

Eucharistic Doctrine and the Liturgy in Late Byzantine Painting

by

Ashton L. Townsley

If the flagrant Christological controversies which preoccupied the ecclesiastical councils, held in Constantinople during the twelfth century, appear to have been resolved with little precision and less *elan*, and not without final recourse to the writings of certain early theologians and liturgists, then we ought to be grateful for a number of precious contemporary attestations that shed some light on the problems and theological conflicts that had arisen.

Moreover, the dogmatic questions and arguments of the time were not simply isolated and non-influential incidents. Within the sphere of Church art, for example, the echoes of specific liturgical questions manifested themselves almost immediately. Even during the eleventh century we find some evidence of experimentation with the desire to render certain aspects of liturgical themes. One such attempt may be seen in a miniature from a Constantinopolitan roll, illustrated towards the end of the eleventh century and the beginning of the twelfth (Fig. 1)¹. Here, the artist has represented the Divine Liturgy, officiated at by Christ as high priest and angels as deacons, in the margin of the text, which itself is the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. With respect to another theme of Byzantine church decoration, i.e., the Etoimasia, we may discover iconographic elements of this composition which reflect particular liturgical characteristics. More importantly, though, this theme leads one to believe that its iconography was possibly influenced by one of the major questions posed during the twelfth century: to whom does one offer the sacrifice of the Mass?

Now during the councils held at Constantinople between 1156 and 1176², the major issues debated were focused on the dogma relating to the divine nature of Christ. Consequently, the attribution of the sacrificial offering

¹ A. Grabar, "Un rouleau liturgique constantinopolitain et ses peintures", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* no. 8 (Cambridge 1954), pp. 163-199, esp. 174, fig. 10.

² N. Choniata, *Thesauri Orthodoxiae Fidei* (PG 140, pp. 137-282); F. Chalandon, *Jean II Comnène et Manuel I Comnène* (Paris, 1912), pp. 632-653.

of the Mass became a central point of discussion. Some of the more thought provoking questions dealing with the Mystery of the Eucharist took place in the sessions of the council held at the capital in 1156: is it possible to offer the Eucharistic sacrifice to the Son, even after it has already been offered to the Father and to the Holy Spirit? Could Christ receive the sacrifice and be the sacrifice at one and the same time? Commencing the debates on the latter was Eustratius of Durazzo, whose hostile refutation of the traditional dogma caused him to be condemned, though he repented shortly thereafter. Eustratius maintained that the Eucharistic sacrifice could not be offered to Christ³. Soterichus Panteugenus, a renowned theologian of the time, delivered his treatise on the matter in the form of a dialogue. Likewise, he asserted the inability of the sacrifice to be offered to Christ after having been offered up to the Father and the Holy Spirit. Thus, of the conclusions formed from these arguments, one was of particular interest and importance, and it concerned the liturgical hymn sung at the Great Entrance, known as the *Cherubicon*: *Σὺ γὰρ εἶ ὁ προσφέρων καὶ προσφερόμενος καὶ προσδεχόμενος καὶ διαδιδόμενος Χριστὲ ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν ...*⁴. It was decided that the hymn implied the Nestorian doctrine of the double-nature of Christ⁵.

The opposing faction argued against Soterichus Panteugenus by explaining that the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross is like the sacrifice offered to the indivisible Holy Trinity. Likewise, during the liturgy, oblations are offered to the consubstantial and indivisible Trinity. At the session of May 12, 1156 the following question was posed for Soterichus to answer: "Should it be considered that the liturgical sacrifice was offered and ought to be offered to the Trinity or to the Father alone?"⁶. Soterichus, failing to be present at the following session in order to defend his position, was condemned *in absentia* on May 13, 1157. His adherents, among whom were Nicholas Vassilakis and Michael of Thessalonica, had been condemned at the same time⁷.

Nevertheless, the controversy continued and towards 1160 a certain Demetrius of Lampa became the focus of attention for his treatise on the nature of Christ. In his exegesis of the passage from the Gospel of John

³ PG 140, pp. 147-153.

⁴ F. E. Brightman, *Liturgies Eastern and Western*, 1: Eastern Liturgies (Oxford 1896 and 1965), p. 378, 5-8.

⁵ Chalandon, 642 n. 1 and 643 n. 3; PG 140, pp. 137-148.

⁶ PG 140, p. 177.

⁷ Chalandon, pp. 641-642; R. Browning, "The Patriarchal School at Constantinople", *Byzantion* 33, no. 1 (1963), pp. 12-14; PG 140, pp. 193-197.

(14.28), ὅτι ὁ πατὴρ μείζων μου ἐστίν, Demetrius held the opinion that a single person could not be equal to the Father and inferior to Him at one and the same time. Along with the emperor Manuel Comnenos, his adversaries attacked this notion for having only considered the human nature of Christ⁸.

Councils and sessions continued and prolonged discussions, still dealing with the interpretation offered by Demetrius, and not until the arrival of Nicholas Mesarites and Michael Autoreianos (1206-1213) were things to subside⁹. Under the latter, the orthodox position was determined, for the most part, and the question of the Nature of Christ was given a final formulation.

It is well to return, now, to a closer examination of the Byzantine mural composition known as the Etoimasia, mentioned above, in light of the previous observations. The stock method of depicting this subject is perhaps best exemplified in one of its well-known Early Christian manifestations the mosaic in the Orthodox Baptistery at Ravenna¹⁰. This empty or prepared throne (Ἐτοιμασία τοῦ Θρόνου), draped and lavishly studded with precious stones, was thought by earlier scholars to signify the Second Coming of Christ as foretold in the Psalms¹¹. However, this interpretation has since been shifted by scholars to pertain rather to late Byzantine thought and art¹². Moreover, a liturgical character was introduced into the basic theme of the prepared throne. This is best illustrated by two frescoes located in the lower zone of wall decoration in the apse. One painting is found in the church of Saint-Panteleimon at Nerezi (c. 1164) and the other exists in very poor condition in a church at Veljusa, near Strumitza (constructed in 1180) (Figs. 2, 3, and 4). At Nerezi we observe the usual representation of the prepared throne or Etoimasia being both draped and richly decorated with gems. Apart from these commonplace accoutrements, present are two deacon-garbed angels holding *ripidions* (liturgical fans) over the cushioned throne, upon which rest the book of the Gospels, a dove and a Byzantine double-crucifix surmounted by a crown of thorns. The fragment at Veljusa

⁸ Chalandon, pp. 644-647; L. Petit, "Documents inédits sur le Concile de 1166 et ses derniers adversaires", *Vizantijskij Vremnik* 11 (St. Petersburg 1904), pp. 465-493.

