity, it would be *homo communicator.* The capacity to communicate with each other through utterances and symbols is what distinguishes the human race from other animal species. Marx did not see this, because he tried to make language and communication merely instrumental to science-technology and political economy. Habermas insists on a separate third level called critical analysis by which we examine the mechanisms of language and communication. All kinds of devices are used to justify and legitimize value choices in the realm of political economy. Quite often these justifications are false and contrived, intended to confuse the

victims of exploitation and oppression and to protect the interests of the exploiters and oppressors. This is ideology or false consciousness, which becomes a constraint in communication.

The way of emancipation is through the kind of social psychoanalysis which Marx practised in exposing the false pretensions of bourgeois ideology. For Habermas, this belongs to a higher level than political economy itself—a realm he calls *Ideologiekritik* or a metacritical process by which we reflect critically on our reflection itself, and on the formative processes which have given birth to our present subjective consciousness. This is absolutely necessary for full emancipation from false consciousness, which is the driving force of all knowledge and action, all theory and practice. *Ideologiekritik* is shaped by the general methodology provided by Marx and Freud, the two radical shapers of european consciousness in recent times. It is based on a meta-theory of communication and empirically confirmed and validated. It is also its own validation; in metacritique alone the method itself is provided by the discipline itself—unlike in the physical or human sciences. In this discipline, reflection reflecting on the history of reflection itself, creates a history of the development of the manifestation of forms of consciousness, understood as constellations of power and ideology in successive stages of human economic-political development.

This exorcism of false consciousness from ideology and its purification is the last stage of emancipation or freedom for the knowing subject. Constraint-free communication, for Habermas, is the final goal of emancipation from external conditioning. As we expose false ideologies, we gain new and more liberating perspectives and strategies for action in the realms of science-technology and political economy. Such strategies would make it possible to identify the normative power built into the institutional system of any society, capitalist, socialist or other, and therefore to identify the nature of the interests that are suppressed. This process has to be one in which all members of that society fully participate without constraint.

This is a thumb-nail sketch of the 'universal pragmatics' proposed by Jürgen Habermas. It implies a consensus theory of truth, and a philosophical understanding of emancipation or freedom as constraint-free, autonomous inter-action. It is certainly free from much of the individualistic bias of many theories of human, personal and social formation. Material exchange, economic-political inter-action, and communicative inter-action and discourse are the three realms which determine both personal formation and social formation. The ultimate objective is truth and freedom in community—which together constitute real mastery, authentic inter-active autonomy, harmonizing true subjectivity and objectivity, reason and nature.

We shall not here attempt a critique of this ambitious and optimistic

metacritical project of Habermas. That needs to be done, but on another occasion. We have sketched it here as an example of the most ambitious intellectual project in contemporary western thought. It is an example that shows that the european Enlightenment has not yet abandoned the quest for mastery and liberation through the use of critical reason.

III *The heideggerian critique*

We shift gears to that other half-understood and much misunderstood german thinker, Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). It is a different world and a different ethos. In fact, Heidegger takes precisely the opposite stance—that the western enterprise to seek mastery and freedom, through science-technology, political economics and modern philosophy, is an enterprise doomed to failure from the start.

Philosophy itself, says Heidegger, cannot proceed through the empirical method and critical analysis. Heidegger says that it is only in the west that philosophy has arisen—in the greek language and by greek philosophers, and later in the german language by german thinkers. Everything else, chinese, indian or other philosophies are not worth the name.

