

# The Universe as Symbols & Signs

*An essay on Mysticism in  
the Eastern Church*

✠ Nikolai Velimirovich

**T**HE **U**NIVERSE AS **S**YMBOLS  
AND **S**IGNS

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# FORWARD

Many people in the West think of the mysticism of Eastern Christianity as something unreal and imaginary, as a dreamy and vague thinking in the clouds. I will try in the following pages to prove the contrary to that opinion.

Our Christian mysticism is wholly different from Buddhist mysticism just as much as it is from modern materialism. It is a vision of realities beyond and through transparent symbols and signs of the material universe. This is one of the fundamental teachings of our ancient church of Christ, based upon Scripture and the Fathers.

It is true that there were some persons in the Western World, among Germans, Dutch, Spaniards, French, English, and others who were great

mystics. But our mysticism is not individualistic but collective. Our church as a whole, from the beginning, has been mystical in its interpretation of the visible universe, of things and events, as well as of man's and mankind's life and destiny.

If some of my readers would learn from this essay that mysticism of the Eastern Christian Church is nothing else but the science of the highest realities, I shall be amply rewarded.

Nikolai D. Velimirovich



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

1. As children learn the alphabet, they perceive letters merely as forms or "idols" in that they represent only a material reality. Chattering along, a child concentrates all his or her thoughts and attention only upon the letters themselves. When the child has finished "reading" a word, letter by letter, you may ask what he or she has read, and the child does not know what to reply, for only the form, size and color of the written letters had made an impression upon the mind; and that is all that the child momentarily knows about letters. Indeed, the child

perceives letters as only a physical reality just as idols are to an idol worshipper. Hence, the beginning reader and the practiced idol worshipper both look upon their idols with veneration and fear.

2. Similar to children are many grown-ups; even many who call themselves philosophers and scientists. With great pains and labor they scarcely go beyond their childlike repetition of the letters that comprise nature. Very seldom, if ever, do they reach and comprehend the actual meaning and significance of those letters, written in nature in the form of things that comprise the visible universe, or in the scenes of happenings and events. A person well trained in reading, however, reads words without even thinking of the letters of which words themselves are composed, and consciously reads them quickly according to their meaning.

A school teacher labors long and hard until students are able to read words "according to their meaning." Worshippers of nature are but worshippers of the letters that comprise that nature. Though they have grown up, they are but immature children. When asked what the things in nature or happenings and events mean, they look at you wonderingly, like puzzled children, when asked about the meaning of that they had just read.

3. Therefore, it may be said that nature worshippers are analphabetic, and spirit worshippers only are alphabetic. To the mind of the former, things and creatures in the natural world represent an ultimate reality, expressed in their forms, colors, functions and relations. While to the mind of the latter things and creatures are only the symbols of a spiritual reality which is the actual meaning and

life and justification of those symbols.

4. These are the clear words of St. Simeon the New Theologian on this subject:

The man who is enlightened by the Holy Spirit, the Revealer of all things, acquires new eyes and new ears, and sees no more as a natural man, namely by his natural sight with natural sensation, but standing as it were beyond himself contemplates spiritually visible things and bodies as the symbols of the things invisible.<sup>1</sup>

Such is a spiritually learned man. He does not mumble the letters in nature as a child learning to read the letters on paper, but he seeks the meaning, weighs the meaning, and interprets the meaning of all those things that strike his senses.

5. St. Maximus the Confessor speaks in similar terms:

To those who have eyes to see, all the invisible (spiritual) world is mysteriously presented in symbols of the visible world; and all the natural world depends on the supernatural world.<sup>2</sup>

This can be understood by those whose spiritual sight is opened to such a degree that they are able to see by the spirit the spiritual meaning of everything, but not by those who gaze with physical eyes and see only the physical nature of things.

6. The Apostle Paul very strongly speaks on this subject with the famous words: "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life."<sup>3</sup> He says also: "Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face."<sup>4</sup> And still more expressively:

We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.<sup>5</sup>

7. It is clear from this that whoever reads the natural without knowing the spiritual content and significance of what he has read, reads death, sees death, appropriates death. Also, whoever considers visible nature as the only reality and not as a riddle in the mirror of the spirit, does not know more than the child who may recognize letters but is far from understanding written words. And again, whoever looks at a visible thing as at something absolutely real and eternal by itself, as the ancient Hellenic naturalists did, and their modern followers do, is certainly an alphabetic idol worshipper. He sees the letters but

cannot guess their meaning. Spiritual reality belongs to eternity while the symbols of that reality belong to time.

8. The Old Testament's tabernacle, which was made by Bezaleel, a divinely inspired artist, according to the pattern which God showed to Moses on Sinai, serves as an example and shadow of heavenly things.<sup>6</sup> But with Christ's coming the tabernacle—the ark—disappeared as letters disappear from our sight when their meaning becomes known. When Reality appears, the symbol of Reality disappears as unnecessary. The veil of the temple was rent from the top to the bottom because the reality of the mystery was revealed in its fullness. The Lord of the Holy of Holies came, and the symbol of Him was removed.

9. But, if the tabernacle with the temple and all its contents represented, as it were, a compressed text book of spiritual reality, the whole universe in

all its extensions and wonders represents "the shadow of heavenly things." Therefore, Christ with both hands, used to take and present to His hearers symbols from nature in order to explain spiritual realities which He would reveal to the world. He spoke to them of many things in parables. The Greek word "*parable*," or the Slavonic word "*pritcha*," signifies in dramatic form an action, an event, or even a physical object in relationship to man. And though the parable has an evident natural significance, its chief significance is to be sought and found in the realm of spiritual realities, in the spiritual kingdom. Therefore, when Jesus spoke to them in parables, He did so because "seeing they did not see, hearing they did not hear, and neither did they understand." Why so? For this people's heart had waxed gross.<sup>7</sup> The engrossed heart means closed and blinded spiritual sight. This

spiritual sight, which resides in the heart, encompasses all that which the psychologists ambiguously call the "subconscious," "intuition," and much, much more.

10. It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not given. Thus spoke Christ to His chosen disciples. By whom was it thus given unto them to know? By Christ Himself. He took off from their hearts the thick veils, and thereby restored their spiritual sight. Thus, they were themselves enabled to contemplate the spiritual significance of things without parables and in the absence of the symbols just as Adam did before the fall. For sinless Adam in Paradise was perfectly able to comprehend the sense and significance of all creation. He possessed the capacity to give every animal the very name which represented it symbolically. The Creator did not

name the animals Himself but brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them. Whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was its name. Adam did not make a mistake, but he gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field.<sup>8</sup>

11. To give the right names to animals may seem a trifle to materialistic thinkers with a gross heart. Of course, it is only a trifle under the supposition that Adam gave the names to the living creatures just as a matter of course and in a senseless manner as the materialists now give names to their horses or dogs more for the sake of novelty than for anything else. But Adam did it with deep and precise vision of the spiritual reality which these creatures symbolically represented. This task, very difficult for a sinner with a gross heart, Adam accomplished quickly and easily.

Without difficulty he read because it had been "given unto him" to know the reality itself without symbols. He had a pure heart, clear as crystal, by which he could see God and through God grasp the real meaning of all created things. The Savior renewed this power of vision in His nearest disciples. He renewed it not all at once but slowly and by degrees through His teaching and guiding, and finally through enlightening them by the Holy Spirit.

12. Such contemplation of realities without parables, which Adam had lost, which the Apostles having lost regained, is meant for all Christians. And all of us Christians would have had that wonderful capacity, that immediate awareness of the truth in its symbols, had we remained unspotted and unfettered by sin after our baptism. But every sin turns our eyes from heaven to earth and from the Creator to the creation. After every sin we hide

ourselves from God just as Adam did after he had sinned. He did hide himself from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.<sup>9</sup> And the more we sin the more we, ostrichlike, hide ourselves from the All-seeing, plunging and dropping among the visible creatures of nature, until we become as one of them, nay, but worse than that—until nature unwillingly becomes to us a god instead of God. In this way it happens that the truth disappears from our sight and the symbol is regarded as the only truth, the only reality. Finally the most fatal disaster occurs to us: our spiritual eyes are closed and blinded and we give ourselves to our physical eyes to lead us through the dark and incomprehensible jungle of nature. Physical nature becomes our only guide. Then justified is the saying, "the blind lead the blind."

13. Christ said: *"It is the spirit*

*that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing.*"<sup>10</sup> Not only human flesh but no flesh, no body in the universe, profits anything of itself. The body is useful in this life only as a tool or as the symbol of the spirit. For the spirit is reality, the body is the symbol of reality. The king is the king, and the coat-of-arms is only the symbol of the king. Unbalanced indeed would be the man who would deny the existence of the king and accept the coat-of-arms of the king as the king. Alas, there are such men in our Christian era, and in our day just as if we were living in King Nebuchadnezzar's time thousands and thousands of days and nights before Christ, and not in the time of the Christian kings and rulers twenty-five centuries after Nebuchadnezzar, the worshipper of idols!



# CHAPTER 2

## EARTH, SUN AND STARS AS SYMBOLS

1. It is written in Genesis: In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. (Gen. 1:1) According to the Fathers of the Church, heaven is meant as the kingdom of spiritual realities, the bodiless and the invisible. The earth is meant as the universal amount of the bodily and visible symbols of those realities. That is to say, the earth or the universe generally, is nothing but a symbolic picture of heaven.

2. All physical beings, agencies, and powers in the universe such as: attraction and repulsion, heat,

electricity, radiation, energy, and the rest, are the symbols of the spiritual beings and powers in the Kingdom of Heaven. They could not exist nor act if there did not exist behind them an incomparably greater and higher and eternal intelligence which keep and control the physical powers. These would be weakened, confused and emptied, turning the whole world quickly into chaos. As it is written of God and His creatures: "Thou hidest Thy face, and they are troubled; Thou takest away their breath, they die and return to their dust."<sup>11</sup>

3. The sun is the symbol of God Himself. St. Gregory the Theologian writes, "What the sun is to the natural man, God is to the spiritual." Just as the sun shines, and by its shining gives light and warmth to all the living beings on earth, even so God enlightens all the souls and spirits by His mind and warms them by His love:

without the sun—death to all living creatures; without God— death to all souls. Moses said to the people of Israel, "I have set before you life and death: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live."<sup>12</sup> It is as if he said: Know God, the Only One, the Living, the Invisible, and worship Him alone; but worship not visible symbols as gods, lest thou become an idol worshipper. One is life and the other is death.

