Christ's return is faith that, in the end, truth will judge and love will conquer. Naturally, this victory is won only when we take a step beyond history as we know it, a step further for which history itself yearns. The historical process can only by perfected beyond itself. It is where this insight is accepted, where history is lived in the direction of its own self-transcendence, that in each and every case the process of history is thrown open to its fulfilment. Thereby, reason receives its due place, and the duty to act according to measure. Simultaneously, hope also enters into its proper realm, and is not exhausted on the laboratory counter.

The world's salvation rests on the transcending of the world in its worldly aspect. The risen Christ constitutes the living certainty that this process of the world's self-transcendence, without which the world remains absurd, does not lead into the void. The Easter Jesus is our certainty that history can be lived in a positive way, and that our finite and feeble rational activity has a meaning. In this perspective, the "antichrist" is the unconditional enclosure of history within its own logic—the supreme antithesis to the Man with the opened side, of whom the author of the Apocalypse wrote:

Behold, he is coming with clouds, and every eye will see him. 74

VII

Hell, Purgatory, Heaven

I. Hell

No quibbling helps here: the idea of eternal damnation, which had taken ever clearer shape in the Judaism of the century or two before Christ, has a firm place in the teaching of Jesus,75 as well as in the apostolic writings.76 Dogma takes its stand on solid ground when it speaks of the existence of Hell77 and of the eternity of its punishments.78

This teaching, so contrary to our ideas about God and about man, was naturally only accepted with great difficulty. According to fragments preserved in Justinian and the Pseudo-Leontius, it was Origen who, in his ambitious attempt to systematize Christianity, the Peri Archôn, first proposed the idea that given the logic of God's relationship with history, there must be a universal reconciliation at the End. Origen himself regarded his outline systematics as no more than a hypothesis. It was an approach to a comprehensive vision, an approach which did not necessarily claim to reproduce the contours of reality itself. While the effect of Neo-Platonism in the Peri Archôn was to over-accentuate the idea that evil is in fact nothing and nothingness, God alone being real, the great Alexandrian divine later sensed much more acutely the terrible reality of evil, that evil which can inflict suffering on God himself and, more, bring him down to death. Nevertheless, Origen could not wholly let go of his hope that, in and through this divine
suffering, the reality of evil is taken prisoner and overcome, so that it loses its quality of definitiveness. In that hope of his, a long line of fathers were to follow him: Gregory of Nyssa, Didymus of Alexandria, Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Evagrius Ponticus, and, at least on occasion, Jerome of Bethlehem also. But the mainstream tradition of the Church has flowed along a different path. It found itself obliged to concede that such an expectation of universal reconciliation derived from the system rather than from the biblical witness. The dying echo of Origen’s ideas has lingered through the centuries, however, in the many variants of the so-called doctrine of *misericordia*. These would either except Christians completely from the possibility of damnation, or else concede to all the lost some kind of relief from suffering—in comparison, that is, with what they really deserve.

What should we hold on to here? First, to the fact of God’s unconditional respect for the freedom of his creature. What can be given to the creature, however, is love, and with this all its neediness can be transformed. The assent to such love need not be “created” by man: this is not something which he achieves by his own power. And yet the freedom to resist the creation of that assent, the freedom not to accept it as one’s own, this freedom remains. Herein lies the difference between the beautiful dream of the Bodhisattva [c.f. above VI. 1. c.] and its realization. The true Bodhisattva, Christ, descends into Hell and suffers there in all its emptiness; but he does not, for all that, treat man as an immature being deprived in the final analysis of any responsibility for his own destiny. Heaven reposes upon freedom, and so leaves to the damned the right to will their own damnation. The specificity of Christianity is shown in this conviction of the greatness of man. Human life is fully serious. It is not to be de-

nated by what Hegel called the “cunning of the Idea” into an aspect of divine planning. The irrevocable takes place, and that includes, then, irrevocable destruction. The Christian man or woman must live with such seriousness and be aware of it. It is a seriousness which takes on tangible form in the Cross of Christ.

That Cross throws light upon our theme from two directions. First, it teaches us that God himself suffered and died. Evil is not, then, something unreal for him. For the God who is love, hatred is not nothing. He overcomes evil, but not by some dialectic of universal reason which can transform all negations into affirmations. God overcomes evil not in a “speculative Good Friday,” to use the language of Hegel, but on a Good Friday which was most real. He himself entered into the distinctive freedom of sinners but went beyond it in that freedom of his own love which descended willingly into the Abyss.