Heidegger looks at the whole western intellectual enterprise as a totality. He generally accepts the picture painted by Auguste Comte in the nineteenth century. Western thought has moved through three stages—the theological, the metaphysical and the scientific or positive. And as the third stage becomes impressively successful, it eclipses the two earlier stages, which are then relegated to the childhood of humanity. Scientific thought, grounded in mathematical logic and empirical validation, is sufficient unto itself, according to Comte. Not so, says Heidegger:

> All the sciences (*Wissenschaften*) have leapt from the womb of philosophy, in a two-fold manner. The sciences came out of philosophy, because they have to part with her. And now that they are so apart, they can never again, by their own power as sciences, make the leap back into the source from whence they have sprung.[8]

The German philosopher agrees with the Frenchman that science was born out of the matrix of philosphy. But Heidegger points out that science cannot get back into the womb from which it was born. Science therefore cannot answer the question about its own nature by the methods of science. It has to go out of its own field to philosophy in order to analyze the very method of science. It is that kind of thinking which sciences cannot do, according to Heiddeger. Sciences can only reflect on experience on the basis of logic and mathematics.

But Heidegger's analysis goes deeper. Like Comte, Heidegger seeks to

see the western quest, which has culminated in modern science, as a single, huge, intellectual, spiritual, human enterprise in western civilization. Unlike Comte's, his analysis ends up in a radical critique of science and technology, as well as of philosophy which gave birth to it. That critique gives us another possibility of orientation in the human quest. Heidegger focuses on what happens to the human psyche itself in the process of development from philosophy, through science, to technology.

Let us try to be concrete in illustrating this transition, which has a great deal to do with a holistic christian spirituality, which is our concern in this paper. Take a mountain, for example. 'Primitive man' sees the mountain as a reality with which he lives, and on which his life depends. He gives it a name—say Himalaya or Kilimanjaro—and develops attitudes towards it, not as an object, but as a quasi-subject. He weaves it into his religious self-understanding through myth and ritual, thus entering into a relationship of reciprocity with it. The mountain impresses him and his total being responds in awe and wonder. Its majesty and grandeur speaks to his depths as an aspect of the reality in which he participates. His psyche responds, not in the scientific quest to analyze and understand, but in the deeper human response of poetry and art, myth and ritual. It is a subject which stands with him and before him, not an object which has to be understood and overpowered. The mountain is a friend, the source of the rivers that water his land and breed the fish he eats—an awesome friend, nevertheless a friend after all.

In science, the perspective changes, with consequent changes in the human psyche itself. The search is now to *understand,* in terms of how it came to be by geological processes, to measure its altitude, to analyze its strata and its vegetation, its mineral content and causal relation to other phenomena like rain and flood. It becomes an object for the understanding, something to be explained and described independently of its relation to us. Sometimes that relation is also studied, not subjectively, but in the context of a presumed objectivity. Already, says Heidegger, the human psyche is alienated from the mountain in the attempt to eliminate all subjectivity in the understanding.

Then, modern technology based on modern science develops; and the human psyche again shifts its perspective. The mountain is no longer an object to be merely understood. The scientific understanding is used to visualize it as a potential resource—as a source of timber for our paper mills and furniture factories, as a deposit of mineral ore to be mined and milled for industrial purposes. The technology is then developed to *exploit* the mountain, to dominate it and make it our slave, serving our will and purpose. Even climbing the mountain becomes an act of overpowering and domination. The subject-object relation leads to a master-slave or owner-property relation.

To the scientist the mountain is 'nothing but' the result of geological

processes. To the industrial technologist, it is 'nothing but' a resource to serve him, to be controlled and exploited by him. Here, in this transition from *under*-standing to *over*-powering, there is the second alienation in the human psyche.

Heidegger exhorts us to shift the very stance, adopted by the Greeks and perfected by other Europeans, of positioning oneself outside beings and questioning them through philosophy, metaphysics and modern science-technology. It is this objectification and separation of the subject that is at the root of western alienation and homelessness. It is this gap between being and thinking that neither western metaphysics nor modern science has been able to bridge:

> In the seemingly unimportant distinction between being and thinking, we must discern the fundamental position of the western spirit, against which our central attack is directed.[9]

Heidegger is not anti-empirical. He places high value on experience. But experience has deeper dimensions which science is unable to explore, says Heidegger. One has experience not only of things, but also persons:

> To undergo an experience with something—be it a thing, a person, or a god—means that this something befalls us, strikes us, comes over us, overwhelms and transforms us. When we talk of 'undergoing' an experience, we mean specifically that the experience is not of our own making;[10] to undergo here means that we endure it, suffer it, receive it as it strikes us, and submit to it. It is this something itself that comes about, comes to pass, happens.[11]

Science, Heidegger would say, is unable to say anything worthwhile about that 'something itself', though it may draw some historical, general conclusions from it. Science may also try to classify different kinds of experiences, including the scientific-technological, political-economic, cultural and even mystical. But that tells us little about that 'something itself'.