4. "For the Lord God is a sun, and a sun and a shield to the righteous," says the God-inspired prophet.<sup>13</sup> Of course the Psalmist thinks not of God as a second physical sun, but as the eternal light of truth, justice, power, and love. The prophet Malachi calls God the "Sun of righteousness."<sup>14</sup> The great seer of unspeakable mysteries in his book tells how he saw the city of the King of Heaven, even the heavenly Jerusalem, describing it as follows:

"And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it."<sup>15</sup> And somewhere else describing the glory in which the righteous will live it is written: "And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light."<sup>16</sup>

5. Speaking of the future glory of the saints, Christ said, "*There shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father.*"<sup>17</sup> More brilliant and beautiful than the visible, natural sun! For their brilliancy and beauty will not radiate upon them from that sun but from God, the Sun of righteousness. Nor dare we say that they will shine by their own light but by the divine light received from God, as the stars shine by the light received from the natural sun. St. Paul clearly makes a difference between Light and light by saying, "There is one glory of

the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead."<sup>18</sup>

6. The prophet Daniel foresaw the shining glory of the saints when he said, "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as stars for ever and ever."<sup>19</sup> St. Simeon Metaphrastes also compares the saints with the stars which, being set on the firmament of heaven, lighten all the world.<sup>20</sup> And many others among the great spiritual Fathers from ancient times until our own day, have considered the stars as the symbols of angels and of righteous souls, whereas they looked at the sun as at a great symbol of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

7. Thus then we Christians understand the earth, the sun and the

stars as the symbols of spiritual reality and in no way as the reality itself. Pagans of all ages, however, have mistaken those luminous bodies of the firmament for reality. As soon as they took them for reality they began to worship them. That is how the pagans have been ensnared by a terrible error to worship the creatures instead of the Creator. The Greeks worshipped the earth under the name of goddess Gea, and the sun under the name of Apollo. The sun was worshipped in Egypt under the name of Osiris, and the moon under the name Isis. The moon was worshipped in Babylon, Assyria, Arabia and in many other countries under the name Ishtar. The Persians, as fire worshippers, bowed before the stars as divinities.

8. The error of the nature worshippers, the ancient as well as the modern, was caused by the fact that their spirit did not guide their eyes but

vice versa: their eyes guided their spirit. Similar to a blind person their spirit tottered after their physical eyes and worshipped everything that the eyes declared as reality, and consequently as divinity.

9. Of course the liar who pushed mankind into such a pit of error was that same liar who first beguiled the mother of Cain to follow bodily eyes more readily than her spirit. Therefore, a Savior had to come to heal the paralyzed spirit in man, to recover its lost lordship over the physical eyes and visible matter. So, the Savior came, and revealed the eternal truth: "God is *the* Spirit."<sup>21</sup> Yea, and since God is the Spirit, those who worship Him must worship Him not His symbols, as the greatest Reality and the Truth. The effect of His revelation was the effect of the gladdest news to those who heard and obeyed Him. From their spiritual sight, as from the eyes of

blinded Saul, fell the scales, and they saw all things new. They saw and understood that all the created things in the world which they used to worship as gods, as ultimate truth and reality, were nothing else but parables and symbols of the One, eternal and loving God and His spiritual Kingdom.



# CHAPTER 3

## RECOGNITION OF THE TRUTH

1. Since God is Spirit, consequently, all that is truth must be spiritual, for God and Truth are one and the same.

2. When we talk of visible things, of their properties and their mutual relations, and when we say: this and that is truth, we do not think of the truth in an absolute and eternal sense, but in a relative and practical sense, for in an absolute sense God alone is eternal Truth.

3. Does this mean that created nature is a lie? God forbid! But nature may be presented as a lie by two

philosophies: the European materialist and the Indian nihilist.<sup>22</sup>

4. When a materialist says: this nature which we see, touch and comprehend with our senses, with all its sum of qualities and activities, represents by itself the whole truth, all the realities and existences and powers, then indeed nature appears to be a lie. On the other hand nature appears as a lie also to the mind of a nihilist, when he declares and says: this nature with all its properties and activities is nothing but illusion (*maya*), dream or nothingness. The unreal bubbles on the surface of Nirvana!

5. Thus both of them, the one who considers nature as the only and absolute truth, and the other who considers nature as illusion and deceptive nothingness—both, in their self deception equally speak untruly of truth.

6. Nature is neither truth nor falsehood. Nature is a symbol of truth. The physical universe is a visible parable of the spiritual world. The first is the symbol, the second is spirit and reality.

7. When the Christian poets, like St. John of Damascus, say,

Truly all things are  
vanity

Life is but a shadow and a  
dream...

They, by no means, think like a Buddhist nihilist. With their visionary spirit they contemplate the real and endless life of heaven, compared with our transitory sojourn on earth which is indeed like a passing shadow and a night's dream. They call vanity all worldly knowledge, wealth and pleasure, by which carnal men try to attain truth and happiness.

9. But this world cannot be an illusion, since its Creator is a true

God. How could that which is false flow from the source of all truth, since it cannot be found in the source? The world may seem to be an illusion to him who seeks to find in this world what this world has not, and is not. Could one find the moon in the water just because it appeared to be there?



# CHAPTER 4

## MINERALS AS SYMBOLS

1. Stone symbolizes, first of all, Christ Himself. The prophets declared this even before the evangelists. The fourth kingdom, which King Nebuchadnezzar saw in a dream, as composed of iron and clay, was the Roman Empire. The stone, cut out without hands, broke that Empire as well as the other three into pieces, and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.<sup>23</sup> This stone is the symbol of Christ, the founder of the new Kingdom of kingdoms, which shall stand forever. So beheld that great visionary, Daniel.

2. The great Isaiah called the Messiah a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence to both houses of Israel<sup>24</sup>: "many shall stumble on it, and fall, and be broken; yea, lo and behold a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation...and whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed."<sup>25</sup> Such a stone has God laid in Zion, His Holy Mount, to be the foundation of a new and imperishable Kingdom, the very Kingdom of Christ.

3. Glorious is that stone, but fearful too. Glorious is He in accepting those who accept Him, but fearful to those who reject Him. There never came more fearful words from the lips of our meek Lord than these words: "*Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.*"<sup>26</sup> With these terrible words He warned all builders—builders of the soul, of the family, of society, of the

state, and of mankind. He warned all of them saying that they must not build without or against Him, Who is the cornerstone, the stone of foundation of every godlike and lasting construction. St. Theophilact of Ochrid wrote, "The Israelites were ground (by that stone) like the chaff and dispersed all over the world. But consider how they first fell on that stone— i.e., stumbled on it—and afterwards how that stone fell on them and punished them." Of course, this has not been the case with Israelites only, as we can learn from the history of our time.

4. A stone, however, is not only a symbol of a strong faith in Christ. It is at the same time a symbol of a strong faith in Christ. When the Apostle Peter confessed his faith in the Lord by saying, "Thou are the Christ (*the Messiah*), the Son of the Living God, Jesus answered and said to him, *Thou are Peter* (meaning stone or rock), and

*upon this rock I will build My Church,"* i.e., on this rocklike faith of thine, *"which is not revealed to thee by thy flesh and blood but by My Father Who is in Heaven."*<sup>27</sup> And that same Peter ("*Stone*") in his epistle calls all the faithful living stones saying, "and ye, coming unto Him as unto a living stone, yea, also as lively stones are built up a spiritual house."<sup>28</sup> All the true followers of Christ, those who are baptized and clothed in Christ, become like Christ. Therefore, the Apostle calls the Christians with the symbolic name of Christ: the lively stones. Also, the innumerable mass of stones in the world is a symbol of the great number of the faithful from the beginning to the end of time, according to God's promise to Abraham, that his seed of true faith will be as the sand which is upon the sea shore.<sup>29</sup>

5. Those of the sons of men who build upon Christ as upon an

unmovable stone are called by the Lord wise, and those who build upon the sand are called foolish. In very ancient times the men who fell away from God decided to build a tower as high as the sky. And they began to build that tower of bricks and lime. But God prevented them from building what they intended and confounded them all over the earth. For the foundation of their work was not rock, namely the rock of faith, but the sand and clay of unbelief. In other words, it was not founded upon belief in God but upon belief in men. Thus, every structure, individual or social, which was not founded upon faith in the one true God, sooner or later ended in ruins, from time immemorial, and will unmistakably end in ruins in the future. Sand is the symbol of inconsistency and weakness, bare of God's power.

6. Gold is a symbol of truth. The Magi from the East brought as their

gifts to the newborn Messiah gold, frankincense, and myrrh. St. John Chrysostom (*John the Golden-mouthed*) interprets these gifts as meaning: truth, obedience and love. Gold does not change, and it does not deceive; it is always the same, whether in a royal crown or under earth, whether in water or in fire—it is always and everywhere the same. It is like truth itself. Therefore, Christian theologians, poets, and prophets, have all regarded gold as an emblem of truth—not as truth itself but as a symbol of truth.

7. Stone, however, not gold, is used in building the foundation of a house. The foundation must be strong, while gold is soft.

The strength of faith has been placed as the cornerstone of our salvation. Gold is used for further building upon the stone of faith. That is to say, whosoever has faith in Christ as

strong as a stone, to him eventually is revealed the truth of faith, shining as purity in gold, and as gentle in charity as gold. The charity is inseparable in truth, as is written, "Mercy and truth are met together,"<sup>30</sup> and again, "Mercy and truth shall go before Thy face, O Lord."<sup>31</sup> Truth is full of light and goodness as gold is shining and soft.

8. We repeat again, that gold is only a symbol of truth and not truth itself. This is evident from the law, which most severely forbade the worship of gold and the making of idols with gold.<sup>32</sup> It is also evident from St. John's vision of the heavenly city that gold is not real truth but only a symbol of truth. Describing the heavenly Jerusalem St. John says, "And in the building of it the wall was of jasper, and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass."<sup>33</sup> But since the heavenly spiritual world cannot be made of earthly material, so the gold

mentioned here means not natural gold but truth. Truth is on all sides pure and transparent. Therefore the seer of mysteries says, "like unto clear glass," because he speaks not of material gold, which is unlike glass.

9. Faith is the foundation of life here on earth. In heaven however faith is not necessary; for in the other world spirits and souls live not by faith but by seeing; not by believing in the reality but by contemplating the reality "face to face." Therefore stone, which is a symbol of faith, has no place in St. John's visions of the heavenly Kingdom. He saw the heavenly city with other foundations, and not with those of common stone. He enumerates twelve precious stones as its foundations: jasper, sapphire, emerald, sardonyx, sardius, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprasus, jacinth, amethyst. Though precious stones are nevertheless stones, they represent

Christ in His heavenly glory, just as the common stone represented Him in His atoning suffering on earth. Twelve jewels are symbols of twelve virtues in the Lord, each shining with its own brilliancy. Twelve gates of the city are described as twelve pearls, every separate gate was of one pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.<sup>34</sup> Some commentators think that the twelve gates are the twelve apostles to whom the power is given over the entrance into heaven. As to gold here, certainly is meant not natural but supernatural gold, i.e., truth, which will be clearly seen even under the feet.

10. Salt is a symbol of a true Christian who helps others to spiritual health. The soul, well salted by Christ's teaching, is safe from corruption. "*Ye are the salt of the earth.*" saith the Lord (Matt. 5:13). This is said not only of the apostles

and clerics but of all Christians too. According to St. Theophilact, the salt also signifies grace. He says, "Grace is salt, as Paul said: Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt" (Colos. 4:6). Thus salt is a symbol of a Christian among unchristian, and of grace in a Christian.



# CHAPTER 5

## THE PLANTS AS SYMBOLS

1. A tree must be rooted in the earth in order that it may grow. It is a symbol of the soul, which must be rooted in the spiritual, heavenly world, which is its earth, its soil.

2. In order to flourish a tree must be watered. Even so, the human soul must be watered by the grace of the Holy Spirit in order to be healthy and strong. St. Anthony the Egyptian says, "As trees cannot grow if they are not watered by natural water, just so the soul cannot grow if it does not feed on heavenly sweetness. Only those souls are growing, which have received the

Holy Spirit and which are filled with heavenly sweetness."