While the real quality of evil and its consequences become quite palpable here, the question also arises—and this is the second illuminating aspect of the mystery of the Cross for our problem—whether in this event we are not in touch with a divine response able to draw freedom precisely as freedom to itself. The answer lies hidden in Jesus’ descent into Sheol, in the night of the soul which he suffered, a night which no one can observe except by entering this darkness in suffering faith. Thus, in the history of holiness which hagiology offers us, and notably in the course of recent centuries, in John of the Cross, in Carmelite piety in general, and in that of Thérèse of Lisieux in particular, “Hell” has taken on a completely new meaning and form. For the saints, “Hell” is not so much a threat to be hurled at other people but a challenge to oneself. It is a challenge to suffer in the dark night of faith, to experience communion with Christ in solidarity with his descent
finished condition, since it could only be clarified by the gradual unfolding of Christian anthropology and its relation to christology. The doctrine of Purgatory is part of this process of clarification. In this doctrine, the Church held fast to one aspect of the idea of the intermediate state, insisting that, even if one's fundamental life-decision is finally decided and fixed in death,79 one's definitive destiny need not necessarily be reached straight away. It may be that the basic decision of a human being is covered over by layers of secondary decisions and needs to be dug free. In the Western tradition, this intermediate state is called "Purgatory." The Eastern church has not followed the path of Western theology with its clarification of the final destiny of man. The East clung to that form of the idea of the intermediate state reached by the lifetime of John Chrysostom (who died in 407). For this reason, the doctrine of Purgatory functioned as an article dividing the churches at the attempted ecumenical reunions of Lyons in 1274 and Ferrara–Florence in 1439.80 Naturally enough, the point around which disagreement centered was not the same as a century later with the Reformers. The Greeks rejected the idea of punishment and atonement taking place in the afterlife, yet they shared with the church of the West the practice of interceding for the dead by prayer, alms, good works, and, most notably, the offering of the Eucharist for their repose.81 But it was in these customs, and above all in the celebration of Requiem Masses, that the Reformers saw an attack on the complete sufficiency of Christ's atoning work on the Cross.82 Given their doctrine of justification, they were unable to concede that there might be atonement in the life to come.

Before investigating the historical roots of the problem of Purgatory, with a view to arriving at a clearer picture of the doctrinal issues involved, we must get a firmer grasp on

2. PURGATORY

(a) The Problem of the Historical Data

The Catholic doctrine of Purgatory received its definitive ecclesial form in the two mediaeval councils which tried to bring about reunion with the churches of the East. At the Council of Trent it was reformulated in summary fashion by way of confrontation with the movements of the Reformation. These statements already give some idea of its historical placing and ecumenically problematic quality. We have already noted [in V. 2 and 4, a.–b. above] that the New Testament left open the question of the "intermediate state" between death and the general resurrection on the Last Day. That question remained in an un-
the Catholic Church's actual teaching in the three councils I have mentioned. The texts speak of poenae purgatoriae seu catharteriae, "purging or purifying punishments," or, more simply, of purgatorium, sometimes translated as "the place of purification." The term "place" is not, in fact, found in the Latin, though it is hinted at by means of the preposition "in": in purgatorio. All three councils approach the task of doctrinal definition by way of a relecture of the preceding tradition. In this process their formulations become more simple and precise. The formula adopted by Trent is the most succinct of all.

... [T]he Catholic Church, instructed by the Holy Spirit, has, following the sacred writings and the ancient tradition of the Fathers, taught in sacred Councils and very recently in this ecumenical Council, that there is a purgatory, purgatorium, and that the souls detained therein are aided by the suffrages of the faithful and chiefly by the acceptable sacrifice of the altar.

Trent adds, however, an emphatic exhortation to the bishops, urging them to do all in their power to oppose excessive subtlety, curiosity and superstition. Here the protest of the Reformation against the abuses prevalent in contemporary practice is taken up and translated into a message of reform. However, the denial of the doctrine obscured by those abuses and the religious practices associated with them is itself rejected.

