

**THE UNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON:
THE BODY-SOUL RELATIONSHIP IN ORTHODOX THEOLOGY**

by

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You have made me and laid Your hand upon me; Your knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great, and I cannot attain to it.

Psalm 138 [139]: 5-6

Microcosm and mediator

In any dialogue between theology and science, there is one basic truth, which as Christians we must keep continually in view. Spirit and matter are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they are interdependent; they interpenetrate and interact. When speaking, therefore, of the human person, we are not to think of the soul and the body as two separable 'parts', which together comprise a greater whole. The soul, so far from being a 'part' of the person, is an expression and manifestation of the totality of our human personhood, when viewed from a particular point of view. The body is likewise an expression of our total personhood, viewed from another point of view – from a point of view that, although different from the first, is complementary to it and in no respect contrary. 'Body' and 'soul' are thus two ways of describing the energies of a single and undivided whole. A truly Christian view of human nature needs always to be unitary and holistic.

It is true that, in our daily experience, we often feel within ourselves not undivided unity but fragmentation and conflict, with soul and body in sharp opposition to one another. It is this that St Paul expresses when he exclaims: 'O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death?' (Romans 7:24). St John Climacus (7th century) voices the same perplexity when he says of his body, 'He is my helper and my enemy, my assistant and my opponent, a protector and a traitor. ...What is this mystery in me? What is the principle of this mixture of body and soul? How can I be both my own friend and my own enemy?'¹ But if we feel within ourselves this dividedness and warfare between our soul and our body, that is not because God has made us that way, but because we are living in a fallen world, subject to the consequences of sin. God for His part has created us as an undivided unity; it is we human beings who through our sinfulness have undermined that unity, although it is never altogether destroyed.

Whenever, therefore, we find passages in the Bible or the Fathers which seem to affirm an antagonism and division between body and soul, or which appear to condemn the body as evil, we have to ask ourselves: To what level of human existence does the text in question refer? Is the author speaking about the fallen or the unfallen condition of humankind? Is he talking about the body in its *natural*

¹ *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* 15 (PG 88:901C-904A). On John Climacus's theology of the human body, see Christos Yannaras, *I metaphysiki tou somatos* (Athens, 1971); also my introduction to Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell (translators), *John Climacus: The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (The Classics of Western Spirituality: New York, 1982), pp. 28-32.

state, as created by God, or does he have in view our present situation, subject to sin, whether ancestral or personal – a situation that is in fact altogether *contranatural*? When St Paul speaks about ‘the body of this death’ (Romans 7:24), he means our fallen state; when he says, ‘Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit Glorify God in your body’ (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), he is speaking about the body as it was when originally created by God, and as it can be once more when we are redeemed in Christ. Similarly, when St John Climacus terms the body ‘enemy’, ‘opponent’ and ‘traitor’, he has in view the body in its present state of fallen sinfulness; but when he calls the body ‘helper’, ‘protector’ and ‘friend’, he is referring to its true and natural condition, whether unfallen or redeemed. When reading Scripture or the Fathers, we have always to place each statement about the body-soul relationship in its specific context, and to allow for this crucial distinction of levels.

However acutely we may feel the inner antagonism between our physicality and our spiritual yearning, let us never lose sight of the fundamental wholeness of our personhood, as created in the divine image. This wholeness is vividly emphasised in a text attributed to the second-century author Justin Martyr:

What is a human being but a rational creature constituted from a soul and a body? So, then, the soul by itself is not a human being? No; it is the human being’s soul. And the body is not to be regarded as a human being? No; it is just the human being’s body. A human being is neither the body nor the soul on its own, but only that which is formed from the combination of the two.²

The unknown author of this text thinks in dichotomistic terms, affirming a contrast simply between soul and body. The Fourth Ecumenical Council (Chalcedon, 451) speaks in a similar way when it states that Jesus Christ is ‘complete (*teleios*) in Godhead and complete in Manhood, truly God and truly Man, [formed] from a rational soul and a body’. On other occasions the Fathers use a trichotomist scheme, speaking of body (*soma*), soul (*psyche*) and spirit (*pneuma*), or of body, soul and intellect (*nous*). Both the dichotomist and the trichotomist schemes can claim support from the tradition of the Church, and there is no basic contradiction between them. For our present purpose it is sufficient to note that, whichever scheme we prefer, the same primary truth is to be affirmed. Our human nature is complex, but it is one in its complexity. There is within us a diversity of aspects or faculties, but this is a diversity-in-unity.