⁹ Petit, pp. 465-493; Chalandon, pp. 644-647.

¹⁰ S. K. Kostoff, *The Orthodox Baptistery of Ravenna* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), fig. 67.

¹¹ Kostoff, p. 80; C. Diehl, *Ravenna* (Paris 1907), p. 40; G. Bovini, *Chiese di Ravenna* (Novara 1957), p. 60; G. Millet, *La dalmatique du Vatican* (Paris 1945), p. 25; Psalms IX, X.7-8; Ps. LXXXVIII, LXXXIX.15; Ps. CII, CIII.15; Revelations IV.1-8.

¹² Kostoff, p. 80.

(Fig. 4) probably portrayed a similar composition, though the only visible remains are the dove, Gospels and part of the cushion of the throne. Now the iconographic significance of the Etoimasia in this context has been discussed by O. Wulff. Simply stated, Wulff's conclusion concerning this particular iconography is that the Etoimasia in connection with the dove or Holy Spirit and apart from the Gospel-book and crucifix, is a symbolic rendering of the Holy Trinity¹³. G. Millet has proposed the interpretation that the Etoimasia symbolized the unity of all three of the persons of the Trinity¹⁴.

It would thus seem to follow that the image of the Etoimasia, possessing the above mentioned articles as well as being flanked by two angelic deacons, implying the liturgical function of ministering at the Eucharistic sacrifice, alludes to and is a symbol of the Holy Trinity¹⁵. Furthermore, if this interpretation is held, there would appear to be some relationship between this iconography of the prepared throne and the objection that defeated Soterichus and which, it will be recalled, was in favor of the notion of the three hypostases of God.

It is not without significance to mention here, that numerous passages were drawn from the writings of theologians and liturgists of the fourth to the seventh centuries, and were closely examined and cited during the councils that took place from 1156-1157, serving to refute the notions of Soterichus and to reaffirm liturgical doctrine. These sources must have had an equal import with regard to iconographic formulae that were developing at the same time the Constantinopolitan councils were in progress. We have already taken note of some of the acts of these councils as reproduced by Nicetas Choniata, whose intention it was to document official dogma of the Church. To mention but a few of the Fathers whose works were cited as orthodox sources of Christian ideology, there were St. John Chrysostom, St. Cyril of Alexandria and Maximus the Confessor¹⁶.

However, among the passages of the Fathers which treat the subject of the prepared throne, though not in Choniata, there seems to be little

¹³ O. Wulff, "Arkitektura i mozaiki hrama Uspenia Bogorodici v Nikee", *Vizantijskij Vremnik* 7 (St. Petersburg 1900), pp. 376-388. I am grateful to Professor S. Čurčić for making this source available to me and for providing a translation of its pertinent parts.

¹⁴ Cf. note 11 and 39.

¹⁵ For the symbolism of the altar and the Etoimasia, cf. A. Grabar, *La peinture religieuse en Bulgarie* (Paris 1928), pp. 90-92. The classic work on the Etoimasia is P. Durand's, *Études sur l'Étimacia, symbole du Jugement dans l'iconographie grecque chrétienne* (Paris and Chartres 1867); T. von Bogyay, "Zur Geschichte der Hetoimasia", *Akten des XI. Internationalen Byzantinistenkongresses 1958* (München 1960), pp. 58-61.

¹⁶ PG 140, pp. 156-176.

evidence that lends credence to the trinitarian interpretation of the Etoimasia proposed by the modern scholars, discussed above. According to Cyril of Alexandria, the throne seems to symbolize the actual, though invisible, presence of Christ. Thus, the divine Person is invisible to man, but represented symbolically by the cross and the book. In a letter to Theodosius II, Cyril writes of the Council of Ephesus that it, "congregates under the presidency of Christ our Lord for on a holy throne lay the venerable Gospel"¹⁷. Tarasius, a patriarch of Constantinople, wrote similarly of the Second Council of Nicea to Pope Hadrian¹⁸. The argument for the Etoimasia as a symbol of the Second Coming, mentioned earlier, is born out somewhat by a passage in a homily on the Mysteries of the liturgy attributed to Narsai, the founder of the great Nestorian School at Nisibis (c. 457). In his explanation of the elements of the sanctuary, Narsai writes: "The adorable altar thereof is a symbol of that throne of the Great and Glorious, upon which He will be seen of watchers (angels) and men in the day of His revelation"¹⁹. With this text, we have a proximate description for the altar-like prepared throne with its ministering angels, as seen in the fresco at Nerezi.

Moving on to a later depiction of the Etoimasia in the Serbian church at Dečani (c. 1327), we notice a variation as well as an elaboration of the theme (Fig. 5). This representation enables us to witness a further development of iconography that has been clearly and overtly influenced by liturgical doctrine of at least one of the Early Eastern Fathers. It is also worth noting that with the advent of the so-called Macedonian School of late Byzantine painting²⁰, generally, we may discover a veritable fruition of liturgical iconography evolving out of and directly parallel to certain liturgical tracts of the Fathers. Henceforth, this paper will address itself to the attempt of bringing to light specific liturgical texts that appear to have more or less directly influenced certain liturgical iconographic subjects in late Byzantine wall painting.

Beginning, then, with the representation of the Etoimasia at Dečani, there is a passage in the writings of Gregory Nazianzen elaborating the symbolism of the procession of the new-Christians into the church prior to the Mass proper, which strikingly resembles our fresco:

The station which you will make immediately after Baptism, before the great throne, is the prefiguration of the glory on high. The chant of the psalms, with which you will be received, is the prelude to the hymns of heaven. The candles which you hold in your hands

¹⁷ *Apologeticus ad piissimum imperatorem Theodosium* (PG 76, p. 472).

¹⁸ *Epistola II* (PG 98, p. 1440).

¹⁹ R. H. Connolly, trans., *The Liturgical Homilies of Narsai* (Cambridge 1909), p. 5.

²⁰ D. T. Rice, *Byzantine Painting: The Last Phase* (New York 1968), 103f.

are the sacrament (*mysterion*) of the escort of lights from on high, with which we shall go to meet the Bridegroom, our souls luminous and virgin, carrying lighted candles of faith²¹.

Now at Dečani, we find a rather precise portrayal of this event with the exception that angels have taken the place of the newly baptized Christians who form a procession to go from the baptistry to the Church, in white robes and carrying lighted candles²². The presence of angels should not disturb us since, as will be shown later and more fully, the real Mass as it took place in the lower "earthly" realm of the Church was but a figure of heavenly realities. As Narsai puts it when explaining the office of the priest:

O thou priest, that doest the priest's office on earth in a manner spiritual, and the spirits may not imitate thee! O thou priest, how great is the order that thou administerest, of which the ministers of fire and spirit stand in awe! ... The nature of a spirit is more subtle and glorified than thou; yet it is not permitted to it to depict mysteries like as it is to thee²³.