3. A tree must be exposed to the light and warmth of the sun in order to flourish and bear fruit—a symbol again. For the soul too must be lightened and warmed by God, the Sun of eternal righteousness. Only under such conditions can the soul, exposed to the light and warmth of the Living and Lifegiving God, live, grow and bring forth fruit.

4. Lilies are a symbol of purity and carelessness. *"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin. And yet never was King Solomon in all his glory arrayed so beautifully as one of them."*<sup>35</sup> Nilus of Sinai wrote of the symbolic meaning of the lilies when he said "It has been said of a perfect soul, that it is like a lily among thorns." This symbolizes a soul that lives without worries amidst those that are worried

much about much.

5. The olive tree is a symbol of election by grace. The Lord has chosen the people of Israel, as an olive tree from among the wild trees, to be His elect people.<sup>36</sup> Also Elijah and Enoch, who were to be the precursors of Christ's second advent, are named olive trees. Both of them were seen by the prophet Zechariah and John the Evangelist in visions, how they stood before the throne of glory in the heaven in the form of two olive trees.<sup>37</sup> As an oil giving tree, and as one of the longest living trees of the earth, the olive tree is a symbol of every man of grace, who is shining with truth and charity by the Holy Spirit, and who has rooted himself deep into life eternal. The Psalmist says of himself, "I am a green olive tree in the house of God."<sup>38</sup>

6. Seed is a symbol of God's word. The sower soweth the word.<sup>39</sup> The field is the world said Jesus; the good

seed are the children of the Kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one.<sup>40</sup>

7. Wheat signifies divine teaching—the teaching of Christ. The good seed is contrasted with the tares which signifies the evil seed of the evil one. But while the men slept, the enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.<sup>41</sup> Every Christian who keeps in himself the divine seed sowed by Christ and watchfully cultivates it until the harvest will be saved. The careless and sleepy ones, who allow tares to grow in their lives instead of wheat, will be destroyed. A grain of wheat, which dies under the earth and there grows and gives fruit Christ took as symbol of His death and resurrection. *"Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."*<sup>42</sup> The apostle uses this same figure of the

death of the old and of the birth of the new man in every one of us.<sup>43</sup>

8. Grapes and thorns, figs and thistles, are symbols of good and evil men. *"Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?"*<sup>44</sup> Good men, like good trees, bring forth good fruit; whereas corrupt men, like corrupt trees, bring forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. *"Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."*<sup>45</sup> Of what does the Lord speak here? Of trees or of men? Evidently of men. Trees are taken only as a symbol of men, either good or bad.

9. The vine is a symbol of Christ, the branches are symbols of His followers. *"I am the vine, you are the branches," saith the Lord.*<sup>46</sup> The vine

is partially visible and partially invisible. Thus the son of God is partially known and partially unknown. The branches without the vine can neither grow nor bring forth fruit. Therefore, He has also said, "*without Me ye can do nothing.*" Good men abide in Christ just as the good branches abide in the vine; they take the life giving sap from Christ, they feed on Him, and consequently they bring forth good fruit, just as good branches do from the vine. Evil men on the contrary cut themselves off from Christ, and therefore become dry and fruitless like cut branches. The first will be kept as fruitful branches and the second will be cast into the fire.

10. The mustard seed is a symbol of the growth of the Kingdom of Heaven from something very small to something very great. "*The Kingdom of Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which indeed is the least of all*

*seeds; but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.*"<sup>47</sup> Just in the same way grows the Kingdom of Heaven, both in the soul of a man and in the world.

11. The palm tree and the cedar are symbols of the righteous man. The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.<sup>48</sup>

12. Sweet basil and marjetica (*Helichrysum*) are two herbs much beloved by Orthodox Christians in the Balkans. They are symbols of the souls of the righteous. For the leaves of these two herbs have a much more pleasant aroma when they are dry than when they are fresh. Even so the souls of the righteous become more and more fragrant with heavenly fragrance as their bodies get older. Sweet basil is used at the consecration of water. In

this case it is a symbol of the sweet fragrance of immortalizing divine grace, which by the power of the cross preserves the water uncorrupted for many years.

13. Grass and flowers generally are symbols of the transitory character of the bodily life and the secular glory of men. St. Peter the Apostle writes of that as follows, "For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth away."<sup>49</sup>

14. According to the Psalmist the fate of the grass is a symbol of the fate of unbelievers.<sup>50</sup> When the wicked (godless) spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish it is in order that they shall be destroyed forever.<sup>51</sup> And in another place he says, "Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the worker of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass,

and wither as the green herb."<sup>52</sup>  
Righteous men are like the grass only  
as to their bodies, but the godless are  
like the grass both as to their bodies  
and their souls.



# CHAPTER 6

## ANIMALS AS SYMBOLS

1. The dove is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a dove when Jesus was baptized in the Jordan. "Lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove."<sup>53</sup> In the tradition of the Church, it is recorded that the Spirit of God appeared to several holy men in the form of a dove. The dove is harmless and guileless, tame and endearing.

2. The serpent is a symbol of the devil. It was used as a tool by Satan when he deceived Eve inducing her to

commit the sin of disobedience toward the Creator. The serpent therefore is the only animal in the world that was cursed by God: "*Because thou has done this, be thou cursed above all cattle and above every beast of the field.*"<sup>54</sup> From here comes the terrible enmity which still exists not only between man and the serpent, but between all animals and the serpent. When Jesus advised His disciples, "*be ye wise as serpents and harmless as doves,*" He was thinking of the serpent's constant watchfulness and awareness of danger. Yet that is only a part of His advice to His disciples. The other part is "harmless as doves." St. Chrysostom comments, "Wisdom is of no avail unless connected with harmlessness." Isidor Pelussiot explains with these words, "To keep the faith as a serpent keeps its head from danger, and disrobe the old man as a serpent disrobes its old scales."

3. Vipers, very fierce and poisonous, symbolize the devil and all those who do the will of the devil. John the Baptist called the Pharisees a generation of vipers,<sup>55</sup> and the Lord Himself repeated these words.<sup>56</sup> The Lord said to the face of the leaders of pharisaism, "*Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do.*"<sup>57</sup>

4. The lamb is a symbol of Christ. St. John the Baptist looking up on Jesus exclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God!" And another John saw in his apocalyptic visions Christ on the throne of heavenly glory as a lamb. Sheep signify the faithful followers of Christ, and the wolves the unfaithful and pagan. "*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me,*"<sup>58</sup> said Jesus. And again, "*Behold, I send you forth as sheep the midst of wolves.*"<sup>59</sup>

5. Dogs and swine are symbol of the stubborn and impure unbelievers. Dogs especially signify the adulterers, and swine the gluttons. Therefore the Savior said, "*Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast pearls before swine.*"<sup>60</sup>

6. Just as a hen with motherly care gathers her chickens, feeds them and warms them, even so the loving Lord tends his faithful. "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem,*" He reproached the faithless city, "*how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!*"<sup>61</sup> So then in this sense the hen is a symbol of Christ and the chickens a symbol of His true followers.

7. The horse is a symbol of a faithful and obedient servant. St. Dionisus the Areopagite says, that the horse signifies obedience. In the service book of the Greek Church the

apostles are called the swift horses, because they swiftly and faithfully spread all over the world the Glad News of salvation.

8. A man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle, are the four symbolic animals seen as standing under the throne of the Almighty by Ezekiel and John the Divine in their transcendent visions.<sup>62</sup> According to some of the sacred commentators, those four animals symbolize the four fundamental virtues: wisdom, courage, justice and purity. Accepting this interpretation, others add that those four animals also represent the different spiritual powers in heaven around the Throne, who are day and night praising the Lord God. From ancient times however, the painters of the four evangelists used to paint each one of them with one of the four symbolic animals, to wit: Matthew with a figure of a man, Mark with a lion, Luke with an ox, and John

with an eagle. The meaning is: The incarnated Christ is the real consummator of all symbolic powers and virtues.

9. Frogs, flies and lice, by which God struck the land of the Pharaohs, are symbolic of men's sins, either by words or deeds. Invisible microbes and bacteria are symbols of men's invisible sins, i.e., in thoughts and evil desires. Unless a man quickly cleanses his soul from evil thoughts and desires in their very beginning, they will multiply like microbes do in a body, and strike the soul with incurable disease.

10. Wild beasts generally are symbols of wild human passions. Just as wild beasts tear human bodies, even so passions tear human souls. The Creator gave Adam power over all passions. Therefore he had the power over all the wild beasts, as symbols of passions. The holy men and women

who succeeded through New Adam, Jesus Christ, to gain the power over their own passions, gained therewith also the power over the wild beasts of the field and forest.



# CHAPTER 7

## RECOGNITION OF TRUTH

1. When the Creator of the world created our first ancestors, He said to them, *"have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."*<sup>63</sup> The Psalmist paraphrasing this commandment of God, said:

O Lord our Lord, Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands; Thou has put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, and

the fish of the sea, and  
whatsoever passeth through  
the paths of the seas. 64

What does all this mean? Certainly not "to conquer nature" in the modern sense, namely: to exploit it, and at the same time to worship it. To exploit it, but, alas, not for spiritual enlightenment but only for material and utilitarian aims, and worship it as the only existing God, which practically means to be conquered by nature. No, the cited words have quite a different meaning. Essentially they mean: O man, have dominion over all these symbols, and allow not them to have dominion over thee! Or: let, O man, all things be to thee as a read book of pictures, and thou ascend with thy spirit to the realm of spiritual realities, represented symbolically in the pictorial book of nature. All is under the feet of the divine spirit, but thou alone are at the feet of thy Creator.

2. God emphatically forbade men to make gods not only of men's works but of His own too. There was, and there is, no civilization so great as this vast and starry universe, this civilization of God. Yet the Maker of the universe feels offended when men adore His works and much more so when they, in their vain glory, adore their own little breakable toys, the works of their hands. When we look at the sun and the stars, what is indeed man, or the son of man? Yet, man is dearer to God than all this world on the condition that he worships the one true God and that he knows the high value and dignity of his own soul.

3. Therefore, every literal reading of nature leads finally to idolatry. And all idolatry separates man from spiritual realities, from God, in the first place. *"God is Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."* (John 4:24) To

an idol worshipper, as well to a materialistic philosopher, nature may be likened unto Chinese letters. What an impression would Chinese writings make on a foreigner ignorant of reading Chinese? The same as that made by embroideries, or ornamentals, or of a mysterious scabblings, without sense and meaning. Not so with a learned Chinese. He would not fasten his attention upon the letters, but he would seek the sense and the meaning of what was written, study the message veiled in the composition of those letters. So the same letters may be for one a pillar of smoke and for another a pillar of light.

4. This is the true picture of idol worshippers, of both the scientific and the unscientific, on one side, and the enlightened Christians on the other. The first cleave with their senses and spirits to the symbols of nature, and the others see with their senses the

symbols, but with their spirit they read in the spirit, i.e., the spiritual message in the symbols.



# CHAPTER 8

## PLACES, THINGS, TOOLS AND CONSTRUCTIONS AS SYMBOLS

1. The threshing floor, fan, and granary also have their symbolic meanings. The threshing floor is a symbol of the world. The fan is a symbol of God's judgment. The granary is a symbol of the Kingdom of Heaven. The righteous will be gathered into heaven as pure wheat is gathered into the granary, and sinners, like the chaff, separated from the wheat, will be thrown into the unquenchable fire.<sup>65</sup>

2. A city on the hill is a symbol of those same men who are called salt and light. Verily, as a city set upon a

mount cannot be hidden, so the true followers of Christ cannot be hidden from the view either of angels or of men.