The roots of the doctrine of Purgatory, like those of the idea of the intermediate state in general, lie deeply embedded in early Judaism. Second Maccabees reports that pagan amulets had been found on the Jewish fallen in the wars of the period. Their deaths are interpreted as a punishment for apostasy from the Torah. According to the narrative, a prayer service was held for the fallen: "they turned to prayer, beseeching that the sin which had been committed might be wholly blotted out." Moreover, money was collected to provide for a sin-offering in Jerusalem. The author praises this action as an expression of faith in the resurrection of the dead. To be sure, the text says nothing about how one ought to conceive of the purifying effect of prayer and the "intermediate state" of the sinful departed. Rather clearer in this respect is the apocryphal Vita Adae et Evae, a work from the first century of the Christian era, which tells of Seth's mourning for the dead Adam and of God's mercy, as proclaimed by Michael.

Rise from the body of your father and come to me and see what the Lord God is arranging concerning him. He is his creature and he has had mercy on him.

Yet this mercy incorporates penalty too:

Then Seth saw the extended hand of the Lord holding Adam, and he handed him over to Michael, saying, 'Let him be in your custody until the day of dispensing punishment at the last years, when I will turn his sorrow into joy. Then shall sit on the throne of him who overthrew him.'

In the material presented by the Strack–Billerbeck collection, part of which goes back to the second century of the Christian era, there are clear signs of the idea of an intermediate Gehenna, understood as a purgatory where souls, in their atoning suffering, are prepared for definitive salvation. Here, as in many other ideas about the afterlife, the Jewish religion had numerous points of contact with various currents of Greco-Roman religiosity, for which prayer for the dead had salvific potential. The transition from early Judaism to early Christianity is, therefore, a gradual affair. Its phases belonged to the single continuum of tradition.

Leaving aside for the moment the controversial question as to where the New Testament contains traces of the idea of Purgatory, let us investigate instead the formation
of the Church's tradition in East and West. As early as the second century, we can consult such representative witnesses as, in the West, Tertullian (who died soon after 220) and in the East, Clement of Alexandria (who died rather before 215). In the history of the doctrine of Purgatory, Tertullian is known above all for the acts of the martyrdom of St. Perpetua, which either were composed by him or derive from his circle. In a dream, Perpetua sees her little brother Dinocrates who had died of cancer at an early age. Dirty and pale, with the cancer sore from which he died still visible, he stands in simmering heat before a water fountain which is much too high for him to drink from. Though terribly thirsty, he cannot slake his thirst. Perpetua understands the message of the dream. Day and night, she prays for her unhappy brother. Shortly, in a second vision, she is allowed to see him cleaned up, well-dressed and with his sore healed. He can easily reach the water now. He drinks at will and plays happily. A. Stuiber has suggested that this text simply reproduces Late Antique conceptions about the sad lot of those who die prematurely. On this view, it would have nothing to do with the doctrine of Purgatory. Such a destiny is not the result of guilt: the misery it brings with it cannot be interpreted as punishment or expiation. But is the right criterion being employed here? If the fully articulated definition of Lyons-cum-Florence-cum-Trent is to be the only possible determination of the concept of Purgatory then one might well come to a conclusion of the kind just described. But in so doing, one would deprive oneself of the chance to grasp something of the structure of the idea of Purgatory and the historically piecemeal assembling of the elements that compose it. It is, therefore, more just to adopt J. A. Fischer's opinion that the essential elements of the doctrine of Purgatory crystallized out of the traditional mate-

rials offered by all three sources: Late Antique sensibility, Judaism and Christianity. The central feature of it all is the idea of a suffering on the part of the dead capable of being alleviated by prayer. The factor of guilt comes into the picture not because ethics demands it but for reasons which historians of religion study. In Tertullian's Montanist essay On the Soul a step is taken which leads to the concept of Purgatory in its proper sense, though even here we are not dealing with an idea which is straightforwardly identical with the teaching of the mediaeval councils. Tertullian's starting point is Jesus' parabolic advice to reconcile oneself with one's opponent on the way to court, since otherwise:

... you will be thrown into prison. I tell you solemnly, you will not get out till you have paid the last penny.