Likewise, for Gregory the limits of the earthly and heavenly realms are deleted and the baptized mingle with the angels and prepare to take part in the heavenly liturgy²⁴.

However, before examining further the subject of the heavenly liturgy and its visible semblance in Byzantine painting, it remains to explicate the presence of the dove depicted in the Etoimasia at Nerezi and Veljusa. Since it has already been posited that the dove is symbolic of the Holy Spirit, the question now arises as to what role this symbol plays within the context of the Eucharistic consecration. With regard to this question, we turn to the testimony of Theodore of Mopsuestia, the Antiochene bishop of Mopsuestia, in Cilicia (c. 392). Theodore held the belief and teaching that the calling down of the Holy Spirit upon the oblation, that is to say, the Epiclesis of the Holy Spirit, effected the transubstantiation²⁵. It was the earlier practice to effect the transubstantiation by invoking the descent of the Logos upon the bread and wine, i.e., the Words of Institution contained in the Anaphora²⁶. There was, however, in the late third century, a nuancing of the "sanctification" of the bread and wine in light of the Holy Spirit's efficaciousness²⁷. Towards the middle of the fourth century, the first clear

²¹ PG 36, 425A; J. Danielou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press 1961), p. 129.

²² Danielou, p. 128.

²³ Connolly, p. 47.

²⁴ Danielou, p. 130.

²⁵ F. J. Reine, *The Eucharistic Doctrine and Liturgy of the Mystagogical Catecheses of Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Wash., D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1942), p. 16.

²⁶ Reine, p. 16.

²⁷ Reine, p. 17; F. Funk, *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum*, 1 (Paderborn 1905), p. 370.

indication of the intervention of the Holy Spirit was offered by St. Cyril of Jerusalem²⁸. Similarly, St. John Chrysostom spoke of the effect of the Holy Spirit in the transubstantiation²⁹, but he also ascribed the power of consecration to the Words of Institution³⁰. There are various and differing opinions as to the precise meaning of these texts³¹, but the paper will not deal with this problem since it is far afield from our major concern. It is more important to the discussion at hand that we recognize Theodore's teaching on this subject as being quite clearly in favor of the Holy Spirit "informing" the Eucharistic consecration. Concerning the Epiclesis of the Holy Spirit, Theodore of Mopsuestia writes:

We ought ... not to regard the elements merely as bread and cup, but as the body and blood of Christ, into which they were so transformed by the descent of the Holy Spirit³².

Those who have been chosen as priests of the New Testament are believed to perform

²⁸ Reine, p. 17; J. Quasten, *Monumenta Eucharistica et Liturgica Vetustissima* (FIP 7), (Bonn 1935-1937), p. 101. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses Mystagogicae* 5,7: "Then having sanctified ourselves by these spiritual hymns, we entreat the benevolent God to send out the Holy Spirit upon the laid-out oblations so that He may make the bread the body of Christ and the wine the blood of Christ".

²⁹ Reine, p. 17; St. John Chrysostom, *De Sacerdotio* 3,4 (PG 48, p. 642), *De S. Pentecoste* 1,4 (PG 50, p. 459), *In Coemetarii Appelatione* 3 (PG 49, pp. 397-398); Epiclesis — "When the priest stands in front of the table and raises his hands to heaven invoking the Holy Spirit that He come down and touch the laid-out oblations, there is much quiet, much silence" (PG 49, pp. 397-398). "The priest stands there calling down not fire but the Holy Spirit, and he makes supplication for a long time not that some flame, sent down from above, may consume the offerings, but the grace, descending on the sacrifice, may thus enlighten the souls of all and make them more splendidous than silver purified by fire" (PG 48, p. 642). "The grace of the Spirit being present and flying to all things effects this mystical sacrifice. For although it is man who is present, it is nevertheless God who works through him ... Nothing is human of those things that happen in this holy sanctuary" (PG 50, p. 459).

³⁰ Reine, p. 17; St. John Chrysostom, *De proditiōe Judae* 1,6 (PG 49, p. 380): Words of Institution — "For it is not man who effects that the offerings become the body and blood of Christ, but Christ Himself, who was crucified for us. Performing the figure the priest stands saying those words; the power and grace is of God. 'This is My body', he says. This word transforms the offerings, and as that word saying, 'Increase and multiply and fill the earth', was said one time, but for all time gave our nature the power to engender children, so also this word, one time spoken at every altar in the churches from that time until today and until His coming, effects a perfect sacrifice".

³¹ Cf. S. Salaville, "Epiclèse Eucharistique", *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* 5, pp. 238-239; F. Probst, "Die hierosolymitanische Messe nach den Schriften des hl. Cyrillus", *Der Katholik* (1884), 1, pp. 258-260; F. Probst, "Die antiochenische Messe nach den Schriften des hl. Johannes Chrysostomus dargestellt", *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 7, pp. 291-293.

³² A. Mingana, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Lord's Prayer and on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist*, Woodbrooke Studies 6 (Cambridge 1933), p. 76.

sacramentally, by the descent of the Holy Spirit ... these things which we believe that Christ our Lord performed and will perform in reality³³.

One is the bread and one is the body of Christ our Lord, into which the element of bread is changed; and it receives this great change from one descent of the Holy Spirit³⁴.

It is indeed offered so that by the coming of the Holy Spirit it should become that which it is said to be: the body and the blood of Christ³⁵.

Picture in your mind the nature of this oblation, which, by the coming of the Holy Spirit, is the body of Christ³⁶.

At first it is laid upon the altar as a mere bread and wine mixed with water; but by the coming of the Holy Spirit it is transformed into body and blood and thus it is changed into the power of a spiritual and immortal nourishment³⁷.

The Anaphora of Theodore of Mopsuestia offers yet another peculiarity that seems to shed more light on the iconography of the Etoimasia at Nerezi and Veljusa as well as providing evidence for its as yet unproven trinitarian interpretation. Theodore's Eucharistic Prayer is especially interesting in that it is addressed to the Holy Trinity, i.e., Father, Son and Holy Spirit³⁸. Apostolic Constitutions differ from this formula by directing the prayer to the Father and Son alone³⁹. In Theodore's version of the Eucharistic Prayer,

we find ourselves clearly on the way to the short Anaphora of the later time, which contain only general praise-formulas and of which the Greek and Syrian Liturgy of St. James gives

³³ Mingana, p. 86.

³⁴ Mingana, p. 110.

³⁵ Mingana, p. 111.

³⁶ Mingana, p. 113.