3. Candles. "Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house."<sup>66</sup> The candle is a symbol of a man enlightened by God's spirit. It would be considered foolishness if anybody would light his candle in darkness and put it under a bushel. Yet such foolishness has been often done to men of God, whose light the envious and the stupid tried to hide, covering them with calumnies and slandering. But there is no foolishness in God. Sooner or later God puts His living candles, rejected by the world, on a high candlestick, higher than time and space, and there they give light to all those who are in God's house. Think of the apostles, saints and martyrs.

4. A closet is an innermost room in the house in which a treasure is often hidden. It is a symbol of the heart of man. Speaking of prayer the Lord said, "*when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.*"<sup>67</sup>

There in secret you should pray to Him who only is able to help you, and not as the hypocrites who pray in the streets before the eyes of onlookers which is offensive to the Almighty. Shutting the door is a symbol of separating one's self from the outer world and its sensations and communicating with the Father alone.

5. The door is a symbol of Christ, according to His own words, "*I am the door; by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved.*"<sup>68</sup> Beside Him there is no other entrance to the Kingdom of Heaven. Also, when He speaks of the

straight gate, He means Himself.

6. The way is a symbol of Christ; of course the right way. Did not He say of Himself: *I am the Way, the Truth and the Life?* (John 14:6).

7. A house built upon a rock is a symbol of the Christian Church, which is built upon faith in the Son of God. It signifies also the right and healthy education of youth grounded upon His teachings. A house built upon the sand, on the other hand, signifies every other spiritual or moral education built upon any foundation contrary to Christ. It must fail and fall.

8. Bottles of wine. New bottles and new wine are symbols of new men and the new Covenant. Through Christ men change and become new. As new wine can only be kept in new bottles, so can the "new" covenant be kept only in "new" men. Like a strong light, the doctrine of the new covenant may be too strong and may blind a set of "old"

and feeble eyes; so too a strong vintage may be altogether too strong a wine for an "old" and feeble soul.

9. New piece of cloth and an old garment. "No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment (Matt. 9:16)," That is to say, a wise man does not, but an ignorant man may. This action symbolizes the usual unchristian methods of correcting a bad man by making superficial corrections; or reforming an old sinner merely by reading him a new lecture on morals; or giving a morsel of bread to the prodigal son instead of turning him back to his father's house. By these palliative remedies, yea, by this mending of a big old evil with a little piece of something new, one makes the evil worse. This is also a reproach to all superficial attempts to correct human society by mending it piecemeal, instead of by a fundamental and thorough renewal through Christ.

10. A yoke is a symbol of misery generally, and of servitude especially. There are two of the worst kinds of servitude: that of living under a godless tyranny, and that of being ruled by personal passions, ignorance and vice.<sup>69</sup> Instead of a heavy earthly yoke Christ proposes for men His own yoke. "Take My yoke upon you—for My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."<sup>70</sup> What wonderful words! The legendary Hercules took the earth upon his shoulders and succumbed under its weight. Jesus took upon Himself all the sins of mankind—a much heavier burden—and still He called it easy and light. Indeed, a true God as against a legendary one. Christ's yoke was easy and His burden is a light one because of His love which always makes everything easy and light. He is a loving Servant of His loving Father.

11. The Cross is a symbol of Christ. It is a symbol of Christianity

too. It is the banner of the Christian Church. It is also a symbol of salvation. It means both death and victory. "The Cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God," said Paul.<sup>71</sup> There were three crucifixes on Golgotha: that of the Innocent One, that of the penitent thief, and that of the impenitent malefactor. The penitent thief took his cross as he had deserved and followed Christ in the very last moment of his life. He thereby became worthy of Him. The impenitent malefactor not only considered his own suffering as undeserved, but mocked Him who suffered innocently. There are only three crosses, and a fourth is not to be.

12. The cup and platter are symbols of both a pure and an impure man. It is more important to wash a cup and a platter inside rather than outside. Just so, purity of soul is more

important than cleanliness of the body, though both are necessary. Jesus said, "*Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.*"<sup>72</sup> When He says, "*cleanse first,*" He thereby gives prevalence to the soul over the body, and puts, as is usual in the Gospel, the care of the body in second place.

13. Whitened and beautifully decorated sepulchers are the symbols of the hypocrites. In vain are the sepulchers outwardly decorated while they are within "*full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.*"<sup>73</sup> The bones signify the petrified hearts of men who are shut to the influence of the Holy Spirit. All uncleanness inside the sepulcher is signified by the foul-smelling human vices and passions which the hypocrites are masquing by their external good behavior.

14. Purses are symbols of our inner

closets filled with heavenly jewels, i.e., with good works. The same meaning has the treasury. *"Provide yourself bags (i.e., purses) which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not...."*<sup>74</sup>

15. The girding of the loins represent abstinence and self-control; and burning candles, the mind enlightened by Christ.<sup>75</sup>

16. The mansions on earth are the symbols of the heavenly mansion. *"In My Father's house are many mansions."*<sup>76</sup> The temple as a building symbolizes the human body. *"Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you?"*<sup>77</sup>

17. A rod is a symbol of authority. But a rod may be also a symbol of God or God's angel supporting a man in his infirmities.

18. The sword is a symbol of God's word. The seed too is a symbol of God's word; but the seed means the

revealed words of God to the world, whereas the sword means the Highest. "And out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword," says the Seer of mysteries.<sup>78</sup> And St. Paul says, "And take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."<sup>79</sup>

19. The shield is a symbol of faith. "Above all take the shield of faith."<sup>80</sup> Indeed, the faith in Christ is the greatest protection against all the temptations of the world. It is also the very root of all the virtues, and of love above all.

20. Darts and arrows are symbols of the temptations both of this world and those of the ancient deceiver, i.e., the spirits of darkness. These evil spirits strike human souls with evil thoughts just as a hart is struck by a hunter's dart. The apostle, therefore, commands the faithful to be watchful with patience and prayer in order to be able to "quench all the fiery darts of

the wicked."[81](#)



# CHAPTER 9

## ACTIONS, SITUATIONS AND OCCUPATIONS AS SYMBOLS

1. Giving birth is a symbol of the spiritual birth. Said the Lord to Nicodemus: *"Verily, verily, I say unto thee: except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God."*<sup>82</sup>

2. The sufferings of a pregnant woman are a sign of the birth pangs and sufferings of a spiritual being within a natural body.

A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come, but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish for joy that a man is born into

the world.<sup>83</sup>

3. The transformation of the water into wine is symbolic of the transformation of the earthly man into the heavenly man. The maker of this transformation is Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Nobody else could accomplish this wonder, i.e., to divinize the soul and to spiritualize the body of man.

4. The parables or symbols of the Kingdom of Heaven are: the sower who sows the seed in his field; the seed and grain that grow; the leaven that a woman hides in three measures of meal; the treasure that a man finds in a field; the goodly pearls that a merchant seeks; the net that is cast into the sea and gathers fishes, both good and bad; the marriage of the king's son, and so on.

5. The symbols of Christ are: a farmer, a builder, a potter, a carpenter, a hammersmith, an artist, or any other

man or woman who, out of rough material, makes something good, useful and beautiful. Therefore, whenever you see a person of any honest and useful occupation, who by his labor transforms the ugly into the beautiful, the unclean into the clean, the abandoned into the useful, the mean into the noble, the diseased into the healthy, and the dying into the living, think then of Christ and of His labor upon your soul.

6. The symbols of Christ are also a king, a ruler, a judge, a priest, a teacher, a householder, a guide, a captain of a ship, a conductor of a train, a shepherd, a father, a brother, a servant, a bridegroom, a fisherman, and so forth.

7. Disrobed physical athletes are a symbol of spiritual fighters, who are willingly disrobed of the riches and the worries of this world. St. John Chrysostom often repeats this

comparison.

8. Children are a symbol of the citizens of the heavenly Kingdom because of their innocence, obedience and purity. *"Except ye are converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven ... For of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."*<sup>84</sup>

9. A king taking account of his hard-hearted servant, who while generously freed from his debts oppressed his own debtor, is a symbol of God's Last Judgment. And just as the king delivered the merciless servant to the tormentors, *"So likewise,"* said Christ, *"shall My heavenly Father do also unto you if you from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses."*<sup>85</sup>

10. The vineyard represents the church of the faithful. It represents also the soul of man. Just as the wicked husbandmen threw the Son of the

Divine Householder out of the city and killed Him, even so does every wicked man who rejects Christ out of his soul thus remains empty and fruitless.

11. Marriage is, as we have said before, a symbol of the spiritual marriage of human souls with Christ. The bride of Christ is every Christian soul, but His bride is also the Church as a whole. A soul not bound in love to Christ is bound in base passions and vices to the dust of the earth or to demons. A widow represents a saddened soul because of its separation from Christ, the immortal Bridegroom.

12. A dead body around which the eagles are gathered symbolizes the Body of the incarnate Messiah, killed for righteousness' sake, around which are gathered His followers who possess the far-sightedness of eagles (especially gathered at the chalice of the Holy Communion).

13. Lightning<sup>86</sup> and a thief<sup>87</sup> represent the unexpected return of Christ. *"Watch therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come."*<sup>88</sup>

14. Trade is symbolic of buying the Kingdom of Heaven; selling what is cheap and buying the precious; selling what is fleeting and buying the eternal; selling what is mortal and buying the immortal. *"Occupy till I come."*<sup>89</sup>

15. Eating and drinking are symbols of nourishing the soul with its proper food. It also symbolizes spiritual enjoyments in the Kingdom of Heaven: *"That ye may eat and drink at My table in My Kingdom."*<sup>90</sup>

16. Planning and counting the cost of a building beforehand is a symbol of taking account of one's own powers for serving Christ in whatever way you can. *"Who of you intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first and counteth the cost, whether he have*

*sufficient to finish it.*"[91](#)

17. A virgin, or virginity, signifies the chastity of the soul. The Apostle expresses his desire concerning the faithful "that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."[92](#)



# CHAPTER 10

## DREAMS AS SIGNALS

1. "In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumbering upon the bed, then He openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction, that He may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man. He keepeth back his soul from the pit and his life from perishing by the sword. He is chastened also with pain upon his bed."<sup>93</sup> Thus spoke to Job his friend Elihu. The truth of these words has been confirmed countless times by the experience of man.

2. King Abimelech took Abraham's

wife Sarah in order to keep her for himself. "But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said unto him: behold thou art but a dead man for the woman whom thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife, not his sister."<sup>94</sup> And the king was frightened by that dream and restored Sarah to her husband.

3. When Laban persecuted his son-in-law Jacob, "God came to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said unto him: take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad."<sup>95</sup> And Laban abstained from doing wickedness to Jacob.

4. Well are known the marvelous dreams of Joseph concerning his predestined superiority over his brethren. And also the dreams of Pharaoh's butler and baker, interpreted by Joseph with exactness. But the most striking dreams, interpreted again by Joseph, were the dream of Pharaoh himself, which had far reaching

economical and historical consequences.