IV *Mastery as liberation*

All of modern western thought can be characterized as a quest for liberation—liberation from necessity and conditioned-ness. Fichte is the archetype of this kind of thinking. For him, humanity can realize its autonomy and freedom by securing control over all activity—knowing, feeling, willing, and over all the productions of that activity, i.e. objects of knowledge and actions, of theory and practice. The autonomy of the non-ego, in its mutiplicity, elements of regularity and unpredictability, should be brought under the conscious control of the ego and become

controlled extensions of the ego. Such mastery is liberation. This is the gist of the western enterprise. This was Fichte's project as well as Hegel's and Marx's. It is in making nature human that human nature becomes liberated from constraint and necessity, from alienation and conditioned-ness. The quest of the Enlightenment is also to seek freedom from dogma and authority, to emancipate the ego and restore its autonomy through the critical exercise of reason. Fichte and Hegel saw the conditioned-ness in consciousness, whereas Marx located the conditioned-ness of the consciousness as rooted in political economy or the relations of production, of which consciousness was only part. What our phenomenal success in science and technology has done for us is to remove many of the constraints and contradictions in the ego's consciousness as well as in external reality.

We have enhanced our mastery over the non-ego. Sartre's lament was, however, typical of the realization that the alienation between the in-itself (ego as consciousness) and the for-itself (the non-ego for consciousness) was an unbridgeable gap, and therefore the quest for emancipation through identity between consciousness and its object was doomed to failure.

Shall we then abandon the mastery that we have gained through science and technology and through transformations in political economy as also in the cultural realm, to seek emancipation in a different way by adopting a radically other stance? That is Heidegger's prescription. Heidegger tells us that the whole, colossal, western enterprise from the pre-socratic Greeks to our day is a colossal failure.

All that Comte has outlined—theology, metaphysics, modern science, technology—all proceed from that stance of the ego where it stands apart from the non-ego and questions being. Such an ego is a predator, one that seeks to know, in order to catch, and catch in order to devour. Heidegger wants us to take a different stance, if we want to be emancipated from our own predator ego. That stance is exemplified best in poets like Hölderlin, Rilke, Trakl and perhaps Coleridge; it may also be seen in the zen approach, away from concept and construct, away from ordinary philosophy and science and technology, in the attuned-ness to Being, waiting in the clearing to heed the summons of Being, of Being that is present in the beings, Being that renders things possible. Philosophy, science and technology got caught in beings but overlooked Being itself. Being presents itself to us in the beings, through sight and hearing, touch and taste and smell. Philosophy tries to put beings together in a single scheme; science seeks to analyze them and see the laws of their operation. But neither gives access to Being.

According to Heidegger, this failed effort to gain mastery through aggressive science and technology could never lead us to emancipation and mastery. That comes only when we learn to 'care', to be-with rather

be-over-against, to wait alongside in *ein Verweilen-bei*. Art and poetry do that better than science and technology. Good art and poetry, by drawing up things from the well of concealment and bringing their being to light, revealing their truth and helping us to heed their call to care—care for humanity, care for beings. A good Van Gogh—a pair of shoes, a tree, a bale of hay as seen by the artist—brings out the concealedness of Being in a way that science or philosophy cannot.

The artist and the poet do not set out to 'capture' reality, only to reveal it, in order that we may heed its call. The quest is no longer, as in science and technology, for grasping knowledge and manipulating technology. Mastery gradually yields to mystery, mystery which remains wonder-provoking and fascinatingly mysterious even when unveiled.