³⁷ Mingana, pp. 118-119.

³⁸ Eucharistic Prayer: "After we have all of us performed this, and while we are silent, in a great reverential fear, the priest begins the Anaphora ... Let the priest be at that time the tongue of the ecclesiastical Community, and let him make use of the right words in this great service. The right praises of God consist in professing that all praises and all glorifications are due to Him, inasmuch as adoration and service are due to Him from all of us; and of all other services the present one, which consists in the commemoration of the grace which came to us and which cannot be described by creatures, takes precedence. And because we have been initiated and baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and because we ought to expect therefrom the full accomplishment of the things that are performed, he says: 'the greatness of the Father'. He adds also: 'and of the Son', because the same that is due to the Father is also due to the Son, who is really and truly a Son with an identical substance with His Father, and in nothing lower than He. He adds necessarily in the same sentence: 'and the Holy Spirit', and confesses that the Spirit is also of Divine Substance. He asserts that all praises and glorification are offered at all times, and before all other (beings), to this eternal and divine nature, by all visible creatures and by the invisible hosts. He makes then mention, before other (creatures), of the Seraphim, who offer that praise which the blessed Isaiah learned in a vision and committed to writing, and which all of us in the congregation sing in a loud voice, as if we were also singing that which the invisible natures sing" (Mingana, pp. 99-100).

³⁹ Reine, p. 131.

a good representation. But in Theodore the development is already advanced beyond James, as he also formulates this part of the prayer in a trinitarian manner⁴⁰.

With the depictions of the prepared throne at Nerezi and Dečani, respectively, we have observed a definite transition from the iconic and static symbolic rendering of the Trinity (though already in a liturgical context) to a more dramatic if not dynamic portrayal of a clearly identifiable liturgical event. Proceeding along this line of development, we arrive at the very important liturgical composition known variously as the Divine or Heavenly Liturgy or Eternal Mass. A well-known example of this subject occurs in a fresco in the Church of the Peribleptos at Mistra from the fourteenth century (Fig. 6). Christ appears at an altar with a ciborium, fully vested in Byzantine chasuble and thus performing the office of highpriest or celebrant at a Solemn High Mass. He is assisted by angels donning the Eastern *orarion* or stole, the customary vestment of the deacons at the Mass.

Concerning the offices of the priest and deacons during the Mass, we have already noted, in Narsai⁴¹, the principle of analogy, that is to say, the comparison made between the earthly and heavenly realities (visible and invisible) with respect to the Eucharistic sacrifice. Furthering of this analogical treatment in Narsai's "Exposition of the Mysteries", illuminates our liturgical composition at Mistra: "The priest who is selected to be celebrating this sacrifice, bears in himself the image of our Lord in that hour. Our Lord performed a mediation between us and His Father; and in like fashion the priest performs a mediation"⁴². Moreover, in Theodore of Mopsuestia we discover what is perhaps the unique precedent for this notion. Theodore also designated Christ as being the archpriest of the Eucharistic sacrifice:

Because Christ our Lord offered Himself in sacrifice for us and thus became our high priest in reality, we must think that the priest who draws nigh unto the altar is representing His image, not that he offers himself in sacrifice any more than he is truly a high priest, but because he performs the figure of the service of the ineffable sacrifice (of Christ)⁴³.

True enough, the composition at Mistra commences the final stage of the liturgy, the first having been witnessed at Dečani (Fig. 5), which is the bringing in and preparation of the oblations on the altar by the deacons. Nevertheless, the fresco at Mistra has still to undergo an iconographic expansion that will stand as the climax of liturgical composition in late

⁴⁰ Reine, p. 131; H. Lietzmann, *Die Liturgie des Theodor von Mopsuestia* (Berlin 1933), pp. 19-20.

⁴¹ See page seven (7) of the text.

⁴² Connolly, p. 4.

⁴³ Mingana, p. 83.

Byzantine painting. Referring once more to the principle of analogy, it is necessary to distinguish the three main elements of the second part of the liturgy which function as figures of heavenly realities: the altar, the deacons and the preparation⁴⁴.

The symbolism of the altar is expressed differently among the Eastern Fathers, though there are obvious similarities. St. Ambrose briefly explains that, "The altar is a figure of the body, and the body of Christ is upon the altar"⁴⁵. More emphatically, St. Cyril of Alexandria writes: "Christ is the altar, the offering and the priest"⁴⁶. In Cyril of Jerusalem we have a faint echo of the *Cherubicon*, before the fact⁴⁷:

I see a child who offers on earth a sacrifice according to the Law, but who receives in heaven the pious sacrifices of all; on the Cherubic throne sitting as is appropriate to God; Himself offered and purified, Himself offering and purifying all; He is the offering, He is the expiatory victim; it is Him who offers, it is Him who is offered, in the sacrifice for the world ...⁴⁸.

Maximus the Confessor writes similarly, but much later:

The Word of God once born in flesh is reborn always in the spirit of those who wish, because He wants it on account of His charity. He becomes a child, He takes form in them corporeally by the virtues and He would appear at such point that He knew that the person who received Him would be able to contain Him⁴⁹.

We seek to show, here, the echo of these texts retained in Byzantine art. In the twelfth-century church at Kurbinovo, there occurs in the lower zone of the apse, a representation of Christ as the *Amnos* or Eucharistic bread on the altar and under a ciborium (Fig. 7). At Dečani (Fig. 8), we find basically the same motif, but now Christ has become a miniaturized adult and is flanked by two angels functioning as deacons not unlike those found in the Etoimasia composition at Nerezi. Now in connection with this rather literal portrayal of Christ as *Amnos*, it is well to note that both St. John Chrysostom and John of Damascus were deeply concerned with the "image" (εἰκών) of Christ. The latter, in particular, has felicitously been called "the first theologian of the images" inasmuch as he is considered to have

⁴⁴ Danielou, p. 130.

⁴⁵ B. Botte, trans., *De sacramentis* (Sources chrétiennes, Les Éditions du Cerf: Paris 1949), p. 80; Danielou, p. 130.

⁴⁶ PG 68, pp. 599-604; Danielou, p. 130.

⁴⁷ The *Cherubicon* probably originated in the sixth century. For an up-to-date discussion, see D. E. Wysochansky's, *The Byzantine Divine Liturgy* (Wash., D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1970), p. 226.

⁴⁸ PG 140, pp. 165D-168A.