5. Take the second dream of King Nebuchadnezzar about a tree so high and strong that it reached into heaven, but it was cut off by a heavenly visitor. Only the stump with its roots was left. The great seer, the prophet Daniel, explained the dream as signalling the terrible punishment of Nebuchadnezzar, near at hand, because of his pride shown in worshipping himself as God. The dream was a clear sign and Daniel's interpretation thereof a right one. The king became insane and for seven years lived as a beast among the beasts of the field. After that he came to his senses and recognized and blessed the only true God. "I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honored Him that liveth forever, Whose dominion is an everlasting dominion."<sup>96</sup>

6. All the four dreams, described at

the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, were God's signs or signals. When Joseph was minded to put away the Holy Virgin Mary, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream and admonished him to abstain from his intention. For that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit, and not of man.<sup>97</sup> The wise men did not return from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, for being warned by God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way. Also through a warning of God in a dream, the child Jesus was saved from Herod's slaughter. The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream saying: "Arise and take the young child and His mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word; for Herod will seek the young child to destroy Him (Matt. 2:13)." Lastly, after the death of Herod, behold an angel of the Lord appeared

in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, ordering him to return with the child and His mother into the land of Israel. "For they are dead who sought the young child's life."<sup>98</sup>

7. When Pilate was judging Christ, his wife, called by historians Sabina Publia, had a tormenting dream. The dream was a divine signal revealing to her the innocence of Jesus. Therefore she warned her husband, "Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him."<sup>99</sup> Probably frightened by his wife's dream the faltering and weak governor washed his hands saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just man; see ye to it."<sup>100</sup>

8. Very often has God given signals in the form of dreams to some men to abstain doing what they intended to. In church history a case is reported about emperor Constantine the Great. He sentenced to death a nobleman on the

ground of some calumnies. St. Nicholas appeared to Constantine in a dream informing him that the condemned man was innocent and asking him to set the man free. Induced by that dream the emperor ordered new investigations and found that the man was indeed innocent. And the dream was true.

9. To some pious childless women who heartily prayed to God to give them children, a signal from the Lord was shown to them that God had heard their prayers. So the mother of St. Gregory the Illuminator of Armenia was given such a signal in a dream. And soon afterwards she gave birth to the famous saint.

10. It is not a rare case that a signal of approaching death is given to some in a dream. Not only to the great saints but also to ordinary persons; and not only in the ancient times but also in our own.

11. Of course here we are not saying that any dream is a sign from God. There are false and meaningless dreams. And the Holy Book warns us many times to be careful concerning dreams. For many dreams may be false and misleading. But are not even our sense impressions while we are awake often deceiving and illusionary?



# CHAPTER 11

## EVENTS AS SIGNS

1. A sign was seen by thousands of the Babylonian lords at a feast in the palace of King Belshazzar. A mysterious hand upon the plaster of the wall wrote three words: Mene, Tekel, Upharsin. According to Daniel's interpretation those three words meant death of Belshazzar and the Persian conquest of his kingdom by Medes and Persians. And a thousand of the Babylonian banqueting lords with their wives had not to wait very long to see the terrible prophecy fulfilled. For in that night was Belshazzar the king of Chaldeans slain, and Darius the

Median took his kingdom.[101](#)

2. In the days of our Savior there happened two sad events which He Himself explained as signals to men. Pilate killed some Galileans

...and their blood mingled with [pagan] sacrifices. Hearing that, Jesus answered: do ye suppose that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.[102](#)

In other words, this event was a warning signal of God that you repent quickly. If you do not heed this signal and act as you will, you shall perish likewise.

3. The second calamity happened not through men but through the sudden fall of the tower of Siloam. Thereby,

eighteen persons of the inhabitants of Jerusalem were killed. Again the Lord explained it in the same way as a sign to the living. *"Think ye that they were sinning above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."*<sup>103</sup> Theophylact of Ochrid says, "They were punished in order that we should correct ourselves; if we, however, do not correct ourselves, a greater calamity will befall us." Why? Because we have not learned the lesson; we have not understood God's signal to us.

4. The death of Herod is a signal to all evildoers. Overburdened by crimes, this king who shamefully derided Christ, sat one day upon his throne arrayed in royal apparel puffed up with pride. And when he spoke his flatterers said, "It is the voice of a god." And that was just what this criminal wished, i.e., to be regarded

and worshipped as a god. Yet, what is great in the eyes of men is small or nothing in the eyes of God. Therefore, the only true god in a moment destroyed the "false" god. "And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory; and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the spirit."[104](#) Behold, what a clear and terrible lesson to all evildoers who do not give God what is God's; but on the contrary, in their self-glory take from God what belongs to God.

5. The sudden death of Ananias and Sapphira was a signal to the young Christian community in Jerusalem. They lied to the great apostle which was the same as to lie to the Holy Spirit. Said Peter, "Why has Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the price of the land?" Both lied, the husband and the wife. And both were

punished by instant death. The lesson of this terrible event was wholesome for all those who saw that miracle, or who heard of it. "And great fear came upon the church, and upon as many as heard these things."[105](#)

6. Sending His apostles to preach the Gospel unto the world, Jesus said among other things,

And these signs shall follow them that believe; in My Name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.[106](#)

And all these things have happened, and not only once, but they have been happening throughout Church history until our day, according to the saintliness of Christ followers

and the faith of the faithful. And all these signs have been the signals of God to mankind for men to awaken from long drawn out pagan sleep. These signs testified and are still testifying that the expected Messiah had come and that no other should be looked for.

7. When the Pharisees with the Sadducees desired Christ to show them a sign from heaven, He answered and said:

When it is evening, ye say, it will be fair weather; for the sky is red. And in the morning, it will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?[107](#)

Hereby He rebukingly stated how sinners knew to discern the signals of

nature as to fair or bad weather, but did not know how to understand the signs of the times, Christ's miracles, by which heaven signalized to them that the expected Savior had stepped in a body on the stage of human history.

8. When the enemies of Christ accused Him of casting out devils as it were by Beelzebub, He bluntly reduced their opinion to glaring absurdity. *"Never will a devil,"* He said, *"be cast by other devils, otherwise their kingdom, like a house divided against itself, could not stand. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God is come unto you."*<sup>108</sup> Casting out evil spirits from the possessed and insane persons was one of the greatest miraculous activities of Jesus Christ. Such a thing was unheard of before Him. Therefore, it was a sure sign and proof that He is the Messiah.

9. Other miracles of Christ were

the signs which proved His messianic personality. John the Baptist, from Herod's prison, in order to convince his own disciples that Jesus was the Messiah, sent them to Him to ask Him about it. "Art thou He that should come—or do we look for another?" But when they put this question, they saw how Jesus cured many people of their infirmities and plagues and of evil spirits; and how unto many who were blind He gave sight. After that Jesus answered the above question and said unto John's disciples, "*Go your way, and tell John those things ye have seen and heard.*"<sup>109</sup> Of course it was enough. And it was much more a testimony than if He had answered: "*Yes, I am He.*"

10. The star which the wise men saw in the East was to them a signal that a new king was born.

11. Sometimes when heavy clouds of worries are hanging over our soul

we are unexpectedly visited by some person who helps us to solve our troublesome problem; or we hear a word, or receive a letter, with the same effect. Entangled in the web of a complicated life, we sometimes despair not knowing how to disentangle ourselves by our own efforts. Then, suddenly, something happens which does more for us than all our personal efforts. If we are only able to understand all those things as God's signals, either as a warning, or for enlightenment, or instructions, or encouragement!

12. The animals also serve sometimes as God's signals to men. According to the foresight of the all seeing Messiah, Peter denied Him thrice on the same tragic night before the cock crew. And when the cock crew Peter remembered the word of Jesus. The crowing of the cock was a signal to Peter. "And he went out and

wept bitterly."<sup>110</sup> In the Old Testament we read the story of Baalam and his ass. It was a signal given to Balaam by God through an ass, which opened its mouth and spoke like a human being and opened its eyes and saw an angel. It was a signal to Baalam to be ashamed of himself, seeing how the most powerful God could make an animal to be a better servant of His than the owner of that animal.<sup>111</sup> Just as He was powerful enough to make out of stones the children of His Kingdom.

13. The tree also served as a signal. Once when David was at war with Philistines, he inquired of the Lord what to do. And the Lord said,

Come upon them over against the mulberry trees. And let it be when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shall bestir thyself: for then shall

the Lord go out before thee  
to smite the host of the  
Philistines.[112](#)



# CHAPTER 12

## THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS AS SIGNS

1. A natural man thinks that all his thoughts are his own, and likewise his products, inventions and compositions. It is, however, a mistake. For by such a conviction man proclaims his spirit to be an absolute entity, independent of the influence of the invisible, spiritual forces, either good or evil. In reality the spirit of man depends very much on those influences, just as body depends on the influences of many different physical forces of this universe.

2. Christ told His disciples beforehand that they would be persecuted and brought before the

councils and the court, before governors and kings for His sake. He warned them in advance to worry about how they should speak. For He said:

...it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak." Who will tell them and how? He answers, "It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you."[113](#)

Indeed unlearned fishermen did afterwards pronounce or record such sublime thoughts that throughout all history the greatest thinkers and writers have not been able to reach their heights or fathom their depths. Those thoughts were not of men but of God. They were signs that God spoke through His elect.

3. The apostles, the prophets, and the saints were often called the organs of the Holy Spirit. They were called by

such a name because the Holy Spirit put His own thoughts and power into their souls. And what they received they declared to men. With their own human thoughts and powers they could not resist the influence of the mighty Spirit of God. The prophet Jeremiah confirms this by his own experience. He desired to stop speaking to the stiff-necked people in order to avoid their persecution.

Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His Name. But His word was in mine heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.[114](#)

He could not resist and he spoke again; not of himself but of God.

4. Evil, godless, and immoral thoughts in man are mostly of evil and impure spirits. The cause of this is our

own sins. And then, by God's permission, the spirits of all falsehood and violence attack us with their darts of false thoughts, vicious imaginations, and impure remembrances. The godless king Ahab listened to the false and self-appointed prophets who spoke to him sweet lies, rather than to the true prophets who spoke to him bitter truths. "Now therefore," said the true prophet Micah to Ahab, "behold, the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of these thy prophets, and the Lord has spoken evil against thee."<sup>115</sup> It is one of the most mysterious dealings of God. He permits the evil spirits to act upon the minds of those men who have already, through their sins, made of themselves the mansions of evil. The true prophecies of the true seers are a signal to them to repent. But Ahab listened to the lies of the false prophets, and because of that lost both war and life.

5. Sometimes we suddenly start to think of a friend, or enemy, at a great distance. It is often a signal to us that such and such person is worrying about us, or talking of us, or doing something against us, or even that he or his message is at hand to come to us. Never on earth was there such a farseeing and deeply penetrating intelligence as Christ's. He knew what was in men. When certain of the scribes thought within themselves, "This man blasphemeth," Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, *'Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?'*"[116](#)

6. Feelings like thoughts may often be signals. Isaac, Jacob, and David all had presentiments of their approaching end. Therefore, they called their sons beforehand to give them their blessings.

7. Many persons in our days also have the presentiment of their

impending death. We have known of several officers and soldiers who said, "Today I shall be killed." And so it happened. They knew it not by intellectual calculations but by some sudden feeling, or some presentiment, which indeed must have been a signal from the spiritual world. Blessed are those who take such a sign as from God and through repentance, prayer, forgiveness, and charity, prepare themselves to appear before the throne of the Lord.