Is that then the way out—gradually decelerating the developments in science and technology and accelerating the movements in art and poetry? Or shall we do what several institutes of technology are trying to do—combine technology studies with humanity studies? This latter may have eased the conscience of scientists and engineers, and helped the access of slightly more mature incumbents to the seats of power in world technocracy, but it has not emerged in any radical solutions to the problems of alienation, meaninglessness and injustice in our societies. Mitigating the sharpness of technological mastery with skills in art and literature can only be good, but no more than a beginning for a more far-reaching solution.

V *The mystery of being*

We now make the transition from mastery to mystery, with great trepidation. Let us first make clear that we are not talking about mysticism which, I submit, is a special creation of western thought. I wish here to speak about the biblical concept of mystery. While the adjective 'mystical' may already have been used in the classical christian tradition, 'mysticism' is a creation of our modern ethos which likes to reduce everything to an 'ism' in order to pigeon-hole and classify it.

The classical word 'mystery', however, goes back to the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. It is an eminently pauline word, but by no means exclusively pauline. Our Lord himself spoke about the 'mysteries of the kingdom' (Mt 13,11, Lk 8,10) or 'the mystery of the kingdom' (*to musterion tes basileias tou Theou*—Mk 4,11). This is the 'mystery' which the apostles knew (Lk 8,10) and made known to the brethren and sisters (Rom 11,25) the mystery unveiled and proclaimed (Rom 16,25). Saint Paul obviously wanted the Corinthians to understand him as an officer of Christ and a manager of the mysteries of God (1 Cor 4,1). The mystery of God seems to have been so difficult for some early copyists of the New Testament that some wrote *marturion* instead of *musterion* in 1 Cor 2,1. In Ephesians, the word 'mystery' becomes central—the mystery of

the will of God (1,9), which was revealed to Paul (3,3) which he understood (3,4) and which he constantly illuminated (3,9) and made known with boldness (6,19). The same mystery hidden for ages (1,26), the glorious richness of which God has now made known (Col 1,27) is simple: 'Christ in you, the hope of glory'. Christ is the mystery known in the community of faith, hope and love (Col 2,2).

We will come back to this mystery, which obviously has little to do with mysticism, after a quick look at its Old Testament antecedents, always important for the understanding of a New Testament concept.

The word 'mystery' occurs in that form mainly in the english translations of the aramaic writings of Daniel. The aramaic word is *raz,* which is used at least seven times in the second chapter of Daniel. The meaning is more 'counsel' than simply something hidden. The persian word *raz* refers to the council in which the king or emperor makes his decisions—secret decisions known only to the councillors. It is these that Daniel finally reveals to Nebuchednezzar. The mysteries have to do with what is to happen in the future. So Daniel says to Nebuchednezzar:

> Your Majesty, on your bed your thoughts turned to what would happen in the future, and the revealer of mysteries disclosed to you what is to take place. This mystery has been revealed to me . . . (Daniel 2,29-30. Jerusalem Bible).

The equivalent hebrew word *sod* has the same significance of a secret council in which decisions are made. We see the word mainly in the psalmist, in wisdom literature, and in the prophets. Psalm 89,8 sees Yahweh seated in his majesty:

> God, awesome in the assembly of the holy ones (*be sod-gedoshim*)
> Great, feared by all around.

To stand in this council of God accredits the prophet:

> Who has stood in Yahweh's Council (*be sod-yahweh*)
> And seen, heard, his word (Jer 23,18).

> Had they (the false prophets) stood in my Council (*amdu be-sodi*)
> They would have made my people hear my word (Jer 23,22).

> Adonai Yahweh does not do a thing
> Unless he reveals his counsel (*galah sodo*)
> To his servants the prophets (Amos 3,7).

The main point here is that mystery or *sod* is not primarily a cultic word, but a prophetic word, related to the knowledge of God's plan and purpose for his creation.