⁴⁹ PG 140, 164AB.

consumated the aim of Byzantine thought on holy images⁵⁰. He sought to prove, not without considerable effect upon ensuing generations, that images mirror *truth* as far as this is possible on earth⁵¹. And he was responsible for what became a kind of rule-of-thumb with respect to Byzantine icons; there can be images of Christ who is *the* Truth because of the Incarnation, specifically, "His divinity has assumed visible flesh"⁵². This last notion had also been anticipated by the Fathers of the so-called Quinisextum, and the eighty-second canon of this synod at Constantinople required that future representations of Christ depict Him in His humanity as opposed to the figure of the Lamb of God, pointed to by St. John the Baptist. It was stressed that, "Grace and Truth are to be preferred to figures and shadows, to typology and symbolism"⁵³.

The veritable zenith of liturgical compositions is witnessed in the very late stages of Byzantine painting, especially in Yugoslavia. The subject is still the Divine or Celestial Liturgy, but now its formal character resembles a conflation of the two previous scenes met with at Mistra and Kurbino. In the monastery church at Gračanica (c. 1321), sister church to the one at Dečani⁵⁴, we bear witness to the full-blown rendition of the Celestial Liturgy (Fig. 9) as it appears in the most sacred zone of the Church, the cupola. The prime image in the hierarchy of holy zones of the Byzantine Church, generally, is Christ-Pantocrator, seen here at Gračanica in its usual position in the center of the cupola.

What we find represented in this liturgy of heaven is, on the most immediate level of perception, a direct reflection of the liturgy as it takes place in the space of the Church proper. Therefore, let us turn to a description of the Divine Liturgy according to Nicholas Cabasilas, by R. M. French for a concise account of the liturgy as it would have occurred at Gračanica and as it is rendered in the heavenly zone. The first part of the three-part Divine Liturgy as celebrated by the Orthodox Church is the Prothesis which takes place in the chapel of that name. Mr. French writes of the Prothesis as follows:

This part of the service is the preparation of the bread and wine which are to be taken

⁵⁰ G. B. Ladner, "The Concept of the Image in the Greek Fathers and the Byzantine Iconographic Controversy", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* no. 7 (Cambridge 1953), p. 19.

⁵¹ Ladner, p. 19.

⁵² Ladner, p. 19.

⁵³ Ladner, 19; p. 32 n. 153 for the text of this canon. This text was apparently the *Leitwort* of the Iconophiles.

⁵⁴ Rice, p. 109.

to the holy table, and it is done with much more elaborate detail than in the West. The Prothesis is performed by the ministers alone ...⁵⁵.

After the clergy have said an office of preparation, vested, and washed their hands, with the prescribed prayers, they enter the Prothesis to prepare the offerings⁵⁶.

Having prepared the species from small loaves of bread:

The paten is covered with the Star or *asterisk* (a metal cross of which the ends of the arms are bent downwards, so that the veil is held up from touching the breads on the paten) and a veil. The chalice is also veiled: and over that a larger veil is used to cover them both.

The elements so prepared are censed and left on the table of the Prothesis. The priest enters the altar and stands before the holy table, and the Liturgy of the Catechumens begins⁵⁷.

Following the Liturgy of the Catechumens, we proceed to the major and final stage of the liturgy known as the Liturgy of the Faithful:

The Liturgy of the Faithful begins with two short litanies which precede the Great Entrance, opens with the words "All we who are the Faithful, again and again in peace let us beseech the Lord". The Great Entrance is the Procession which, ... brings the sacred vessels containing the prepared bread and wine from the Chapel of the Prothesis to the Altar. This is done with all possible solemnity and externally is the most noticeable part of the whole service⁵⁸.

Now the angels in the depiction at Gračanica are performing, as heavenly ministers, the same function as do those in the Great Entrance just described. Indeed, we see the Angelic Procession leaving the Prothesis (Fig. 10) and moving towards the main altar. Among this retinue we notice an angel bearing upon his head the *asterisk*-veiled paten and likewise, preceeding him, an angelic minister is transporting the veiled chalice (Fig. 11). In yet another part of the Procession, we observe two angels facing one another; one swings a censer while the other holds the already familiar *ripidion* or Greek liturgical fan which, in turn, bears an image of a six-winged Seraphim (Fig. 12)⁵⁹. Interestingly enough, we may take note of a repetition of this subject at Dečani, if not a mirroring of the composition (Fig. 13).

⁵⁵ J. M. Hussey and P. A. McNulty, trans., with an introduction by R. M. French, *Nicholas Cabasilas on the Divine Liturgy* (London 1960), p. 2.

⁵⁶ Hussey and McNulty, p. 3.

⁵⁷ Hussey and McNulty, p. 4.

⁵⁸ Hussey and McNulty, p. 9.

⁵⁹ D. Attwater, *A Catholic Dictionary* (1958), p. 434, contains the following account of the *ripidion*: "A flat metal disk representing a cherub's head surrounded by six wings, sometimes furnished with tiny bells mounted upright on a shaft in such a manner that it can be made to revolve; used in Byzantine, Armenian, Coptic, Maronic and Syriac rites. Its original purpose was to keep away flies from the holy gifts during the *Anaphora* ... It is the characteristic instrument of the deacon and is handed to him at ordination".

Looking to the depiction of the altar proper (Fig. 14), we encounter the Christ-Amnos upon the holy table draped with the *asterisk* and veil that was previously reserved for the paten and prepared bread. He is attended on both sides by angels vested as priests rather than as deacons, the latter being true of the angels in the Procession. This difference of vestments and their significance is glossed by Theodore of Mopsuestia. He describes the garments of the deacons (*orarion* and *stole*) as, "an apparel which is consonant with their office". They wear an outer garment which is white and taller than themselves, as is suitable to those who serve. A stole is placed on their left shoulders so that it hangs equally in front and in back, signifying a ministry of freedom as opposed to servitude, "as they are ministering unto things that lead to freedom". The stole that is worn on the neck so that it hangs on either side but not directly in front is reserved for those who are masters of themselves; the deacons wear it on their shoulders rather because they are appointed to serve⁶⁰. It is just this crossed-stole that is reserved for the masters or priests that we find being donned by the angels flanking the altar table at Gračanica. It is not to be forgotten, however, that Christ is the archpriest or celebrant for whom the chasuble is normally reserved. A Seraphim is present also, behind the altar table, and is seen holding two rectangular *ripidions* in either hand. We must connect the presence of this Seraphim with the Trisagion, a hymn of the Seraphim who eternally surround the throne of God, and which constitutes part of the solemn introduction to the Canon. Cyril of Jerusalem expresses it thus:

We speak of the Seraphim that Isaias saw in the Holy Spirit surrounding the throne of God and saying: 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord, the God of hosts'. This is why we recite this theology that is transmitted to us by Seraphim, so that we may take part in the hymn of praise with the hosts above the cosmos⁶¹.

