

ancestral house and lands, was told as comfort the story of the flute-player who attempted to kill the snake and was killed in his turn. This fantastical story of the convolutions of fate was understood by the story-teller to apply quite precisely to the current catastrophe, and it did in fact figure as a kind of comfort and pave the way to a kind of acceptance: 'Almost you persuade me that this is true.'

The retrospective nature of the understanding of fate has another important consequence in that belief in fate by no means makes the people 'fatalistic': they are very far from abandoning effort and letting blind forces unravel as they will, in the case of marriage or anything else. In the stories, people struggle for good marriages for their children, for life and prosperity. In life, the efforts, for instance, of the herdsman to buy sheep, to buy goats, to labour for their increase, were clearly unremitting. Marriages are focuses of hopes which begin, particularly for girls (who need a dowry), at the cradle, and are subject to the most intense enquiry, assessment, speculation, and negotiation. But in the end 'you take a man to be a good man and he turns out bad; and a bad man turns out good.' Fate does not free people from effort, but it frees them from the plague of self-recriminations if things go wrong. Getting things wrong may be a matter for grief, but not for guilt, for it is a natural part of our life on earth.

It is in this way that the gulf is bridged between God and fate, freedom and predestination. Posed as philosophic statements, the two theories of life are in contradiction and the Church treats them as such. But for the people who hold them they are ideas which are lived, not conceptualized, and as experiential realities they form a single complex weave in which the belief in fate by no means excludes personal endeavour or a creative interplay between man and the spiritual world. Fate and God are not mutually exclusive, and the intuitive fusions of fate, God, the Mother of God, and the Angel, which occur in the story-teller's mind, are natural consequences of this inner reconciliation between the two sets of ideas. And it is in the end a reconciliation which is extraordinarily simple: 'Everything is written, but you have to take care.' The idea of predestination has in fact no power to stifle the imaginations of the people as they struggle with their present and their future, as they pray and toil, fast and feast, honour the saints, arrange their marriages, and care for their creatures. And in retrospect it has a healing and a freeing function, for it enables the people to see that some-

times as a result of and sometimes in spite of their endeavours, a certain pattern was all the time being unfolded which was ordained by another hand than theirs. *Moira*, in fact, means exactly what it says—a person's 'share' or 'lot'. A person's 'fate' is his share or apportionment of good and evil in his life, and as such it is a part of God's law, given by God.

The fallen order of sin and death which Christ comes to renew involves, then, first, that sins draw down punishment, whether on present or future generations; second, that God, though creator of a beneficent world, is an authoritarian figure who distributes to each a share of suffering on a random basis, and whose ultimate power over the life of every man is dramatically expressed in the idea of fate; and also, third, that death in its violence and finality has the last word, revealing in the end the life of man to be 'deluding' or 'false'. Death shows life to be but a brief interlude under the sun before the soul is banished to a shadowy existence in the underworld and the body becomes a handful of bones.

In Orthodox tradition the renewal of this fallen order involves repentance or *metánoia* (*μετάνοια*), a change of perception which enters into God's way of looking at the world and transforms a relationship of subjection to power into one of understanding. In this altered way of looking at the world the figure of Christ is central, because he is seen as both human and divine: as human, he inspires understanding, empathy, and affection; as divine, he reveals the mind of God. Not only in the Church tradition though, but in village understanding too, the changes of perception which soften and illuminate the harsh experiences of the village predicament centre on images of Christ, and the village perspective thus reveals suggestive echoes of this Orthodox view of the fall and the way to restoration.

The divinity of Christ is a simple fact to the villagers to whom 'Christ is God', and it is consistent with this that it is 'Christ', rather than 'God', who springs most easily to people's lips when they refer to the creation of the animals, such as in the stories of the cat, the pig, and the buffalo, and Christ also who, as 'the Son of God who could do anything he wanted', created light to dispel the darkness. Sometimes he is portrayed as going to his Father to ask for something to happen—a request always granted. In these essential creative acts the village Christ reflects the Logos, the Word of God who 'is before the

world was,³ and brings the world into being. Here, therefore, Christ is none other than the Almighty who made and rules the heavens and the earth, and who is the son of God—the Word who expresses the will of his Father.

If the divinity of Christ poses no problem to the people, however, neither does his humanity. In the stories of his wandering the world in various guises as an old man or a young gallant, sometimes as a child, demonstrating by his mere presence in a place the extent to which divine love resides in it, he is the incarnate Christ of the Gospels, God who took on our life. And as this figure he features in the people's conversations and imagination as the Christ who came into the world as a little child, whom they sometimes refer to with extraordinary affection in the endearment '*Christoutzikós mou!*' (*Χριστουτζικός μου*), 'my little Christ!'; the innocent one who died 'for us', the Christ who 'came to save us' but whom 'we killed'; and the Christ who, betrayed and put to death on the cross, nevertheless, as the Easter hymn constantly asserts, 'trampled down death by death' and rose from the grave. Thus the villagers' Christ is both God and man, both the Almighty and maker of all, and a deeply loved and deeply-loving figure with whom is possible a relationship altogether more personal and intimate than that offered by other modes of the divine.