The true character of our human personhood, as a complex whole, a unity-in-diversity, is admirably expressed by St Gregory of Nazianzus, ‘the Theologian’ (ca. 329-90).³ He distinguishes two levels in created reality, the spiritual and the material. Angels belong only to the spiritual or non-material level; although according to many Patristic authors God alone is to be considered non-material in an absolute sense, yet in comparison with the rest of creation angels may indeed be termed ‘bodiless’ (*asomatoi*) in a relative sense. Animals on the other hand exist solely on the material and the physical level.

² *On the Resurrection* 8 (PG 6: 1585B).

³ *Oration* 38:11.

Uniquely in God's creation we human beings exist on the two levels at once, belonging to both the spiritual and the material realm. Accordingly St Gregory applies to human nature such terms as 'mingling' (*krama*) and 'mixture' (*mixis*).

As 'mixed' beings we may not stand at the highest point in the created world; that position is usually assigned to the angels, although there are in fact some Fathers such as St Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) who are inclined to assign to human beings a place above the angelic orders, precisely by virtue of our 'mixed' character.⁴ Yet, even if we human beings are not at the summit of creation, we are certainly at the crossroads. We humans are the bridge and meeting point between the spiritual and the material. As St Gregory the Theologian puts it, each of us is 'earthly yet heavenly, temporal yet immortal, visible yet intelligible, midway between majesty and lowliness; one selfsame being, but both spirit and flesh'. In this way each is a 'second cosmos, a great universe within a little one'; we contain within ourselves the diversity and complexity of the total creation. It is significant that, in St Gregory's understanding, the 'great universe' is not the world around us, the outer space that is measured in millions of light years, but the world that is within us, the inner space of the human heart. Moreover, continues St Gregory, because we are not only an image of the world but an image of God, we are capable not simply of uniting the spiritual and the material – of rendering the material spiritual, and of rendering the spiritual incarnate – but it is our vocation also to attain 'deification' (*theosis*), thereby uniting ourselves and the whole created world with God.

The human person is in this way called to be both microcosm and mediator. But we cannot fulfil this vocation as unifiers and bridge-builders – we cannot unite matter and spirit, the earthly and the heavenly – unless we each see our own self as a single, undivided whole. If we reject our body as alien to our true personhood, if we sever our links with our material environment, then we cease to express our true character as microcosm and we are no longer able to mediate. 'One selfsame being', says St Gregory; and this is all-essential.

This truth is underlined with great clarity by St Maximus the Confessor.⁵ If according to the account of creation in Genesis 1 Adam, was created last of all, after the rest of the created cosmos, that is because the human person is – as St Maximus puts it – 'a natural bond of unity', mediating and drawing together all the different levels of the outside world, because related to them all through the different aspects of his own being. In the words of St Maximus, each of us is 'a laboratory (*ergastirion*) that contains everything in a most comprehensive fashion', and so 'it is the appointed task of each one of us to make manifest in ourself the great mystery of the divine intention: to show how the divided extremes in created things may be reconciled in harmony, the near with the far, the lower with the higher, so that through gradual ascent all are eventually brought into union with God'. Having united all the levels of creation with each other, then – through our love for God (a key concept in St Maximus) and through

⁴ See Georgios I. Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man: St Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition*, translated by Liadain Sherrard (St Vladimir's Seminary Press: Crestwood, 1984), pp. 19-20.

⁵ *Ambigua* 41 (PG 91: 1305A-1308B).

the gift of *theosis* which God in His divine love confers upon us – we finally unite created nature with the uncreated, ‘becoming everything that God Himself is, save for identity of essence’.

In the thought of St Maximus, as in that of St Gregory of Nazianzus, the corollary of all this is abundantly clear. We cannot mediate if we are ourselves fragmented; we cannot unify unless we are at unity within ourselves, Only if we accept our physical body as integral to our humanness can we bring together into harmony the spiritual and the material, and offer them together to God their Creator. ‘I beseech you,’ says St Paul, ‘to present your bodies as a living sacrifice to God’ (Romans 12:1). Unless we have first by God’s grace made our body into a true temple of the Holy Spirit and offered it to God, we cannot as mediators offer back the material world to God. St Maximus is emphatic about this need to ‘glorify God in the body’. ‘The body is deified along with the soul’, he writes;⁶ ‘by nature we remain entirely human in our soul and in our body, but by grace we become entirely God in our soul *and in our body*.’⁷ ‘The body,’ affirms St Gregory Palamas in similar terms, ‘once it has rejected the appetites of the flesh, no longer drags the soul downwards but is raised together with it, so that the whole human being becomes spirit.’⁸ Only if we spiritualise our own body (without thereby dematerialising it) can we spiritualise the creation (without thereby dematerialising it). Only on a holistic view of human personhood, which regards body and soul as an undivided unity, does it become possible for us to carry out our uniquely human vocation as mediators.