8. Feelings are a signal of Christ's presence. When Cleopas with another disciple walked to Emmaus, Jesus drew near and walked with them. They did not know Him. Neither with their eyes nor by their minds did they recognize Him. After He blessed and break bread before them at the dining table did they know Him. "And they said unto one another: did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us

by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures."[117](#)

9. St. Seraphim of Sarov knew in advance when he was to be honored by a heavenly visitor. "Today we are going to have the Holy Mother of God as a visitor." Many saints had similar experiences. It was a signal in their hearts by which they knew what was going to happen.

10. It is a well known fact that animals have a very pronounced presentiment of some nearing catastrophe, as an earthquake. But it is a less known fact that animals, like dogs, and horses, also have a strong presentiment of some catastrophe relating to their owners. When St. Artemius stood before his martyrdom, his tamed and beloved deer licked his hands and wept.

11. Sometimes sudden sadness oppresses a person without any known cause, but later on he understands that

it was a signal of death or some other heavy blow among his relatives or friends.

12. The feeling of a great despair, which produces in a soul thoughts of suicide, is a signal, according to the teachings of the Fathers of the Church, that the evil spirit has taken possession of the mind of such a person by deadening in him faith and hope in God.

13. Joy is a signal. When a sinner sincerely repents and pours out prayers to God from the depths of his contrite heart, he may suddenly get a feeling of joy and warmth which fills his soul. That is a sign that God has forgiven him his sins according to the great teachers of spiritual science.



# CHAPTER 13

## ORDINARY OR NORMAL HAPPENINGS AS SIGNS

1. Even those happenings and occurrences which we call ordinary and normal are signals too. When the sun gives its light as usual; when the stars move on their prescribed paths through the vast universe as usual; when heat and cold follow each other in due season; when sowed fields give the expected harvest; when children are born and progress in growth and strength; when the cattle are healthy and multiplying; when abundance is smiling upon men from every corner; when there is peace instead of war,

and health instead of pestilence; all these things are signals of God's blessings upon men.

2. The Holy Book of God affirms beyond any doubt, that all those normal happenings are the signals of God's mercies and blessings. Thus spoke the Lord Sabaoth to the people of Israel, *"Wherefore ye shall do my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; ye shall dwell in the land in safety. And the land shall yield her fruit, and ye shall eat your fill, and dwell therein in safety."*<sup>118</sup> And again the Lord promised them and said,

All these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God. Blessed thou shalt be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of the thy body, and the fruit of thy

ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine and the flocks of thy sheep.... The Lord shall open unto thee His good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in His season, and to bless all of the work of thine hand. [119](#)

3. After the awful signals of God's displeasure with men shall come the signals of God's mercy and benevolence. Through prophet Zechariah the Lord promises to be merciful to the remnant of the people.

The seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew, and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things. [120](#)

4. God's mercifulness transcends

all understanding. He pours His gifts not only upon the righteous but also upon the sinners and unbelievers. Thus spoke Paul to the heathen at Lystra of The Living God, Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless He left not himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. All these gifts of mercy did not mean God's approval of heathenism and of wickedness of men. They were God's signals to the people to return to Him, the only living, compassionate, and long-suffering Creator.

5. Christ's words have the same meaning when He spoke of the heavenly Father, "*Who maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.*"<sup>[121](#)</sup> It is as if a father had two sons, the one obedient and the

other disobedient; the one healthy and the other sick. He gives equal gifts to both. You may protest: This is not just! Don't be angry, O man! God is not like man. He is not only the God of justice but also of wisdom and love. By His mercy He makes the strong child stronger and the sick one healthy. He strengthens the one and He heals the other by the same means. To both sons His mercy is a signal: to the one a signal of approval, and to the other a signal for repentance.



# CHAPTER 14

## NATURAL PHENOMENA AND CATAclysms AS SIGNALS

1. On the first page of the Holy Book, it is recorded how God created lights in the firmament of the heaven on the fourth day of Creation. Those lights are called the sun, the moon, and the stars. "Let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and for years."<sup>[122](#)</sup> In the first place the signs are mentioned, and then seasons, days and years. The signs—for whom are these signs? For men of course, for those who can read and understand them.

2. In earlier times before modern inventions, the stars were signs to

navigators, and caravans, for their orientation of the vast spaces of the sea, and of the desert. In speaking of symbols, we have said that those greater and lesser lights on the firmament represent symbols of spiritual realities. Now we shall try to describe when and how they serve as God's signals. It is written that when Christ was dying on the Cross, "From the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour..."<sup>123</sup> "and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose ... and the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst."<sup>124</sup> Verily, these are clear signals of Christ's innocence and of God's anger. The sun, which is otherwise considered a symbol of God, here is a sign, a signal of God's anger.

3. Joshua, after first praying to

God, ordered the greater lights on the firmament to stop moving and they obeyed. "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hastened not to go down about a whole day."[125](#) This is God's signal to men that He loves His faithful servants and does the will of those who love Him.

4. When King Hezekiah was sick unto death, he prayed with tears for the prolongation of his life. Then came Isaiah as God's messenger who said to the king that he would be healed and his life prolonged. Hezekiah then asked: "What shall be the sign that the Lord will heal me?"[126](#) And Isaiah, the prophet, cried unto the Lord to bring the shadow of the degrees on the sun dial of King Ahaz, and lo and behold, "He brought the shadow of ten degrees backward."[127](#) That was a signal to Hezekiah to continue to serve God

with thankfulness and humility. Soon, he lost God's favor by his pride. This usually happens with men in great position.

5. The star which guided the wise men of the East to Bethlehem certainly was a signal of God. It was a signal that a great King was born. "We have seen His star in the East, and we are come to worship Him."<sup>128</sup> Of course that star was exceptional but if we plunged deeper into the mystery of God's signals, we could understand that even the ordinary stars have often been, and will continue to be, signals to men.

6. The universal flood was a signal of God's anger because of universal wickedness of men. "And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at the heart."<sup>129</sup> And when the flood ended God said to Noah that He had set a rainbow in the cloud as a sign that

there would be no other universal flood.

*"I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between Me and the earth."*<sup>130</sup> It does not mean that the rainbow did not exist before the flood, but that God, at that same time made it a token, a sign, to men. It is just as if He had said: Here it is! Although the universal flood has not been repeated, though limited floods, calamities, and inundations that happen frequently in our times as in the past, are God's signals.

7. Blizzards and rains are God's signals. The aged prophet Samuel spoke to the people of Israel and said that their demand for a king to rule over them was not pleasing to God. It was the time of wheat harvest, but there was no rain in that land, nor was it expected at that season. To prove what he had said, Samuel called unto God to make an extraordinary sign

before the sight of the assembled people. "So Samuel called unto the Lord, and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day; and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel."[131](#)

8. Thunder is a signal both of God's anger towards heathens and of God's protection of the faithful. In answer to a prayer of Samuel in a war with the Philistines "the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them, and they were smitten before Israel."[132](#)

9. Droughts are also a signal. "The ground is as brass, for there was no rain in the earth, the plowmen were ashamed, they covered their heads. Yea, the hind also calved in the field, and forsook it, because there was no grass."[133](#) So pictures Jeremiah a drought in God's dealings with sinful people. The prophet Elias prayed to God to stop a rain because of king

Ahab's apostasy. And it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. [134](#)

The fire that fell from heaven on Elias' sacrifices and at other occasions was also a signal from God.

10. The prophet Amos clearly says, that the Lord God sends the rain in one place and withholds it from another place, all according to the spiritual and moral states of the people. The Lord speaks:

I have withheld the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest, and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain up on another city; one piece was rained up on, and the piece whereupon it rained not, withered. So two or three cities wandered unto one city to drink water. Yet have

ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord.<sup>135</sup>

11. The earthquake signalizes God's displeasure with mankind because of disbelief and of mercilessness of man to man. "Shall not the land tremble for this?"<sup>136</sup> asks the prophet. And the great Isaiah cries against the godless city and says, "Thou shall be visited of the Lord of hosts with thunder, and with earthquake, and great noise, with storm and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire."<sup>137</sup>

12. The earthquake may sometimes typify heavenly joy and triumph instead of sadness and anger. So at Christ's resurrection the earth quaked. "And behold, there was an earthquake."<sup>138</sup>

When the Christians were assembled to pray together and ask God's help, behold, "when they had prayed, the place was shaken, where they were assembled together, and they

all were filled with the Holy Spirit."[139](#)  
The same happened to Paul and Silas at Philippi. While in prison they were praying and praising God so that all other prisoners heard them. "Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and, immediately, all the doors were opened, and everyone's hands were loosed."[140](#)

13. Hail, the multitudes of locusts, as well as mice, serpents, and other creeping creatures, are God's signals. He used them once in Egypt. The prophet Haggai speaks in the Name of the Lord, "I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the labors of your hands; yet ye turned not to me, saith the Lord."[141](#) The Psalmist says, "He gave up their cattle also to the hail, and their flocks to hot thunderbolts."[142](#)

14. Thunderings out of season, falling stars, and the eclipse of the sun,

have been understood by the simple people of the Balkans and elsewhere as God's signals of some approaching great event, especially war. Before the Serbian insurrection against the Turks in 1804, it was said that thundering occurred in the midst of the winter, the stars like "bloody flags" struggled against each other, and the sun was covered in darkness.

The same celestial struggles were observed in 1885 on the eve of the Serbo-Bulgarian war. Of course such popular interpretation of the physical phenomena could be called superstitious, had not the succeeding events justified them. Had not the Messiah foretold such happenings as the signals of the end of the world drama? We ought to know that secondary causes, which are taken as the primary, are nothing but the effects of the first cause. And the first cause of all the calamities is the sin of man and

people.



# CHAPTER 15

## WAR, FAMINE, AND PESTILENCE AS SIGNALS

1. These three scourges may be taken first as symbols because as external events they are the expressions of the internal state of human souls and spirits. The apostle James explains this as follows: "From whence come wars and fightings among you? Do they not come hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?"<sup>143</sup> The invisible war against God ends in the visible war against me: the inward war leads to the outward war. This is the mystery and the constant symbol of all wars. War as

a temporary event, at one time and in one generation, is God's signal to that time and to that generation.

2. The true prophets repeatedly predicted those three scourges. "I will send the sword, the famine and the pestilence among them, til they be consumed from off the land that I gave unto them and to their fathers"<sup>144</sup> saith the Lord God. "And I will persecute them with the sword, with the famine and with the pestilence."<sup>145</sup> Again the Lord speaks through Jeremiah: "Behold, the whirlwind of the Lord goeth forth with fury, a continuing whirlwind; it shall fall with pain upon the head of the wicked, until they have understood it."<sup>146</sup> How long, O Lord? Until men get to understand that God is God.

3. Famines are a signal. In the time of King David there was a famine during three years, year after year. David enquired of the Lord about the

cause of such a scourge. The Lord answered, "It is for Saul and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites."<sup>147</sup> Saul had sworn to the Gibeonites not to kill them and had violated his oath. Thereupon there was a famine in the whole land. The famine then came not because the clouds had by chance forgotten to pour rain, nor because tares suffocated the wheat, nor because the locusts ate up the harvest, nor for any physical cause, as some people might think. No. It was a signal of punishment by God because a ruler of a nation had trodden underfoot the Law of the Lord.