Interpreting this text in terms of human destiny in the world to come was made easier by the fact that phylake, the word for "prison," was also one of the current terms for Hades. For Tertullian, who had become a rigorist, the text meant that the time between death and resurrection is a time of imprisonment in which the soul has the opportunity to pay the "last penny" and so to become free for the resurrection. A new theological rationale is being offered for Hades, and this rationale "makes the interim state into a necessary purgatory for everyone." Cyprian of Carthage, dying in 258, removed Tertullian's thesis from its rigorist context and gave it a new look on the basis of the tasks of a pastor in a period of persecution. In this way, Cyprian succeeded in eliminating the pagan element. He managed to work out the authentically Christian form of an insight which, though derived from the Church's Jewish roots, had earlier seemed equivalent to Greco-Roman conceptions. Cyprian's contribution set the
Western Church on its way. He asserted a definitive salvation for those who have died in faith, and notably for the martyrs. He was similarly clear about the definitiveness of Hell. His actual pastoral problem concerned the well-intentioned but weak, average Christians who did not find the strength to accept martyrdom in times of persecution. They had carried out the demands of the State religion, and thus had publicly denied Christ. Nonetheless, they wished to remain Christians and asked for reconciliation with the Church. The saying found in Matthew 5, 26 offered Cyprian an occasion for thinking through a possible continuation of penance in the afterlife. Against the protesting voices of the rigorists, this enabled him to re-admit the weak to communion with the Church. Certainly they cannot, in their present condition, enter into definitive communion with Christ. Their denial, their half-heartedness, stands in the way. But they are capable of purification. The penitential way of purification exists not only in this world but in the world to come. With this interpretation, that there is purification in the future life, the root concept of the Western doctrine of Purgatory is already formulated clearly enough.

In the West, the idea of Purgatory developed in its initial stages with almost no connection with ancient philosophy. Its contacts were, rather, with the beliefs of the Christian people, marked as these were by the earlier sensibility of the classical world and of Judaism. But in turning to Clement of Alexandria, we find a very different picture. Clement's views were worked out in controversy with Valentinian Gnosis, therefore in debate with the impressive philosophical tradition of the Greek world, and notably with Platonism and Stoicism. Clement interprets our theme, and indeed Christian existence at large, in terms of the notable Greek idea of paideia, "education." Into this idea, he integrates the gnostic and, prior to that,

Greco-Roman notion of a post-mortem fire of judgment. This gives him a basis on which to carry out his exegesis of First Corinthians 3, 10—15: a text which also introduces the idea of a fire of judgment, something we shall have to look at in a moment. According to the Valentinians, the gnostic cannot be touched by that fire. It fails to reach him, since he carries the two extinguishing agents—the water of baptism and the "Wind," the Spirit, that can grant him unfailing protection. The ordinary man, however, called by the gnostics "hylicos" ("material ones"), is caught in the fire's blaze, with results at once curative and destructive. In place of this two-fold distinction, Clement speaks of the "purifying" and "educative" power of this fire. He re-interprets the rather naturalistic Gnostic thinking in more human and spiritual terms. The process of man's pneumatic purification, that catharsis which will fit him for God, begins with baptism and reaches into eternity.

Clement proved able to integrate into a most compelling synthesis the whole drama of Christian existence: life and death, immortality, resurrection, the Last Day. In this drama, there takes place an "ascent" whereby the soul is transformed into a soma, "body," of ever greater pneumatic perfection. This is a picture which leaves no room for the distinction between the soul and the glorified body. The two components melt into self-identity in the glorified subject. The idea of purification after death:

turns out to be, in this context, something of a mediating metaphysical link between the Platonic idea of the soul's immortality and the Resurrection.

Just as Clement can give a place to the doctrine of the risen body by his idea of man's ascending transformation, so he can also create a significant space for the ecclesial aspect of Christian existence. The process of purification is, on all its levels, an activity of reciprocal caring. "Even
beyond the threshold of death, the perfect gnostic can care for those who stand beneath him and need him. This conversion of a naturalistic into an anthropological and personalist world view gives a new twist to the question of the Last Day. The true gnostic can celebrate as the Day of the Lord that day on which he frees himself from an evil disposition and embraces the gnostic way of life. In this way, he gives fitting honor to the Lord's resurrection. However, Clement does not fall into the trap of the idea of Timelessness [considered above]. He lights upon a profound anthropological concept of time which allows him to say that, when the one who is "ascending" reaches the highest level of pneumatic bodiliness, the plērōma, then at that moment he enters susteileia, "perfection," and therewith the eschatological "Day of God," the eternal Today.