It follows from what we have seen, here, that the Eucharistic sacrifice, as it occurs in the real space of the Church, is the sacrament of the Heavenly Liturgy. This is most aptly stated by Father Danielou: "As the altar is the figure of Christ perpetually offering Himself to the Father in the heavenly sanctuary, so the deacons represent the angels who surround this heavenly liturgy". Again: "As Christ Who offers Himself under the symbol of the

⁶⁰ Mingana, pp. 84-85; Reine, p. 71. The Byzantine priest traditionally dons the *stikharion*, *epitrahelion*, *zone*, *epimanika* and *phelonion*; all originating from ancient Roman garb. Cf. Wysochansky, pp. 116-118. Cf. also Simeon of Thessalonica (c. 1429), for the symbolic meanings of the vestments (PG 156, pp. 291-294).

⁶¹ PG 33, p. 114B; Danielou, p. 135.

altar, so the angels are really present in the background of the visible liturgy"⁶². Let us now acknowledge Narsai's explication of the subject:

In that hour let us put away from us anger and hatred, and let us see Jesus who is being led to death on our account. On the paten (*πίναξ*) and in the cup He goes forth with the deacons to suffer. The bread on the paten and the wine in the cup are a symbol of His death. A symbol of His these (the deacons) bear upon their hands; and when they have set it on the altar and covered it they typify His burial: not that these (the deacons) bear the image of the Jews, but (rather) of the watchers (i.e., angels) who were ministering to the passion of the Son. He was ministered to by angels at the time of His Passion, and the deacons attend His body which is suffering mystically.

All the priests who are in the sanctuary bear the image of the image of those apostles who met together at the sepulchre. The altar is the symbol of our Lord's tomb, without doubt; and the bread and wine are the body of our Lord which was embalmed and buried. The veil also which is over them presents a type of the stone sealed with the ring of the priests and the executioners (*questionarii*). And the deacons standing on this side and on that and brandishing (fans) are a symbol of the angels at the head and at the feet thereof (sc. of the tomb). And all the deacons who stand ministering before the altar depict a likeness of the angels that surrounded the tomb of our Lord⁶³.

Narsai's predecessor, Theodore of Mopsuestia, is the earliest attestation, treated here, seemingly in agreement with the liturgical doctrine discussed thus far. For example, Theodore has the following to say concerning the Procession of the Great Entrance, in which he does not differ from his contemporaries:

The deacons bring out the oblation of the sacred vessels, bread on the paten and wine in the chalice. Other deacons spread linens on the altar, and there the oblation is arranged. Then the appointed deacons stand up on both sides and fan the air above the oblation in order to protect it from insects. Everyone is silent, praying quietly and watching what is being done⁶⁴.

Likewise, Theodore speaks of the earthly liturgy as a visible rendering of the heavenly sacrifice:

As often, therefore, as the service of this awe-inspiring sacrifice is performed, which is clearly a likeness of heavenly things ... we must picture in our mind that we are dimly in heaven, and, through faith, draw in our imagination the image of heavenly things, while thinking that Christ who is in Heaven, and who died for us, rose and ascended into heaven and is now being immolated. In contemplating with our eyes, through faith, the facts that

⁶² Danielou, p. 131.

⁶³ Connolly, p. 4.

⁶⁴ Mingana, pp. 85-88. Examples of both a silver chalice and a liturgical fan (*ripidion*) such as the ones used in the Syrian rite (Figs. 15 and 16) are preserved from the sixth century in the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore and the Dumbarton Oaks Collection in Washington, D.C., respectively.

are now being re-enacted: that He is again dying, rising and ascending into heaven, we shall be led to the vision of the things that had taken place before-hand on our behalf⁶⁵.

When the offering which is about to be placed (on the altar) is brought out in the sacred vessels of the paten and the chalice, we must think that Christ our Lord is being led and brought to His Passion, not, however, by the Jews ... but by the invisible hosts of ministry, who are sent to us and who were also present when the passion of our Salvation was being accomplished ...

We must think, therefore, that the deacons who now carry the Eucharistic bread and bring it out for the sacrifice represent the image of the invisible hosts of ministry, with this difference, that, through their ministry and in remembrances, they do not send Christ our Lord to His salvation-giving Passion. When they bring out (the Eucharistic bread) they place it on the holy Altar, for the complete representation of the Passion so that we may think of Him on the altar, as if He were placed in the sepulchre, after having received His Passion⁶⁶.

We have now come to the place in our study where it is necessary to discuss the "uniqueness" of Theodore's Eucharistic doctrine with the intent of providing a final insight into the meaning of the Presence of Christ on the altar in the fresco at Gračanica. It would be incorrect to assign to Theodore, alone, the teaching of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, though his denial of symbolic interpretation is not to be outdone aside from its strong parallel to the eighty-second canon of the synod mentioned above. Noteworthy, is the fact that Cyril of Jerusalem also insisted on the Real Presence and in him we find a fuller expression of the doctrine than all the earlier writers as well as before Theodore's own treatment⁶⁷:

Since then He Himself has declared and said of the bread, 'This is My Body', who shall dare to doubt any longer? And since He has affirmed and said, 'This is My Blood', who shall even hesitate, saying, this is not His blood⁶⁸?

That what seems bread is not bread, though bread by taste, but the Body of Christ; and that what seems wine is not wine though the taste will have it so, but the Blood of Christ⁶⁹.

Contemplate therefore the bread and wine not as bare elements, for they are, according to the Lord's declaration, the Body and Blood of Christ; for though sense suggests this to thee, let faith establish thee. Judge not the matter from the taste, but from faith be fully assured without misgiving, that thou hast been vouchsafed the Body and Blood of Christ⁷⁰.

It was Cyril who first gave to this transformation the interpretation of a

⁶⁵ Mingana, pp. 83-85.

⁶⁶ Mingana, pp. 85-86.

⁶⁷ J. Quasten, *Patrology*, 3 (Utrecht/Antwerp: Spectrum Publishers, 1966), p. 375.

⁶⁸ P. Schaff and H. Wace, eds., *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (Buffalo and New York, 1886-1900; reprinted: Grand Rapids 1952ff), *Cat. Myst.* 4.1.

⁶⁹ Schaff and Wace, 4.9.

⁷⁰ Schaff and Wace, 4.6.



Fig. 1.