When we speak in this way of the human person as mediator, we have of course to add that in the ultimate sense there is only one mediator: Jesus Christ, the ‘God-man’ or *Theanthropos*. He is *the* mediator; we can only mediate in and through Him.

The human mystery

At this point in our discussion, it will be prudent to issue three words of caution.

First, we understand only a very small part of ourselves. This is true for theology, as it is true also for physiology and psychology. However far we carry our inquiries into human nature, there remains always much more that we cannot yet put into words, that has to remain unsaid. Our self-analysis, however penetrating, is never exhaustive. ‘What is this mystery in me?’ asks St John Climacus, in words that we have already quoted.⁹ Yes, indeed: the greatest mystery in the entire world is the human person. The Greek Fathers, moreover, give a specific reason for this mysterious, indefinable character of our nature: the human being is fashioned in God’s image and likeness (Genesis 1: 26-27). Our personhood is a created icon of the uncreated God: and from this it follows, according to St Gregory of Nyssa (died *ca.* 394), that – since God the Archetype is beyond our comprehension – so also is God’s living icon, the human being.¹⁰ In our discourse about human persons, as in our discourse about God,

⁶ *Gnostic Centuries* 2:88 (PG 90: 1168A).

⁷ *Ambigua* 1: (1088C).

⁸ *Triads* 2:2:9.

⁹ See note 1.

¹⁰ *On the creation of the human person* 11 (PG 44: 153D, 156B).

there needs always to be an apophatic dimension; negative theology requires as its counterpart negative anthropology. As theologians, then, and equally as scientists, let us be circumspect in what we assert about ourselves, for all our statements are no more than provisional. The knowledge that we have of ourselves falls far short of the knowledge that God has of us; as the Psalmist observes, His knowledge is too wonderful for us, and we cannot attain to it.

In the second place, the words that we customarily use to describe our human personhood have almost always altered their meaning, in subtle yet significant ways, since the era of the New Testament and the Early Church. Can we be confident that we today mean by 'soul' exactly what St Paul meant by *psyche* in the first century, or St Gregory the Theologian in the fourth? Almost certainly we cannot. Many of the key terms concerning human nature – not only 'soul' (*psyche*) but equally 'intellect' (*nous*), 'passion' (*pathos*), and 'heart' (*kardia*), to mention only a few examples – carry different connotations today from those which they possessed in the past. To assess the meaning of such terms, we have to analyse carefully the way in which they are employed on specific occasions. When I was working on the English translation of *The Philokalia* with my friends the late Gerald Palmer and the late Philip Sherrard, we regularly found that the most problematic Greek words were those referring to human nature, and we were often dissatisfied with the English equivalents that we proposed. So also, in many instances, were the critics who reviewed our translation; but, if they proposed alternatives – which usually they did not – these raised further difficulties, perhaps as serious as those involved in our own renderings. What T. S. Eliot says in East Coker about words in general applies particularly to words about human personhood:

.... a raid on the inarticulate
With shabby equipment always deteriorating
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling.

Thirdly, while acknowledging the great benefits to either side that may be gained through a dialogue between science and theology, we have to recognize the profound difference in scope and method between the two. Whereas science relies upon observation and experiment, theology starts from the data of revelation. And whereas science is limited to the present fallen condition of our human nature, theology embraces within its scope – albeit only tentatively and with a constant apophatic reserve – the unfallen as well as the fallen state of the created world. It has to be kept in mind that in our present experience we know only the situation of the body in its fallen state; and it is of this alone that science speaks. But the body as we now know it is not at all the same as the body in the state in which God intends it to be. It lies largely beyond our present imagination to envisage the transparency and radiance, the lightness and sensitivity that our material bodies – along with the rest of the material creation – will possess in the surpassing glory of the Age to come.