4. Pestilence is a signal. King David in his pride issued an order that all the people in Israel should be numbered. It displeased the Lord, because it was done with pride and self-glory. Forced to choose one of the three proposed evils David chose pestilence. Pestilence destroyed

seventy thousand men. Finally, the Lord, moved by David's repentance, commanded the destroying angel saying, "It is enough, stay now thine hand."<sup>148</sup> No famine comes as it were just by chance and blindly. It is always a signal of the all-seeing and all-watching Intelligence to the misled travelers on earth.

5. Sores and diseases are also signals. It has been a conviction of religious peoples from time immemorial, especially Christian people, that diseases were sent by God. This had been revealed to them that not even a sparrow can fall on the ground without our Father who is in Heaven, and that the very hairs of our heads are all numbered. The apostate King Jehoram, because of his apostasy, was smitten with an incurable disease in his bowels. Why? Several reasons were enumerated in the letter which the prophet Elijah wrote to the king.

"Therefore," wrote Elijah, "thou shall have great sickness day by day."<sup>149</sup>

Quite a different significance had the sore disease of Job, a man of God. His signal was to both to Satan and to man. To Satan, to understand how impotent he is against a man of God. To men, to learn how God does not allow the righteous ones to suffer more than they are able; how he brings eternal glory to those who innocently suffer.

6. The sickness of Lazarus was destined to be a signal of the power of Christ. Informed of the sickness of His friend, Christ said, "*This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God; that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.*"<sup>150</sup> So it was indeed. The sickness of Lazarus led to death, and death to resurrection. The signal in this case had the same meaning as in the case of the healing of the man born blind. "*Neither this man*

*sinned, nor his parents; but that the works of God should be manifested in him."*[151](#)



# CHAPTER 16

## MAN AS A SIGN TO MAN

1. The Creator of man is not an idle unemployed God, as a philosophic sect of bygone times supposed Him to be. He is not a passive but the most active Being that exists. He causes many efforts in manifold ways to save mankind, i.e., to make them in this temporary life fit for the life everlasting. He signals His holy will to men through the stars, through animals, through events, through famine, through abundance, through catastrophies, through war and peace, through diseases, and dreams. With this same desire to save men, He makes one man

signal another man, and one nation signal another nation. A spiritual person observes this divine procedure every day and gets the confirmation of this. The Holy Book of God, as a Record Book of God's intentions, plans, and procedures, serves as the unshakeable touchstone of everyday experiences.

2. The God Man is a sign to mankind. The greatest sign and signal that has ever been given to men from the world of spiritual realities is the Lord Jesus Christ. Even as a forty day-old child the aged Simeon foretold of Him saying: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against."[152](#)

3. The Holy Virgin Mary was called by the prophets a sign, a sign of God's power and wisdom in the divine economy of human salvation. "Ask a sign of the Lord thy God," said the

marvelous Isaiah to King Ahaz, "ask it either in the depth, or in the height above" (i.e., in the depth of time or in the height of eternity). When the faltering king refused to ask it, the prophet still, penetrating centuries ahead, prophesied—not to the unwilling king but to the generations to come and said: "Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign. Behold a Virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His Name Immanuel."[153](#)

4. The Apostle Andrew was the first of the Twelve to follow Christ. Afterwards he said to his brother Simon Peter, "'We have found the Messiah,' which is interpreted Christ."[154](#) This news induced Peter at once to go with Andrew to meet Christ. In the same way Philip served as God's signal to Nathanael.

5. The prophets were the signals, or signal givers, to mankind. The Lord spoke to Ezekiel, "I have set thee for a

sign unto the house of Israel." Again, "Say, I am your sign."<sup>155</sup> Repeatedly speaking to the people, "Thus Ezekiel is unto you a sign."<sup>156</sup> The great Isaiah speaks the same of himself and of his children, "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts."<sup>157</sup> The last words ought to be specially marked: "From the Lord." A signal of God!

6. A good man and a bad man can be seen as signals from the Lord. Zerubbabel certainly was a good and wise man. To him, the Lord revealed His intentions of overthrowing the thrones of kingdoms, chariots, and riders. "And in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, and will make thee as a signet; for I have chosen thee, saith the Lord of hosts."<sup>158</sup>

7. One man to another man, or even to a nation, may be a signal of the

Lord; in a similar way one nation to another nation, or one city to another city. The instances are numerous: Assyria, Babylon, Moab, Egypt, Ethiopia, Sodom, Gomorrah, Tyre, Sidon, Capernaum, Bethsaida, Chorazin, and Jerusalem. A reader of prophecies about those cities and countries would shiver if he thought of their succeeding destructions. The Lord did not spare even His elect people. "And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations wither the Lord shall lead thee."[159](#) A sign, a signal, a lesson to all nations.



# CHAPTER 17

## THE SIGNS OF THE END OF THE WORLD

1. "Tell us, what shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the end of the world?"<sup>160</sup> asked the disciples of their Master, and He enumerated many signs. These signs will be revealed through corrupt minds and feelings, through false men, through terrible events, through natural elements and phenomena. In a word, the sum of all the different signs will be shown and seen before the conclusion of the world drama.

2. Just as on the eve of the universal flood, even so on the eve of

the world's end the thoughts of men will be continually evil. Error, apostasy, falsehood, and violence will take the lead in the human ant hill. Peoples' hearts will be perverted so iniquity shall abound and "*the love of many shall wax cold.*"<sup>161</sup> Falsehood instead of truth, hatred instead of love, cleverness instead of wisdom, violence instead of compassion, will prevail. There will be false prophets, self appointed saviors, and self proclaimed messiahs. The faithful ones will stick to the only true Messiah and will not deny Him. Therefore, they will be persecuted and hated, tortured and killed by the enemies of God. "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."<sup>162</sup>

3. After Christ, His apostles lifted a little more the curtain of the mystery, which the Lord confided to them. Peter describing the end, said: "There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking

after their own lusts,"<sup>163</sup> ridiculing the promise of His coming, and scornfully asking, "Where is the promise of His coming?"<sup>164</sup> Apostle Paul writes to Timothy:

The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned into fables."<sup>165</sup>

It is as if he had said: men will consider themselves as the only gods, their works greater than God's works, and their civilization more marvelous than God's starry universe.

4. With still stronger words the same apostle reveals the vices of the last generations of men on earth saying: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men

shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection."<sup>166</sup> It is terrible even to repeat those awful words describing as it were our own time. All these apostolic words are in a harmony with what Christ predicted because of the loss of truth and love among men.

5. Other signals of the end shall be: the rising of nations against nation, of kingdom against kingdom, insurrections, mutinies, strikes, mutual hatred, and strife, as well as all kinds of wickedness, treasons, and apostasy. Such relations of man towards God and man, and of nations toward nations, will be clear signs of the end of the world.

6. Famine, pestilence, earthquakes—these three ancient scourges will be replicated in unprecedented measure all over the world. As it is written,

*"Then shall be great tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be."*<sup>167</sup> Famine will be spread over many countries not because of the impotence and exhaustion of the ground to produce corn, but because of the mistrust of men in God and because of their trust in their own cleverness and labor. Men will labor more than ever and will starve more than ever. The man-made device of distributing food by cards equally to everyone will be of no use. For when faith is lost, reason is lost; when reason is lost, mercy is lost. Because of hunger, pestilence will spread in spite of all scientific efforts to stop it. Earthquakes, accompanied by floods of the sea, storms, hurricanes, and swollen rivers, will destroy men and men's properties; all these calamities will be very frequent and people will live in continual fear. *"Men's hearts shall fail them for fear,*

*and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth."*<sup>168</sup>

7. False Christs will be taught by Satan how to show their own false signs and wonders, as the Egyptian magicians did against Moses. But the Almighty will show his own fearful signs and wonders. *"The fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven.... And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars"*<sup>169</sup> which will fill the hearts of all the living on this planet with distress and perplexity. It will look like a most terrible clash between heaven and hell. Yea, it will be the final scenes of the fifth act of the universal drama.

8. Parallel with those terrific phenomena will go the strained preaching of the Gospel to all the nations. The apostolic zeal of Christian missionaries will not be dampened, lessened or stopped by any diabolic

devices of Christ's adversary. *"And the Gospel must be published among all nations."*<sup>170</sup>

9. Paul points out the appearance of the Antichrist as a signal of the end. First the falling away from the true faith, and then the revelation of "that man of sin, the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God—showing himself that he is God."<sup>171</sup> He will be, as it were, the bearer of all iniquities, sins, vices, deceits, crimes, ever known and unknown to man on earth from the beginning of history until the end. Yet all in vain. Christ shall destroy him with His spirit and with the brightness of His coming.<sup>172</sup> Verily, blessed shall be those who will be able to discern the signs of God from the signs of Satan. For the signs of God are the signs of victory, and those of Satan are the signs of destruction.

10. The number of signs will be

multiplied closer to the end of the world. The sun and the moon also shall be used as signals. *"For immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven and the powers of heaven shall be shaken."*<sup>173</sup>

Consequently, a terrible darkness shall compass the earth and the whole universe—probably like the darkness of Pharaoh's Egypt. The deafening roar of the falling stars will cause desperate cries and exclamations of men only to remain unheeded.

11. Then as one of the last signals of the Lord's coming His sign will appear. *"And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven."*<sup>174</sup>

His sign is the Cross upon which He suffered and died for His love of men. In the midst of the awful darkness the Cross will suddenly appear from one end of the Universe to the other, and

will lighten it with more brilliancy than the sun and all the stars could ever display.

12. These last signals of Christ's coming will succeed each other quickly like the last scene of a drama on the stage. *"For as the lightning cometh out of the East, and shineth even unto the West, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be."*<sup>175</sup>

13. Finally, as the last signal—not that He is coming but that He has come—"a great sound of the trumpet of God"<sup>176</sup> from the mouth of an archangel. And then *"the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout."*<sup>177</sup> All the mourning tribes and nations of the earth *"shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."*<sup>178</sup> Then a shining host of angels will be sent by Him to gather together all His elect and faithful from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the

other. Then the curtain shall fall on the stage of the most amazing divine drama. The elect shall be taken home, to their real fatherland.



# CHAPTER 18

## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SYMBOLS AND SIGNALS OR SIGNS

1. A symbol is something lasting, whereas a signal is something passing or momentary. For instance, physical death is a symbol of spiritual death. The death of David's little son was a signal to the father of his own sin.

2. The sun is the greatest symbol of God in nature, but the eclipse of the sun is a signal to men. (As the "smaller" moon hides the sun from our physical eyes, so the "small" matters of our daily lives hide the greatest light from our spiritual sight).

3. A stone is a symbol of Christ

and of faith in Christ as the foundation upon which the whole spiritual life is built. The breaking of stones at Christ's death is a signal.

4. The wild beasts are symbols of our wild passions. When a wild beast kills a man, then it is to us a signal, (cf. I Kings 13, 24 and II Kings 2, 24).

5. The wind is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. When the wind ruins a house or a town, then it is a signal.

6. The Cross is a symbol of suffering and of salvation. The Cross which appeared to Constantine, or that which shall appear at the end of the world, is a signal.

7. Man in his relations to nature is a symbol of God. This or that man, by his character or fate, or by words and deeds, may be a signal to you.