Curiously enough, this word of exilic and post-exilic provenance in the Old Testament became a central concept for the Qumran communities also. Their concept of the assembly of the initiated ones was in terms of participation in the *sod-Yahweh* or council of God. The prophetic concept becomes the basis of the cultic initiation and life.

When the christian community gave the name 'mystery' to the Eucharist, they could have meant no less. When our Lord himself spoke of his disciples that they were privileged to know the 'mysteries of the kingdom' (Mk 4,11; Mt 13,11; Lk 8,10), did he not mean that the initiated community partook of the *sod-Yahweh?* Saint Paul speaks about making known the mystery (Rom 11,25; 16,25; Eph 6,11; Col 4,3) and sees himself and his colleagues as stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Cor 4,1). The epistle to the Colossians is all about this mystery hidden for the ages and now revealed to God's people (Col 1: 26 ff). And the central substance of that *sod-Yahweh* is disclosed in Colossians, above all: 'Christ in you, the hope of glory' (*Christos en humin, he elpis tes doxes*—Col 1,27): 'When Christ is manifested, your life, and you yourselves with him, will be manifested in glory' (Col 3,4). This is the mystery of God made known to us Christians (*eis epignosin tou mysterion tou Theou, Christou*—Col 2,2). This is the mystery which the apostles proclaimed, and which the deacons of the Church handle with a pure conscience—the mystery of the faith (*to mysterion tes pisteos*—1 Tim 3,9). This is the mystery which we confess (*homologoumenos mega estin to tes eusebeias mysterion*—1 Tim 3,16) and communicate in—in the Eucharist.

But how easy it is to misunderstand the great mystery of the Eucharist by which Christians participate in the great secret council of God with the holy ones—the *sod-Yahweh,* which is the *sod-gedoshim.* The worst misunderstanding is when we forget the mediatory role of Christ between the creation and the creator. That is where some understanding of the other Old Testament concept renewed by the New Testament, the royal priesthood, comes in.

VI The royal priesthood

In Exodus, 19,6, Yahweh says to the people of Israel:

> And you shall become to me a kingdom of priests (*mamleketh kohnim*) and a holy nation (*goy gadosh*). These things you (Moses) shall utter to the children of Israel.

This promise, however, has a condition, given in the previous verse (Ex 19,5):

> And you, if you do indeed heed my voice (*im shamo'a teshme'u beqoli*) and observe my contract (*wshemartem eth-berithi*), you shall become for me a specially beloved people among all peoples (*segullah mekol ha-ammion*) for (after all) to me (belongs) the whole earth.

This is the vocation of Israel, the vocation which only Jesus Christ fully fulfilled, and in which we Christians now participate. Jesus Christ with his body, the Church, is the new *segullah*—the nation of priests, the holy kingdom, provided of course that we do indeed keep the new agreement or New Testament in Jesus Christ and are always sensitive to the voice of Yahweh. This is repeated by Peter the apostle in his commission to newly baptized Christians, reported in 1 Peter 2, 5 and 9. The phrases are piled up by Peter: *hierateuma hagion* or holy priesthood, *genos eklekton* or a race chosen, the king's priesthood or royal priesthood (*basileion hierateuma*), a holy nation (*ethnos hagion*) a people to be possessed as special (*laos eis peripoiesin*)—all reminiscent of the vocation of Israel from Mount Sinai. The task of this royal priesthood is also clear in verses 5 and 9:

> (a) to lift up spiritual sacrifices well pleasing to God through Jesus Christ (*Anenengkai pneumatikas thusias euprosdektous Theoe dia Iesou Christou*) (v 5)
> and
> (b) to proclaim abroad the heroic virtues of the one who called you out from darkness to God's marvellous light (*hopos tas aretas exangeilete tou ek skotous humas kalesantos eis to thaumaston autou phos*) (v 9).

Peter probably forgot or overlooked two important elements in the Old Testament vocation, first that it was conditional on really heeding the voice of God and being faithful to the agreement of God with us; and second, that this calling is in the context of the whole earth belonging to God.