This would not be the place to discuss that synthesis of Christianity and Hellenism which is Clement's philosophy. His vision would certainly have something of value to offer to contemporary attempts to appropriate the biblical message in a meaningful and objective fashion—even if it is bound to a world whose concepts we cannot in many cases adopt ourselves. What is important for our present investigation is that, in a quite different context, we meet again the two basic elements of the idea of Purgatory which we saw emerge by a gradual development in the West. In Clement as in the Western writers, the penance imposed by the Church is the concrete starting point. For him as for them, such penance is a process which can and often must continue beyond the gate of death. For him as for them, this process points up the difference between someone's valid fundamental decision, whereby he is accepted in grace, and the defective permeation of the effects of that decision throughout the being of the whole person.

We can also note that, according to these witnesses, the anchoring of a person in the Church is not something which death disrupts or destroys. Even when they have crossed over the threshold of the world beyond, human beings can still carry each other and bear each others' burdens. They can still give to each other, suffer for each other, and receive from each other. More clearly at Alexandria than in the Western tradition, this conviction rests on the Pauline-Johannine belief that the real frontier runs not between earthly life and not-life, but between being with Christ, on the one hand, and, on the other, being without him or against him. The decisive step is taken in baptism: while the fundamental option of the baptismal candidate becomes definitively established with death, its full development and purification may have to await a moment beyond death, when we make our way through the judging fire of Christ's intimate presence in the companionable embrace of the family of the Church.

With suitable modifications, Clement's teaching was continued by Origen, and found acceptance wherever the theology of that great Alexandrian was considered authoritative. Finally, and scarcely changed in its central affirmations, it was put forward by Gregory of Nazianzus, whose death occurred around the year 390. Alas: because the doctrine formed part of Origen's system, it shared in his downfall. Drawn into the controversy about Origen, it was dismantled along with his heritage. The crucial figure here was that of John Chrysostom, a younger contemporary of Gregory Nazianzen, dying in 407. In his homilies on First Corinthians 3, 1–17, he rejects the idea of a general restoration, apokatastasis, which had become linked with that of the purging fire. Chrysostom thus originated the doctrine which remains official in the Eastern churches. These churches, after the elimination of the Alexandrian
attempt to synthesize Greek and Biblical thought, held to a somewhat archaic conception. The intermediate state, “Hades,” applies to everyone in the period between death and resurrection. But this state contains “various levels of happiness and unhappiness,” which correspond to the different levels of justification and sanctification of the faithful on earth. The saints intercede for their brethren here on earth, and we may call on them for their intercession. Through the Eucharist, through prayer and almsgiving, the living can bring “respite and refreshment” to the souls in Hades. However, the “unhappiness” to be alleviated by such actions is not taken to include a purifying or atoning suffering.\textsuperscript{103}

(b) The Permanent Content of the Doctrine of Purgatory

In the wake of this brief historical sketch, the question remains: What is the authentic heart of the doctrine of Purgatory? What is its rationale? In listening in to the patristic discussion, we had occasion to mention First Corinthians 3, 10–15. For this text, there is a foundation, Jesus Christ, on which some build with gold, silver and precious stones, and others with wood, hay and straw. What each one has in fact built will be brought to light by the Day of the Lord.

\ldots it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

J. Gnilka has shown that this testing fire indicates the coming Lord himself. Echoing a passage from the prophet Isaiah,\textsuperscript{104} it is

an image for the majesty of the self-revealed God \ldots the unapproachability of the All-Holy.\textsuperscript{105}