We have spoken a little time ago about the human person as mystery and about the need for apophatic reserve. In this connection it is noteworthy how few are the definitions concerning human nature in the

Creed and in the dogmatic decrees of the Seven Ecumenical Councils. Our Orthodox teaching concerning human personhood belongs for the most part to the realm of *theologoumena* rather than *dogmata* (it should of course be remembered that *theologoumena* stand on a far higher level than the private opinions of individual theologians). Only on two occasions, so far as I am aware, do the Creeds and the Ecumenical Councils speak directly and in authoritative terms about human nature; and significantly on both occasions they are concerned with the unity of our personhood.

- (1) The Nicene Creed – or, more exactly, the expanded version of the Creed of 325 endorsed by the First Council of Constantinople (381) – affirms in its final clause: ‘We await the resurrection of the dead.’ Body and soul, that is to say, are separated at the moment of our physical death, but this separation is only temporary. We look forward, beyond physical death, to the Last Day when the two will once more be reunited. As Christians we believe, not simply in the immortality of the soul, but in the ultimate survival of the *entire* person, soul and body together.
- (2) A second, and less obvious, affirmation concerning human nature is to be found in the first of the Fifteen Anathemas directed against Origen, which were adopted at (or perhaps immediately before) the Second Council of Constantinople (553), the Fifth Ecumenical Council: ‘If anyone maintains the mythical pre-existence of souls ... let him be anathema.’¹¹ Soul and body, in other words, come into existence at the same time, as a single unity, and they grow to maturity together. They are strictly interdependent. Although many of the Greek Fathers were profoundly influenced by Platonism, the anathema against Origen clearly indicates that there were limits to this Platonic influence. Orthodox Christianity rejects the picture of human nature presented by Plato in the myth of Er (*Republic*, Book X). According to the Christian view the human person is not a soul temporarily enclosed in a body, but an integral unity of soul and body together. The body is not a transient dwelling-place or tomb, not a piece of clothing that we shall in due course discard, but it is from the first beginnings of our human existence an indispensable and enduring expression of our total personhood.

These two ecumenical affirmations, then, underline the unity of our personhood, both at its initial coming-into-being – there is no pre-existence of the soul – and at its final end, when soul and body, divided at death in a manner profoundly contrary to nature, will be forever restored to their primal oneness in the Age to come. So at the consummation of all things the words of the prophet will be fulfilled: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’ (Isaiah 25:8; compare 1 Corinthians 15:54).

‘It is raised a spiritual body’

¹¹ On the anti-Origenist anathemas, see Aloys Grillmeier and Theresia Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition* 2:2 (Mowbray: London, 1995), pp. 403-4.

In this way the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and the Fifth Ecumenical Council bring us back to our central theme. Alike in the sphere of human personhood and in the cosmos as a whole, spirit and matter are not opposed, not mutually exclusive, but complementary and interdependent. They interpenetrate. Let us briefly review the outstanding examples of such interpenetration, first as expressed in Scripture, and second as affirmed in the Tradition of the Church.¹²

Scripture. (1) At His *Incarnation*, Christ the divine Logos assumes into Himself the totality of our human nature; He has a genuinely human body and a genuinely human soul (for the soul of Christ, see above all Matthew 26:38 and Mark 14:34). His divine glory permeates both aspects of his humanness – not only His soul but equally His body – as can be seen supremely at His *Transfiguration* upon Mount Tabor (Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36). When the three disciples behold Christ's face shine as the sun and His vesture become dazzling white, what they see is human nature, our physical nature, rendered godlike and deified. To quote from the liturgical texts for Orthros, 'You have put on Adam in his entirety, O Christ, and changing the nature that had previously grown dark, You have filled it with glory and deified it by the alteration of Your form.'¹³ At the moment of Christ's Transfiguration, the materiality of His body is not abolished but it is rendered spiritual, becoming totally a vehicle of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit: 'You were revealed as a non-material fire that does not burn up the materiality of the body.'¹⁴ What is more, it is not only Christ's face but His clothes that shine with the divine Light. The Transfiguration of His body foreshadows the transformation of all material things at the Last Day.¹⁵

(2) The interaction between spirit and matter, revealed by the Saviour on Tabor, is evident also in His *appearances after the Resurrection*. Christ has still a physical body, bearing the wounds of His Passion (John 20:20-28); returning from the dead, He has the same material body as he had when He suffered on the Cross.¹⁶ The risen Lord is not a ghost, not a disembodied phantom, but He has flesh and bones, and He eats and drinks in the presence of His disciples (Luke 24:39-43). Yet at the same time His body has changed. It passes through closed doors (John 20:19); He has 'another form' (Mark 16:12), so that He is not immediately recognized by the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:16) or by the apostles beside the Lake of Tiberias (John 21:4). In the forty days between His Resurrection and His Ascension, Jesus is not continuously present in a visible manner to His followers, but from time to time He appears suddenly and then once more withdraws. His resurrection body continues to be genuinely physical, but it has been released from

¹² In speaking thus of Scripture and Tradition, I do not intend to separate and contrast them as two 'sources'; for they form together a single and undivided whole.