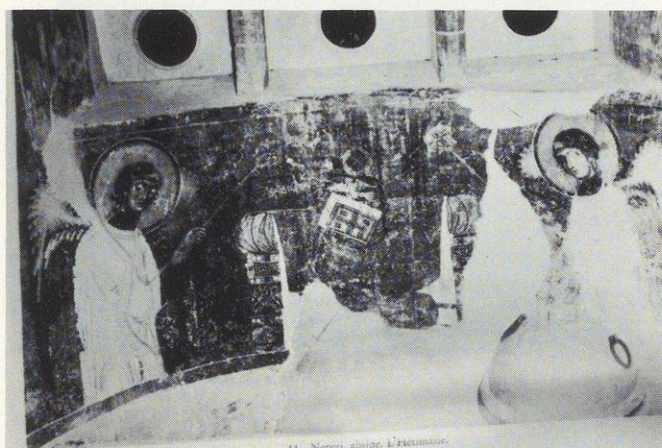


Fig. 2.

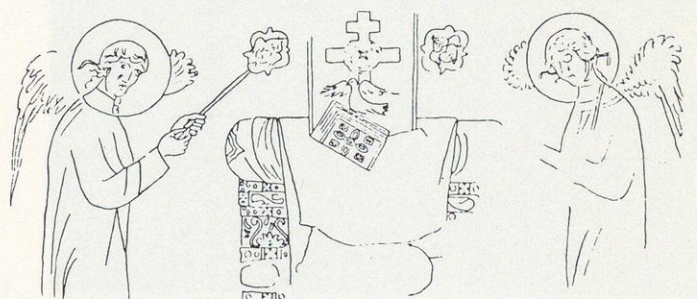


Fig. 3.

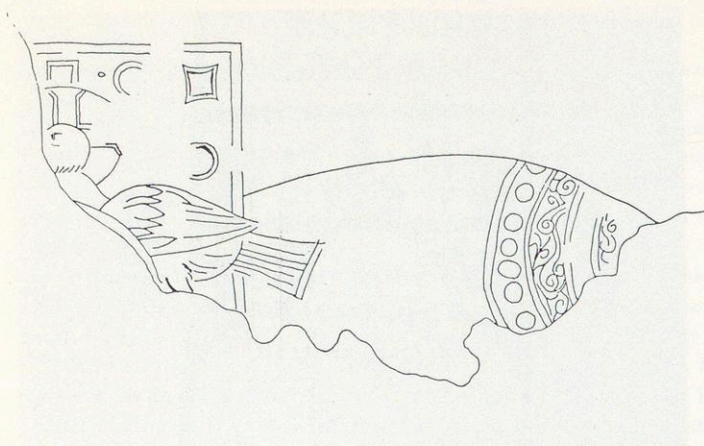


Fig. 4.

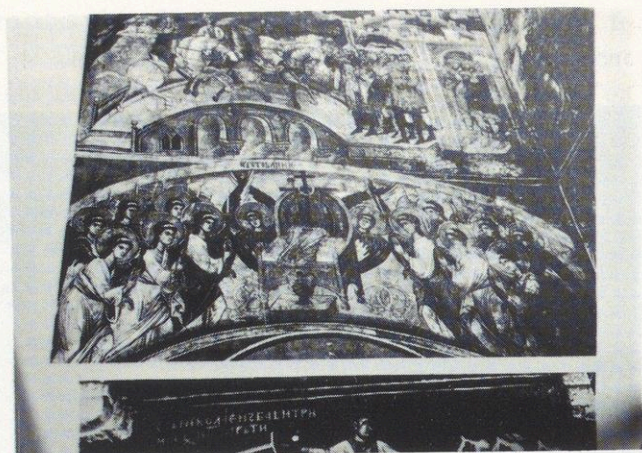


Fig. 5.

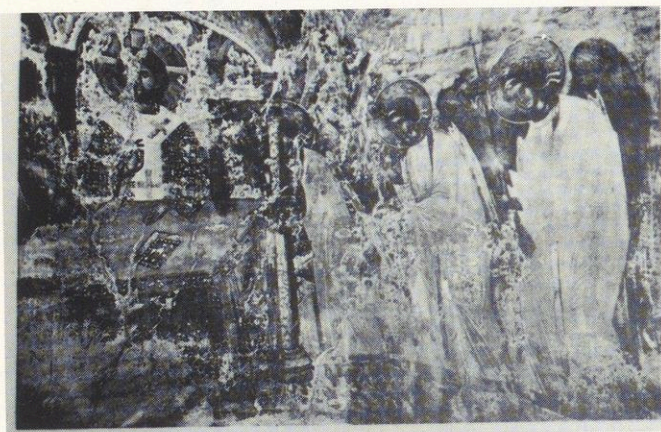


Fig. 6.

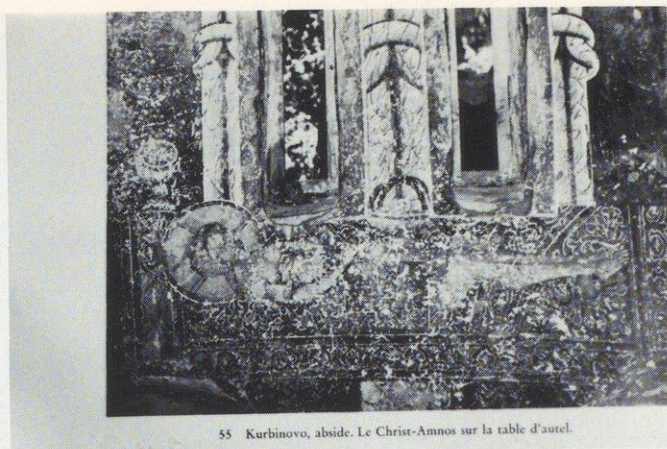


Fig. 7.

55 Kurbino, abside. Le Christ-Agnos sur la table d'autel.

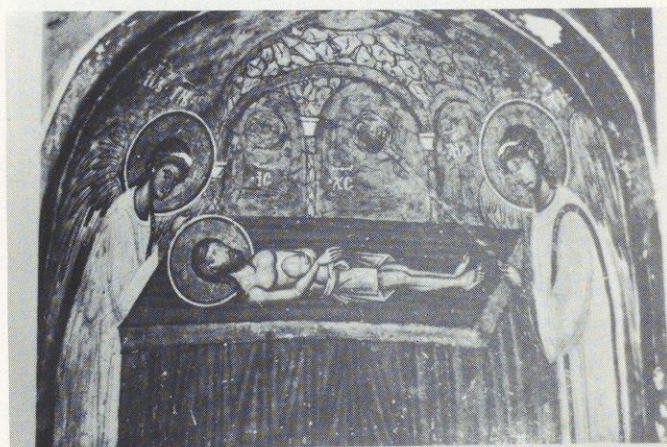


Fig. 8.