8. Suffering with guilt, or without, is a signal.

9. The defects or diseases of the body are generally symbols of defects

and diseases of the soul. A sudden disease may be a signal.

10. A vivid and clear dream, which needs no interpretation (like those of St. Joseph or of the wise men) is a signal. A dream may be symbolic when it is in imaginative pictures which need an interpretation.

11. In a word: all the visible world represents the sum of the symbols of the invisible, spiritual realities. Through the exceptional relations of one thing to another, or changes, it may serve also as signals to a person or a society.

12. There is no difficulty in knowing the difference between symbols and signals for a man who is deep in spiritual knowledge of the Book of Life and the Book of Nature.



# CHAPTER 19

## THE RECOGNITION OF THE TRUTH

1. The philosophers ask: What is the essence of things? What is the material substance, or primary element, out of which all things are made?

2. The most ancient thinkers have raised this question which still is not solved in our days. Will this question ever be solved? Never. The famous German scientist, at the end of the last century, Dubois Raymond also said never. Even such a thinker, a positivist, as Herbert Spencer declared that it is the ever "unknowable." Only the European materialists and Indian

nihilists imagine that they have definitely solved this problem.

3. The European materialist thinks that matter is the essence of things. If you ask him, what is matter, he will open the history of philosophy, from which the noise of a hundred materialistic philosophers will strike your ears. Not two of them agree between themselves. One of them would answer that the primary substance of all things is water; another air; another fire; another earth; another protoplasm, or ether, or electric waves, and so forth. Is it not clear from this that those who pretend to have absolutely solved that problem, have not solved it at all?

4. The Indian nihilist, on the other hand, thinks that there is no matter at all and no material substance of things. The endless universe is merely a *samsara* of shadows and ghostly hallucinations. Since there is no reality

in existing things, it is useless to inquire about a "substratum" in the deceiving world of this *maya*. Not only men and every visible thing are passing shadows but also gods and demons. What we call "being" is only an illusion. Therefore nonbeing is better than being. Nirvana is better than life.

5. The Buddhist or—philosophically spoken—Nihilistic conception is an extreme counterpoint of the materialistic conception, an absolute denial of materialism.

6. Where do we stand today after thousands of years of human thinking and searching? We stand before a raised but never satisfactorily answered question. Since men as men could not solve this mystery, could not we turn to some other source of knowledge? For instance, to the Holy Scripture.

7. What does that Book of God say

of the substance of which this world is made and moulded? Nothing. Absolutely nothing whatever. That means that the Creator of the world did not think it to be necessary to lift the curtain of this mystery of His. Nor did He as the incarnated Savior of the world reveal that mystery to men.

8. If the Bible does not reveal anything of the essential substrata of the things of this world, it reveals very much, almost on every page, the significance of those things. The knowledge and wisdom that God revealed to man relate not to what the things are but to what they mean. According to the Book as understood by the Christian saints, we could even say, that the essence of things is their meaning.

9. What is essential in a written word? The ink with which it is written, or the form of the letters, or the paper upon which it is written? No. The

meaning of it. And what is the essential in a spoken word, or even in a voice? The mere sound? No. The meaning. Paul says, "There are so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification."[179](#)

Unless the God reveals to us some of His great mysteries, we can not get them from Him neither by force nor by theft.

10. About the substance of His creation He has revealed nothing through the greatest philosophical minds in history nor through His Holy Scriptures. Why? First, there is no such substance beside God's creative word, second, men do not need to know that in order to fulfill their task on earth, and because men cannot bear the information. As Jesus said to His disciples, "*I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.*"[180](#) Did not God ask Job, "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations

of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding? —When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy."[181](#)

11. Suppose, for the sake of argument, man was present when God was creating the world. Could he enter God's mind and understand God's ways and plans and actions? Higher intelligence can quite well understand a lower intelligence but the lower cannot comprehend the higher.

12. The symbolism of things is ever before our eyes and minds, always as new and clear as the newest edition of a book. Our guide through the forest of symbols and signals is God the Holy Spirit. Different colored lights on the crossways serve as signals to a traveler: which way is right and which way wrong, where is danger and where is free passage. Even so God through innumerable signs and symbols, as through a

mirroring of nature, reveals the way we ought to travel in safety and security.

13. Who knows whether searching for the substance of things has ever made a man better? It is doubtful indeed. But it is well known that a knowledge of the significance of things and events has made innumerable souls more enlightened, better and happier.



# NOTES

1 St. Simeon the New Theologian, Sermon 65.

2 St. Maximus the Confessor, The Path of Mysteries. Chapter II.

3 II Cor. 3:6

4 I Cor. 13:12

5 II Cor. 4:18

6 Heb. 8:5

7 Matt. 13:11-15

8 Gen. 2:19-20

9 Gen. 3:8

10 John 6:63

11 Ps. 103

12 Deut. 30:19

13 Ps 83:11

14 Malach. 4:2

15 Rev. 21:23

16 Rev. 22:5

17 Matt. 13:43

18 1 Cor. 15:41

19 Dan. 12:3

20 St. Simeon Metaphrastes in his introduction to *The Lives of Saints*.

21 John 4:24

22 There are different kinds of nihilists, political, moral, social, etc. Here, I refer to the the metaphysical nihilism.

23 Dan. 2:35

24 cf. Is. 8:14; 1 Peter 2:8

25 Is. 28:16; cf. Rom 9:33; cf. 1 Peter 2:6

26 Luke 20:18

27 Matt. 16:16-17

28 1 Peter 2:4-5

29 Gen. 22:17

30 Ps. 85:10

31 Ps. 89:14

32 cf. Ex. 32

33 Rev: 21:18

34 cf. Rev. 21:21

35 Matt. 6:28

36 cf. Jer. 11:16

37 cf. Zech. 4:3; cf. Rev. 11:4

38 Ps. 52:8

- [39](#) cf. Mark 4:14
- [40](#) cf. Matt. 13:38
- [41](#) cf. Matt. 13:25
- [42](#) John 12:24
- [43](#) cf. ICor. 15
- [44](#) Matt. 7:16
- [45](#) Matt 7:18-20
- [46](#) John 15:5
- [47](#) Matt. 13:31-32
- [48](#) Ps. 92:12
- [49](#) 1 Peter 1:24
- [50](#) cf. Ps. 129:6
- [51](#) cf. Ps. 92:7
- [52](#) Ps. 37:1-2
- [53](#) Matt. 3:16
- [54](#) Gen. 3:14
- [55](#) cf. Matt. 3:7
- [56](#) cf. Matt. 23:33
- [57](#) John 8:44
- [58](#) John 10:27
- [59](#) Matt. 10:16
- [60](#) Matt. 7:6
- [61](#) Matt. 23:37
- [62](#) cf. Ezekiel 1:5-10; cf. Rev. 4:6-

- [63](#) Gen. 1:28
- [64](#) Psalm 8:6-8
- [65](#) cf. Matt. 3:12
- [66](#) Matt. 5:15
- [67](#) Matt. 6:6
- [68](#) John 10:9
- [69](#) cf. Jeremiah 27
- [70](#) Matt. 11:28-30
- [71](#) 1 Cor. 1:18
- [72](#) Matt. 23:26
- [73](#) Matt. 23:27
- [74](#) Luke 12:33
- [75](#) cf. Luke 12:35
- [76](#) John 14:2
- [77](#) 1 Cor. 6:19
- [78](#) Rev. 1:16
- [79](#) Eph. 6:17
- [80](#) Eph. 6:16
- [81](#) Ibid.
- [82](#) John 3:3
- [83](#) John 16:21
- [84](#) Matt 18:2-5; 19:14
- [85](#) Matt. 18:23-35

[86](#) cf. Matt. 24:27

[87](#) cf. Matt 24:43

[88](#) Matt. 24:42

[89](#) Luke 19:13

[90](#) Luke 22:30

[91](#) Luke 14:28

[92](#) 2 Cor. 11:2

[93](#) Job 33:15-19

[94](#) Gen. 20:3

[95](#) Gen. 31:24

[96](#) Dan. 4:34

[97](#) Matt 1:19-21

[98](#) Matt. 2:12-20

[99](#) Matt 27:19

[100](#) Matt. 27:24

[101](#) cf. Dan. 5

[102](#) Luke 13:1-3

[103](#) Luke 13:4-5

[104](#) Acts 12:21-23

[105](#) Acts 5:1-11

[106](#) Mark 16:17-18

[107](#) Matt. 16:1-3

[108](#) Matt. 12:24-28

[109](#) Matt. 11:1-4

- [110](#) Matt. 26:69-75
- [111](#) Num. 22
- [112](#) 2 Sam. 5:23-24
- [113](#) Matt. 10:19-20
- [114](#) Jer. 20:9
- [115](#) 2 Chronicles 18:22
- [116](#) Matt. 9:3-4
- [117](#) Luke 24:13-32
- [118](#) Lev. 25:18
- [119](#) Deut. 28:2-12
- [120](#) Zech. 8:12
- [121](#) Matt. 5:45
- [122](#) Gen. 1:14
- [123](#) Matt. 27:45
- [124](#) Luke 23:45
- [125](#) Joshua 10:12-13
- [126](#) 2 Kings 20:8
- [127](#) 2 Kings 20:11
- [128](#) Matt. 2:2
- [129](#) Gen. 6:6
- [130](#) Gen. 9:13
- [131](#) 1 Sam. 12:18
- [132](#) 1 Sam. 7:10
- [133](#) Jer. 14:4-5

- [134](#) cf. 1 Kings 17:1; cf. Luke 4:25
- [135](#) Amos 4:7-8
- [136](#) Amos 8:8
- [137](#) Is. 29:6
- [138](#) Matt. 28:2
- [139](#) Acts 4:31
- [140](#) Acts 16:26
- [141](#) Haggai 2:17
- [142](#) Ps. 78:48
- [143](#) James 4:1
- [144](#) Jer. 24:10
- [145](#) Jer. 29:18
- [146](#) Jer. 30:23
- [147](#) 2 Sam. 21:1
- [148](#) 1 Chronicles 21:15
- [149](#) 2 Chronicles 21:15
- [150](#) John 11:4
- [151](#) John 9:3
- [152](#) Luke 2:34
- [153](#) Is. 7:11-14
- [154](#) John 1:41
- [155](#) Ez. 12:6,11
- [156](#) Ez. 24:24
- [157](#) Is. 8:18

[158](#) Haggai 2:23

[159](#) Deut. 28:37 (cf. Jer. 24:9;

25:9)

[160](#) Matt. 24:3

[161](#) Matt 24:12

[162](#) Matt 24:13

[163](#) 2 Peter 3:3

[164](#) 2 Peter 3:4

[165](#) 2 Tim. 4:3-4

[166](#) 2 Tim. 3:1-3

[167](#) Matt 24:21

[168](#) Luke 21:26

[169](#) Luke 21:11,25

[170](#) Mark 13:10

[171](#) 2 Thess. 2:3-4

[172](#) 2 Thess. 2:8

[173](#) Matt. 24:29

[174](#) Matt. 24:30

[175](#) Matt. 24:27

[176](#) Matt 24:31

[177](#) 1 Thess. 4:16

[178](#) Matt. 24:30; Luke 21:27

[179](#) 1 Cor. 14:10

[180](#) John 16:12