¹³ First Canon, Canticle 3:1.

¹⁴ Second Canon, Canticle 4:3. Compare the Burning Bush (Exodus 3:2).

¹⁵ On the ecological significance of Christ's Transfiguration, see the collective volume *Metamorphosi*, edited by Kostis Kyriakidis (Akritis: Athens, 1984).

¹⁶ Indeed, His body will still bear the marks of His Passion when He returns to earth at His Second Coming (see Zechariah 12:10; John 19:37). Although glorified, His human flesh still bears witness to His suffering and death. As Léon Bloy has well said, 'Souffrir passe, avoir souffert ne passe jamais': suffering passes, but the fact of having suffered remains always with us. That is true even of God Incarnate.

the limitations of materiality as we normally experience it, dwelling as we do in a fallen world. It has become a spiritual body – spiritual, yet still material.

(3) The condition of Christ's body after His resurrection helps us to understand what will be the condition of the bodies of the redeemed at the *resurrection of the dead* on the Last Day. We shall be changed in our physicality, just as He was changed when He rose on the third day: 'Jesus Christ will transfigure the body of our humiliation, so as to conform it to His own glorious body' (Philippians 3:21). The risen Christ is in this way our model and forerunner; He is the 'first fruits' and we are the harvest (1 Corinthians 15:20-24). What has already happened to Him – and to the Mother of God – will happen by God's grace and mercy (so we pray) to all of us at the Second Coming. In this connection St Paul uses exactly the phrase that we have already had occasion to employ, 'spiritual body' (*soma pneumatikon*): 'What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural (*psychikon*) body, it is raised a spiritual (*pneumatikon*) body' (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). Here as always we should remember that 'spiritual' does not signify 'dematerialized' but 'filled with the power of the Holy Spirit'. Our 'spiritual body' at the Final Resurrection will not be a non-material or metaphorical body, but a body that, while still remaining physical, is totally interpenetrated by the glory of God.

There are, needless to say, many questions about the resurrection body which in the present state of our knowledge we cannot answer. With good reason St Paul, when speaking of the Final Resurrection, employs the word 'mystery': 'Behold, I speak to you of a mystery' (1 Corinthians 15:51). We have to admit frankly that we do not understand the exact connection between the human body as it now is and the human body as it will be in the Age to come. What will happen, we are often asked, to those who are born with defective bodies (or minds), or who die before they have grown to maturity? With what kind of body will they rise from the dead? We cannot claim to give a precise answer, for 'at the present moment we see only puzzling reflections in a mirror' (1 Corinthians 13:12). But concerning two things we may be confident. First, like the risen Christ, we shall have what is in some sense the *same* physical body – the same and yet different: for it will be transformed and glorified (1 Corinthians 15:51-53). Second, in the Age to Come all our pain will be healed, all our defects made good, all our brokenness repaired; every tear will be wiped from our eyes, and there will be no more mourning and crying and pain, for Christ will make all things new (Revelation 21:4-5).¹⁷

Holy Tradition. The interpenetration of spirit and matter – and likewise the transfiguration of our physical bodies and of all material things by the uncreated energies of God – are clearly affirmed not only in Scripture but in the continuing experience of the Church.

- (1) In the *sacraments* or 'mysteries' of the Christian life – pre-eminently in Baptism, Chrismation, the Eucharist, and the Anointing of the Sick – we bless material things such as

¹⁷ For further discussion of the resurrection body, see my book *The Inner Kingdom* (St Vladimir's Seminary Press: Crestwood, 2000), pp. 37-41.

water, bread, wine and oil; and through this blessing they are transformed into effective signs that confer spiritual grace. Sacraments are thus precisely an example of matter rendered spiritual, and in each of them the saving power of the Spirit is transmitted to us in and through our physical bodies. The Christian East continues to resist any diminution in the materiality of these sacramental signs. Baptism is conferred by immersion, except in case of emergency; leavened bread is used at the Eucharist, not wafers; the wine at Holy Communion is always red, and its material character is emphasised by the addition of hot water.