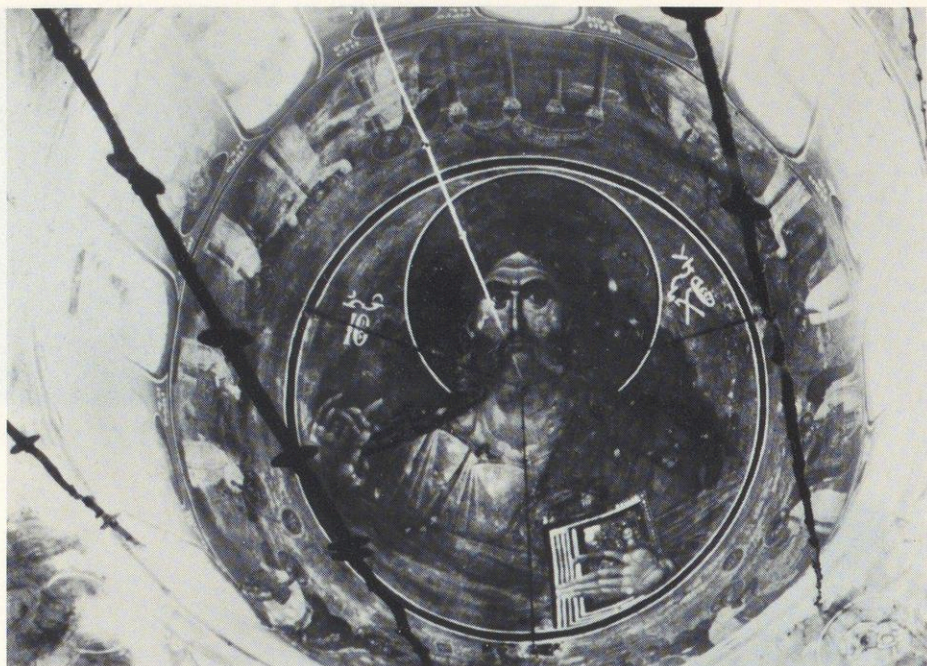


Fig. 9.



Fig. 10.



Fig. 11.



Fig. 12.

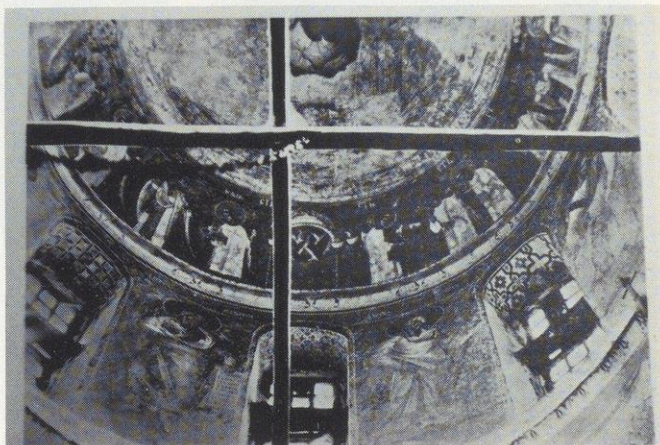


Fig. 13.



Fig. 14.

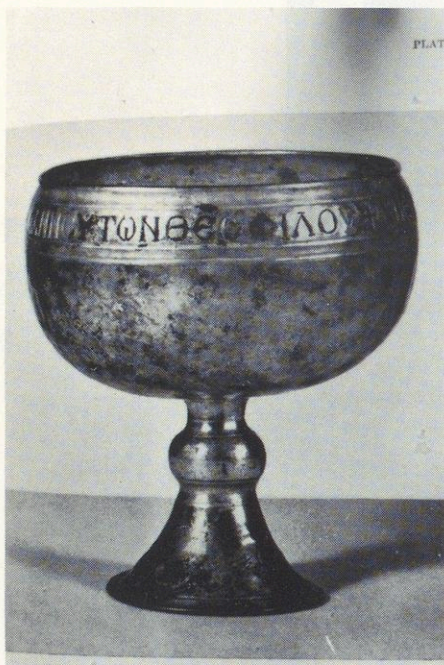


Fig. 15.

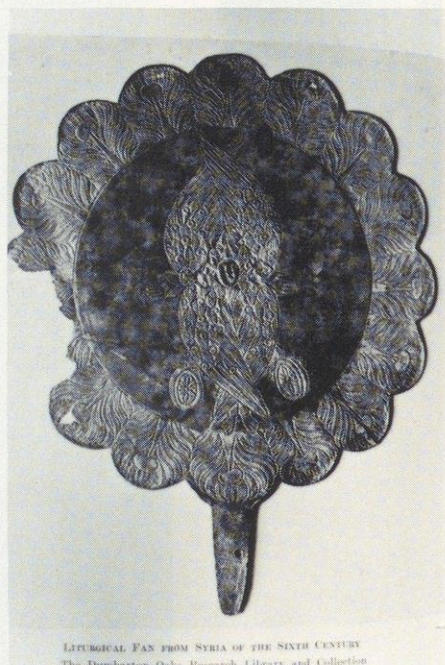


Fig. 16.

changing of the substances of the elements (*μεταβάλλεσθαι*) and thus the sense of a transsubstantiation⁷¹. He illustrates this by way of the transformation at Cana:

He once turned water into wine (*μεταβέβληκεν*), at Cana in Galilee, at His own will, and shall not we believe Him when He changes wine into blood⁷²?

With Theodore we find more than a mere capitulation of Cyril of Jerusalem in regard to the Real Presence:

It is with justice, therefore, that when He gave the bread He did not say: 'This is the symbol of My body', but: 'This My body': likewise when He gave the cup He did not say: 'This is the symbol of My blood', but: 'This is My blood', because He wished us to look upon the (elements) after their reception of grace and the coming of the Spirit, not according to their nature but to receive them as they are the body and the blood of Our Lord. We ought ... not to regard the elements merely as bread and cup, but as the body and blood of Christ Our Lord⁷³.

In the fragment of his Commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew, Theodore offers a parallel passage with doubtless meaning:

He (Christ) did not say: 'This is the symbol of My body and this of My blood', but: 'This is My body and My blood', teaching us not to consider the nature of the laid-out things, but through the accomplished giving of thanks they have been changed into the flesh and blood⁷⁴.

Hopefully, this examination has supplied sufficient evidence for stressing certain connections of Eastern patristic liturgical and theological writings with liturgical representations in late Byzantine painting. Just as it was not unusual to discover the Eastern Orthodox conception of the Divine Liturgy as "heaven on earth" and the identity of the earthly liturgy with its heavenly pattern, we ought not to be puzzled by its visual manifestations in the Byzantine Church, functioning not unlike the *vera ikon* already so familiar to us.

⁷¹ Quasten, *Patrology*, p. 375.

⁷² Schaff and Wace, 4,2.

⁷³ Mingana, p. 75.

⁷⁴ PG 66, p. 713.