I do believe that the spiritual sacrifices which we are to offer up to God through Christ include all that is well-pleasing to God in the three realms of the formative activity of the whole earth's human beings—science/technology, political economy, and cultural and philosophical creativity. The Church certainly learned from the beginning to lift up the second and third realms, when it interceded for the authorities and rulers, and used the best in its art and music for worship. The first realm, that of science/technology is new, impressive and liberating. We should learn to incorporate it in our worship, both in terms of intercession for that realm and by introducing the best in science/technology into our

worship. The christian community's task then is constantly and periodically to lift up humanity's offerings to God, offerings from all three realms of our existence and formation.

To do so, however, we need to be in the heart of these three realms. It is not enough to understand that our own formation as christian persons is heavily determined by what happens to us in the three realms now badly alienated from the Church and from God. We need to experience the conflicts and contradictions present in science/technology, political economy and culture/philosophy. Only thus can we discern how even in these alienated realms the Spirit of God is at work, bringing light where there is darkness, truth where there is false consciousness, justice where injustice rules, peace and harmony where conflict and violence erupt, health and wholeness prevailing over sickness and fragmentation.

This is why an authentic christian sprituality cannot be a flight from these realms, but a deeper penetration of their more creative features. The exhortation of St Paul in Romans 12,1-2 takes on fresh meaning as a guideline for christian life and worship:

> My appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, through the mercies of God, is that you offer up your bodies as a life-sacrifice, holy and well-pleasing to God. This is the worship of the rational beings which you are. And do not let yourselves be squeezed into the schemes and patterns of this age, but be transforming agents and be transformed yourselves through the renewal of the mind (*anakainosis tou noos*). That way you will be demonstrating what is the will of God—that will which is always good, pleasing and mature.

It is in this *anakainosis* or renewal of the mind as a world-transforming force that we earn the right to lift up the sacrifices of the whole creation in our eucharistic worship. Developing new meditation techniques or practising some spiritual exercises can be useful only as ancillary to this renewal of the mind and the consequent transformation of the world. We cannot, as Christians, do this by simply fitting into the scheme of things as they now exist in science/technology, political economy and culture/philosophy. We have to discern God's will within these realms and set our realms as well as ourselves within the formation processes of the world.

This is merely an indication of what it means for the Church to be a priest-nation in the community of nations. The task belongs to the whole Church. As always, only a few will be given the special gifts of the Spirit, the charisma to perform this penetration into the three realms and their transformation from within. But these realms shape all human beings,

and in so far as they do so, the transformation will affect Christians as well, in their being, in their worship and in their life.

VI *To conclude*

The twin pulls are upon us as humanity, the pull for one kind of mastery over creation—that which has come to us through the western intellectual enterprise of the last twenty-five or so centuries—from the pre-socratics to our day—through european philosophy, european theology, european science-technology. The mastery we have achieved over our environment through science-technology is colossal indeed. But we know that there is deep-rooted evil and sickness in all the three realms where we have sought mastery—in science-technology, in political economy and in culture and value choices. We have recognized the presence of evil and sickness in all three realms, but still have found no physician who can heal us, no balm in Gilead which will take out the poison.

The other way of mastery we have been exploring, the way of escape and personal meditation through new techniques, also fails to fulfil us. It is possible, even through meditation techniques, to seek a new kind of mastery—that of altered states of consciousness, of trance and levitation, of awakening the *kundalini,* of being a master of yoga, of keeping the body and mind under control, even to the point of achieving dramatic powers of clairvoyance, telepathy and even levitation and out-of-body travel. We can even get close to the remarkable marvels of mental and spiritual power which Jesus and other great masters have shown—that of rebuking the raging waves to make them still, of walking on water, of healing paralysis and blindness by a mere word.

Both these masteries—the technological mastery of physical reality and the psychic mastery of spiritual power—cannot heal us. We need to balance these masteries with an awareness and participation in the underlying mystery of God and his universe, and the related mystery of Christ in us, the hope of glory. To relate the eucharistic mystery to technological and psychic mastery demands striving in three areas.