The villagers' relationship with this divine and human Christ derives from the Church's liturgy, but it is also, as has been seen, expressed in stories, songs, and practices of their own, and both means of transmission act to transform the village understandings summarized above: the understanding of the law of punishment for sin, the law of apparently random suffering, and the law of death. All three laws surface again and again in the liturgy and receive liturgical answers throughout the sacred year, but it is the liturgy of Holy Week, the week of Christ's Passion leading up to the morning of Easter, which expresses their quintessence. This second and last part of the present chapter discusses these themes as they appear in the last days of Holy Week, and points to the way in which in each case confirmatory folk practices have grown up to interpret and elaborate their meaning.

It is on Holy Thursday, the Thursday immediately preceding Easter, that the issue of sins being paid for comes face to face with a God

³ John 17 : 5.

who acts quite otherwise. On the Thursday evening the Passion Service is held which recounts in twelve readings from the Gospels the story of the crucifixion. The twelve readings include virtually the whole account of John⁴ and Matthew⁵ with additions by Mark and Luke, and these form the predominant part of the service, with the addition of some sung commentary after each reading. The crucifixion itself is imaged at the mid-point of this service, when, in one of the most dramatic events of the whole liturgical year, the priest emerges from the north door of the sanctuary bearing a great cross, often twice his height, which is carried in procession right-handed round the church before being set upright in the centre of the nave. On this the priest then fixes an icon in the figure of the crucified Christ, or drapes around it a white cloth in representation of the figure of Christ. This is the moment of the crucifixion itself, and for it the people wait in awe, crossing themselves and prostrating when the cross appears, and it is characteristic that of this moment a newcomer should be told: 'You wait for the moment when the cross is brought out. Your hair will stand on end!' Both the liturgical and the village commentary on the death of Christ thus focus on this moment.

The crucifixion is an event which villagers sometimes, consonant with habitual village patterns of asserting the honour of one's own behaviour and denigrating that of others, describe as an alien act—it is not an act of shepherds, for instance, since it was a shepherd who took the three nails first made for the crucifixion and hid them in his *tsournás* (τσουρνάς),⁶ but it can be described as an act of the Jews, and on occasion of the gypsies too, since a blacksmith was needed for the nails and he then made not three but five nails, one each for the hands and feet and the fifth for the heart.⁷ Blaming

⁴ vv. 13 : 3 to 19 : 42.

⁵ vv. 26 : 57 to 27 : 66.

⁶ The *tsournás* is a bass woodwind instrument which carries long distances in the open air, and in the mountains can be used to powerful effect for laments, which may be the allusion here. Sometimes described as a bass clarinet, it is according to Jane Cowan (*Dance and the Body Politic in Northern Greece*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, p. 97) a Balkan double-reeded shawm (hence an ancestor of the oboe, or in terms of its register, of the cor anglais).

⁷ For claims to honour and denigration of others, see p. 178. The narrative details which express this pattern in folk tales of the crucifixion derive from an ancient ballad tradition, see Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, pp. 65, 73.

others, primarily the Jews, for the crucifixion, has also been a tendency in Christian liturgies; and Oriental liturgies like the Orthodox, which often draw on texts from the first centuries after the painful break with the Synagogue, are liable to fall into this.⁸ But an attitude of blaming others is, in these liturgical texts, constantly undermined by an inward shift of perception, a change of heart, in which such images of 'we' as honourable, and others as suspect, fall away.

In this second more serious and intimate perspective, which is at the fore in Holy Week, the villagers speak of the crucifixion as their own act. Moving into this second way of seeing it, they will say with the utmost simplicity, 'We crucified him'; with the addition, sometimes, that this did not need to happen, that we could have acted otherwise, and that God meant it to be otherwise: 'Christ came to save us, but we crucified him.' The crucifixion of Christ is here therefore a shared human responsibility, 'our' responsibility, and not in any way an act of 'others' or an act of God; and it is apparent that in saying this the people can only be speaking from within the understanding of their liturgical tradition referred to at the end of Chapter 4, where the 'I' of all the people present speaks with the voice of Adam of things which are happening 'today'. The people are Adam and Adam is the people in a timeless present; so likewise in the matins of Holy Thursday, the words of the high priest Caiaphas, as he advises the secret arrest and rapid execution of Jesus as the best way to avoid 'an uproar among the people' and a Roman decision to crush the fragile Judaeian state, are marked out as having a timeless significance for human society which is beyond the understanding of Caiaphas himself:

Today the evil Sanhedrin has assembled against Christ
And devised vain things against him,
Plotting to deliver him, though innocent, to Pilate to be put to death...
Today Caiaphas prophesies against his will, saying:
'It is expedient that one man should perish for the people.'⁹

⁸ Charlotte Klein, 'The Oriental Liturgy and the Jews', *Sobornost*, series 6, number 7, 1973.

⁹ *Lenten Triodion*, Holy Thursday Matins, Aposticha, p. 555, commenting on Luke 22 : 1-2 (just previously read at Matins, p. 548, cf. Matthew 26 : 3-5 read at the Vespertal Liturgy that follows it, *Lenten Triodion*, p. 559) and John 11 : 47-52.