- (2) Among the 'mysteries' there is one in particular which involves the interdependence of spirit and matter, and that is the sacrament of *marriage*. Adopting a unitary view of human nature, in the wedding service we ask that the couple may be granted 'concord of *soul and body*'. The body, with its sexuality that is expressed at many different levels, is blessed by God in its entirety and made holy. 'Among those who are sanctified', states Clement of Alexandria, 'even the seed is holy.'¹⁸
- (3) The *Holy Icons*, although on a different level from the consecrated elements at the Eucharist, are also an instance of matter rendered spiritual. In his defence of the icons, what St John of Damascus (*ca.* 675-759) emphasizes is above all the spirit-bearing potentialities of material things:

I do not worship matter, but I worship the Creator of matter, Who has been pleased to enter matter and has through matter effected my salvation. I shall not cease to venerate matter, for it was through matter that my salvation came to pass Do not insult matter, for it is in no way despicable; nothing that God has made is to be despised Matter is filled with divine grace.¹⁹

- (4) A further example of the interaction between matter and spirit is provided by the discipline of *fasting*. Ascetic fasting does not signify a repudiation of the goodness of material objects; on the contrary, food and drink are a gift from God, to be received with joy and thanksgiving. We fast, not in order to express our disdain for material things, but so as to raise those things to the level of the Spirit. Through fasting, our food and drink – instead of being merely a way of satisfying physical hunger – become a means of communion with God. Eating and drinking are through fasting rendered *personal*.
- (5) If fasting brings about the spiritualization of the body, so also in another way does the *gift of tears*. Through grace-given weeping the bodily senses are made spiritual, and our human physicality is purged and refined, although not rejected. Tears signify not the mortification of the body but its transfiguration.
- (6) The interplay and reciprocity of spirit and matter, of soul and body, are evident also in the *physical technique* employed by the Hesychasts in combination with the recitation of the Jesus Prayer. By adopting a particular bodily posture and by regulating the rhythm of their

¹⁸ *Stromateis* 2:6.

¹⁹ *On Icons* 1:16 and 1: 36.

breathing, the monks of 14th-century Athos were seeking in a positive manner to harness their physical energies to the task of prayer. There are obvious dangers here, but St Gregory Palamas rightly defends the physical technique by appealing to a holistic view of human personhood. ‘Glorify God in your body’ (1 Corinthians 6:20): through such methods the body is treated, not as a lump of inert matter to be ignored and repressed, but as the messenger and friend of the soul, the temple of the Holy Spirit.

- (7) The spiritualization of the body is evident above all in *the vision of the divine Light* granted to the saints in prayer. Here once more we may take St Gregory Palamas as our sure guide. At the Transfiguration of Christ on Tabor, the light which shone from His face was not a created light of the senses but the uncreated energies of God; yet the three disciples saw this uncreated Light through their bodily eyes. They saw it, that is to say, not by virtue of the normal power of sense-perception, but by virtue of the power of the indwelling Spirit which had transformed their senses. This Taboric mystery, according to Palamas, has continued in the life of the Church. The saints of God do not merely contemplate the divine light inwardly within their soul, but their bodies also shine in an outward and physical fashion with the uncreated glory that they contemplate; and this glory may sometimes be seen by others through their bodily eyes, as the light of Tabor was seen by Peter, James and John upon the mountain. In this way the transfigured bodies of the saints, even in this present life, manifest the final glory of the resurrection body in the Age to come. The eschatology of Palamas is thus not a futurist but an inaugurated eschatology. ‘If in the Age to come’, he writes, ‘the body will share with the soul in ineffable blessings, it must certainly share in them, so far as possible, here and now.’²⁰

In all these examples, then, alike from the New Testament and from the life of the Church, it is fully evident that spirit and matter are not to be set in opposition, nor yet to be juxtaposed in a purely external manner, but they are to be seen as interpenetrating and interactive. There is between the two a constant *perichoresis*, a mutual coinherence that brings healing and salvation. The glory of God’s Holy Spirit is not only an invisible but a physical glory. Matter, when taken up into Christ, is not merely dead particles but living presence. This conviction that matter is not inert ‘stuff’ but dynamic energy is something that the natural sciences share with the mystical theology of the Orthodox Church. On the basis of this common conviction, we have everything to gain from listening to each other. Whether we are theologians or scientists, can we not pursue together in creative co-operation our continuing exploration of the human mystery, about which at present we both of us have such a partial and imperfect understanding?

²⁰ *The Tome of the Holy Mountain* 6.