According to Gnilka, who here sets himself over against the opinion of Jeremias,\textsuperscript{106} this excludes any interpretation of the text in terms of Purgatory. There is no fire, only the Lord himself. There is no temporal duration involved, only eschatological encounter with the Judge. There is no purification, only the statement that such a human being “will be saved only with exertion and difficulty.”\textsuperscript{107} But it is by following just this exegesis that one is led to wonder whether its manner of posing the question is correct, and its criteria adequate. If one presupposes a naively objective concept of Purgatory then of course the text is silent. But if, conversely, we hold that Purgatory is understood in a properly Christian way when it is grasped christologically, in terms of the Lord himself as the judging fire which transforms us and conforms us to his own glorified body,\textsuperscript{108} then we shall come to a very different conclusion. Does not the real Christianizing of the early Jewish notion of a purging fire lie precisely in the insight that the purification involved does not happen through some thing, but through the transforming power of the Lord himself, whose burning flame cuts free our closed-off heart, melting it, and pouring it into a new mold to make it fit for the living organism of his body? And what, in any case, can it mean in concrete terms when Gnilka remarks that some “will be saved only after exertion and with difficulty”? In what does such “exertion” and “difficulty” consist? Would this not become a merely mythical statement should it say nothing about man himself, and, more specifically, about the manner of his entry into salvation? Surely these terms must refer, not to something external to man, but to the man of little faith’s heartfelt submission to the fire of
the Lord which will draw him out of himself into that purity which befits those who are God's? One really can't object that Paul is only talking here about the Last Day as a unique event: that would be hermeneutical naïveté, though exercised in the opposite sense from the type we considered in parts V and VI of this book. Man does not have to strip away his temporality in order thereby to become "eternal"; Christ as judge is ho eschatos, the Final One, in relation to whom we undergo judgment both after death and on the Last Day. In the perspective we are offered here, those two judgments are indistinguishable. A person's entry into the realm of manifest reality is an entry into his definitive destiny and thus an immersion in eschatological fire. The transforming "moment" of this encounter cannot be quantified by the measurements of earthly time. It is, indeed, not eternal but a transition, and yet trying to qualify it as of "short" or "long" duration on the basis of temporal measurements derived from physics would be naive and unproductive. The "temporal measure" of this encounter lies in the unsoundable depths of existence, in a passing-over where we are burned ere we are transformed. To measure such Existenzzeit, such an "existential time," in terms of the time of this world would be to ignore the specificity of the human spirit in its simultaneous relationship with, and differentiation from, the world. 109

The essential Christian understanding of Purgatory has now become clear. Purgatory is not, as Tertullian thought, some kind of supra-worldly concentration camp where man is forced to undergo punishment in a more or less arbitrary fashion. Rather is it the inwardly necessary process of transformation in which a person becomes capable of Christ, capable of God and thus capable of unity with the whole communion of saints. Simply to look at people with any degree of realism at all is to grasp the necessity of such a process. It does not replace grace by works, but allows the former to achieve its full victory precisely as grace. What actually saves is the full assent of faith. But in most of us, that basic option is buried under a great deal of wood, hay and straw. Only with difficulty can it peer out from behind the latticework of an egoism we are powerless to pull down with our own hands. Man is the recipient of the divine mercy, yet this does not exonerate him from the need to be transformed. Encounter with the Lord is this transformation. It is the fire that burns away our dross and re-forms us to be vessels of eternal joy. 110 This insight would contradict the doctrine of grace only if penance were the antithesis of grace and not its form, the gift of a gracious possibility. The identification of Purgatory with the Church's penance in Cyprian and Clement is important for drawing our attention to the fact that the root of the Christian doctrine of Purgatory is the christological grace of penance. Purgatory follows by an inner necessity from the idea of penance, the idea of the constant readiness for reform which marks the forgiven sinner.

One vital question still remains to be cleared up. We saw that prayer for the departed, in its many forms, belongs with the original data of the Judaic-Christian tradition. But does not this prayer presuppose that Purgatory entails some kind of external punishment which can, for example, be graciously remitted through vicarious acceptance by others in a form of spiritual barter? And how can a third party enter into that most highly personal process of encounter with Christ, where the "I" is transformed in the flame of his closeness? Is not this an event which so concerns the individual that all replacement or substitution must be ruled out? Is not the pious tradition of "helping the holy souls" based on treating these souls after the
fashion of “having”—whereas our reflections so far have surely led to the conclusion that the heart of the matter is “being,” for which there can be no substitute? Yet the being of man is not, in fact, that of a closed monad. It is related to others by love or hate, and, in these ways, has its colonies within them. My own being is present in others as guilt or as grace. We are not just ourselves; or, more correctly, we are ourselves only as being in others, with others and through others. Whether others curse us or bless us, forgive us and turn our guilt into love—this is part of our own destiny. The fact that the saints will judge means that encounter with Christ is encounter with his whole body. I come face to face with my own guilt vis-à-vis the suffering members of that body as well as with the forgiving love which the body derives from Christ its Head.