(a) First, we must overcome the idea that it is away from the material universe that we seek spiritual fulfilment. The historical economy of the Incarnation, the eucharistic bread and wine and their material assimilation into our physical bodies, the hope of the Resurrection of our bodies, all these should help us overcome this false pursuit of an antimaterial spirituality. We will need to make our eucharistic practice more material, using all the senses, taste and smell, seeing and hearing, touching and feeling, using our bodies more, using better art and architecture, better lines and lighting, better music and singing, better symbols that speak to our depths transconceptually. We must draw the material order of physical creation in all its beauty and goodness into our eucharistic worship. Our mastery of the material should be drawn more adequately into eucharistic

worship, which today tends to become too austere and spiritualistic.

(b) Second, we must break out of the individual and conscious bind in which spirituality has been caught. All personal prayer and discipline should feed into genuine community worship where we can lay aside our ego-awareness and our self-consciousness into a liturgical act in which the community acts and we as persons are carried by the community. This community, however, cannot be limited to the local community. Symbols and words should make the community aware of its unity with the Church of all ages and all places, of all cultures and all times, of all rites and of all jurisdictions, both those now living and those who have gone beyond the curtain of this world's visible scene. The local christian Church has to transcend its parochiality, not only by conscious education, but also through eloquent symbols and liturgical memorials. There has to be a wide stretching of the we-awareness of Christians.

(c) Thirdly, we should have a greater awareness of our mediatory role as the royal priesthood, lifting up the offering of the whole creation to God in the Eucharist. We must escape from the trap into which the children of Israel and the christian Church have unwaringly fallen. It is in this trap that we become overly concerned about what happens to Christians, and not sufficiently about that humanity whose priest we are. This demands greater participation in all aspects of life—science-technology, political economy, and culture-value, including world religions and ideologies. We as Christians should break through all the barriers that keep us Christians isolated from the world of plurality and conflict in which people of all religions and ideologies live, from the worlds of scientists and engineers, from the worlds of political and economic oppression, injustice and exploitation, from the worlds of peasants and workers, from the life of the marginalized of the world. This all-embracing dialogical participation by Christians in the life of the world should enrich their eucharistic offering and their participation in the great eucharistic mystery should inform their participation in the daily life of the world.

This indeed, seems to me the framework for a balanced spirituality, balanced between mastery and mystery—but also between God and his world. To keep the two poles in balance seems to lead to strain and tension: but it is precisely through that strain and tension that the true equipoise of a mediating royal priesthood leads to beatitude and the knowledge of true joy and peace in community.

Paulos Mar Gregorios

NOTES

[1] For Gregory, see the chapter 'Frontière', in J. Daniélou, *L'être et le temps chez Grégoire de Nyssée*, (Leiden, 1970), pp 116-132.

[2] For Maximus, see Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and mediator.*
[3] Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* LXXV: 853 C.
[4] *Ibid.,* LXXIII: 1045 C.
[5] Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* LXXIV; 192 A-B.
[6] See *Knowledge and human interests* (1971), *Theory and practice* (1973), *Legitimation crisis* (1975) and *Communication and the evolution of society* (1980), all published by Beacon Press, Boston. The best introductions are Thomas McCarthy, *The critical theory of Jürgen Habermas,* (London, 1978), and Garbis Kortian, *Metacritique: the philosophical argument of Jürgen Habermas,* (Cambridge, 1980).
[7] See the fascinating discussion of this point in Gregory of Nyssa's *On the making of man,* especially Ch VIII in the english translation in *Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers,* Series Two, vol V, pp 393 ff.
[8] Heidegger, M., *Was Heisst Denken?* (1954), eng. tr. *What is thinking?* (Harper and Row, 1968), p 18.
[9] See Heidegger, M., *An introduction to metaphysics,* (New York, 1961), p 99.
[10] Unlike the scientific experiment, which may be of our own making, or at least our own contriving.
[11] Heidegger, M., *On the way to language,* (New York, 1971), p 57.