The intercession of the saints with the Judge is not . . . some purely external affair whose success is necessarily doubtful since it depends on the unpredictable benevolence of the Judge. It is above all an inner weight which, placed on the scales, can bring them to sink down.111

This intercession is the one truly fundamental element in their “judging.” Through their exercising of such judgment they belong, as people who both pray and save, to the doctrine of Purgatory and to the Christian practice which goes with it. As Charles Péguy so beautifully put it, “J’espère en toi pour moi”: “I hope in you for me.”112 It is when the “I” is at stake that the “you” is called upon in the form of hope.

This second line of reflection is actually even more important than the first which, to remind the reader, turns on the relation between Purgatory and the Church’s penitential practice. Even more important because self-substituting love is a central Christian reality, and the doctrine of Purgatory states that for such love the limit of death does not exist. The possibility of helping and giving does not cease to exist on the death of the Christian. Rather does it stretch out to encompass the entire communion of saints, on both sides of death’s portals. The capacity, and the duty, to love beyond the grave might even be called the true primordial datum in this whole area of tradition—as II Maccabees 12, 42–45 first makes clear.113 Furthermore, this original “given” has never been in dispute as between East and West. It was the Reformation which called it into question, and that in the face of what were in part objectionable and deformed practices. Here, then, is where the ecumenical way ahead in this matter lies, at least as between Orthodox and Catholics. What is primary is the praxis of being able to pray, and being called upon to pray. The objective correlate of this praxis in the world to come need not, in some reunification of the churches, be determined of necessity in a strictly unitary fashion, even though the content and rationale of the Western teaching is anchored, as we have shown, in ancient tradition and central motifs of faith.

3. HEAVEN

Christian tradition uses the image of heaven, an image linked to the natural symbolic force of what is “high” or “above,” in order to express that definitive completion of human existence which comes about through the perfect love towards which faith tends. Such a fulfillment is not, for the Christian, some music of the future. Rather is it sheer description of what happens in the encounter with Christ, itself already present in its fundamental elements. To raise the question of “heaven” is thus not to float free from earth in a balloon of enthusiastic fantasy. It is to
come to know more deeply that hidden presence by whose gift we truly live, even though we ourselves continually permit it to be camouflaged, and to withdraw from us, displaced by the many objects that occupy the foreground of our lives.

Heaven, therefore, must first and foremost be determined christologically. It is not an extra-historical place into which one goes. Heaven's existence depends upon the fact that Jesus Christ, as God, is man, and makes space for human existence in the existence of God himself. One is in heaven when, and to the degree, that one is in Christ. It is by being with Christ that we find the true location of our existence as human beings in God. Heaven is thus primarily a personal reality, and one that remains forever shaped by its historical origin in the paschal mystery of death and resurrection. From this christological center, all the other elements which belong to the tradition's concept of heaven may be inferred. And, in pride of place, from this christological foundation there follows a theological affirmation: the glorified Christ stands in a continuous posture of self-giving to his Father. Indeed, he is that self-giving. The paschal sacrifice abides in him as an enduring presence. For this reason, heaven, as our becoming one with Christ, takes on the nature of adoration. All cult prefigures it, and in it comes to completion. Christ is the temple of the final age; he is heaven, the new Jerusalem; he is the cultic space for God. The ascending movement of humanity in its union with Christ is answered by the descending movement of God's love in its self-gift to us. And so worship, in its heavenly, perfected form, entails an immediacy between God and man which knows of no setting asunder. This is what theological tradition calls the vision of God. Thomists and Scotists dispute whether this fundamental act is better called the vision of God or the love of God: it all depends on one's anthropological starting point.

But in the last analysis, the point of it all is the same: God totally permeates the whole man with his plenitude and his utter openness. God is "all in all," and thus the human person enters upon his boundless fulfilment.

The christological statements made here also have their ecclesiological aspect. If heaven depends on being in Christ, then it must involve a co-being with all those who, together, constitute the body of Christ. Heaven is a stranger to isolation. It is the open society of the communion of saints, and in this way the fulfilment of all human communion. This is not by way of competition with the perfect disclosure of God's Face, but, on the contrary, is its very consequence. It is because the Church knows this that there is such a thing as the Christian cult of the saints. That cult does not presuppose some mythical omniscience on the part of the saints, but simply the unruptured self-communion of the whole body of Christ—and the closeness of a love which knows no limit and is sure of attaining God in the neighbor, and the neighbor in God.

But from this a theological element does indeed emerge. The integration of the "I" into the body of Christ, its disponibilité at the service of the Lord and of others, is not the self's dissolution but a purification which is, at one and the same time, the actualization of its highest potential. This is why heaven is individual for each and every one. Everyone sees God in his own proper way. Everyone receives the love offered by the totality in the manner suggested by his own irreplaceable uniqueness.

To him who conquers, I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone, which no one knows except him who receives it.

In this light, one can understand why the New Testament, and the whole of tradition with it, calls heaven not only sheer grace through the gift of love but also "reward." It is
"reward" in that it is a response to this life-way, this biography, this particular person with his actions and experiences. The Scholastics took these insights further and gave them systematic form. Drawing, in part, on extremely venerable traditions, they spoke of the special 'crowns' of martyrs, virgins and doctors. Today, we are rather more circumspect where such assertions are concerned. It is sufficient to know that God gives each and every person his fulfilment in a way peculiar to this or that individual, and that in this way each and all receive to the uttermost. Perhaps such reflections should encourage us, not so much to consider this way or that privileged in the Church, but rather to recognize the task of enlarging the vessel of our own life. But once again, this enlargement is not meant to ensure that in the world to come we have the largest barn possible in which to store our wealth, but rather to be able to distribute all the more to our fellows. In the communion of the body of Christ, possession can only consist in giving, the riches of self-fulfilment in the passing on of gifts.

The cosmological dimension of the christological truth we are considering has occupied our thoughts earlier and in some detail. The "exaltation" of Christ, the entry of his humanity into the life of the triune God through the resurrection, does not imply his departure from this world but a new mode of presence to the world. In the imagistic language of the ancient credal symbols, the mode of existence proper to the risen Lord is that of "sitting at the right hand of the Father." It is sharing in God's sovereign power over history, a power which is effective even where it is concealed. Thus the exalted Christ is not stripped of his worldly being but, by coming to transcend the world, is related to it afresh. "Heaven" means participation in this new mode of Christ's existence and thus the fulfilment of what baptism began in us. This is why heaven escapes spatio-temporal determination. It lies neither inside nor outside the space of our world, even though it must not be detached from the cosmos as some mere "state." Heaven means, much more, that power over the world which characterizes the new "space" of the body of Christ, the communion of saints. Heaven is not, then, "above" in a spatial but in an essential way. This enables us to pronounce upon the legitimacy, as well as the limitations, of the traditional images. They retain their truth so long as they evoke transcendence over, and freedom from, the world's constraints, and the power of love which overcomes the world. They become false if they either remove heaven altogether from relation with this world, or if they attempt to integrate it totally into the world, as some kind of upper story. Scripture, accordingly, never tolerates the monarchical supremacy of a single image. By utilizing many images, it keeps open a perspective on the Indescribable. In particular, by announcing a new heaven and a new earth, the Bible makes it clear that the whole of creation is destined to become the vessel of God's Glory. All of created reality is to be drawn into blessedness. The world—God's creature—is what the Scholastics would call an "accidental" element in the final joy of the redeemed.

Heaven is in itself eschatological reality. It is the advent of the finally and wholly Other. Its own definitiveness stems from the definitiveness of God's irrevocable and indivisible love. Its openness vis-à-vis the total eschaton derives from the open history of Christ's body, and therewith of all creation which is still under construction. Heaven will only be complete when all the members of the Lord's body are gathered in. Such completion on the part of the body of Christ includes, as we have seen, the "resurrection of the flesh." It is called the "Parousia" inasmuch as then the presence of Christ, so far only inaugurated among us,
will reach its fulness and encompass all those who are to be saved and the whole cosmos with them. And so heaven comes in two historical stages. The Lord's exaltation gives rise to the new unity of God with man, and hence to heaven. The perfecting of the Lord's body in the plérōma of the "whole Christ" brings heaven to its true cosmic completion. Let us say it once more before we end: the individual's salvation is whole and entire only when the salvation of the cosmos and all the elect has come to full fruition. For the redeemed are not simply adjacent to each other in heaven. Rather, in their being together as the one Christ, they are heaven. In that moment, the whole creation will become song. It will be a single act in which, forgetful of self, the individual will break through the limits of being into the whole, and the whole take up its dwelling in the individual. It will be joy in which all questioning is resolved and satisfied.