

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Three Byzantine Commentaries on the Divine Liturgy: A Comparative Treatment\**

by Bishop Auxentios and  
Father James Thornton

The rich liturgical tradition of the Eastern Church has bequeathed to us three important commentaries on the Divine Liturgy, dating from the late fifth to the early eighth centuries: *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* of St. Dionysios [Dionysius] the Areopagite,<sup>1</sup> St. Maximos [Maximus] the Confessor's (†662) *Mystagogia*<sup>2</sup> and the *Ecclesiastical History and Mystical Contemplation* of St. Germanos [Germanus] (†733), Patriarch of Constantinople.<sup>3</sup> These commentaries merit a comparative treatment for several reasons. First, they fall between two watershed events for the Byzantine Empire: the Fourth and the Seventh Œcumenical Councils (or, more appropriately, "Synods"). Second, in terms of liturgical development *per se*, St. Dionysios' commentary comes at a time when the Divine Liturgy had been substantially codified in the Byzantine world, subsequent to the liturgical flowering of the fourth century,<sup>4</sup> while St. Germanos' work is a reasonable end-point, it being more than three hundred years before any other liturgical commentary, the eleventh-century *Protheoria* of Nicholas and Theodore of Andida, was forthcoming. Indeed, the first *opus* to have an impact on liturgical studies comparable to that of St. Germanos' commentary was not written until the fourteenth century: Nicholas Cabasilas' famous *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*. Finally, these three treatises are worthy of a comparative treatment because, it can be convincingly argued, the two later texts build on one another, constituting a developmental thesis of sorts—something obvious not only in their conceptual framework, but a point acknowledged by each writer himself. These acknowledged links between three popular Saints have made these texts a virtual trilogy in the minds of traditional Orthodox scholars.

While there is certainly sound scholarship concerning the de-

velopment of the Byzantine Liturgy to support the appropriateness of the commentaries that we have cited, some observers would argue that we have failed to add a fourth text, the *Catechetical Homilies* of Theodore of Mopsuestia (written between 392 and 428). Paul Meyendorff, in the introduction to his English text of St. Germanos' liturgical commentary,<sup>5</sup> feels that the trilogy of texts which we have chosen to examine is incomplete without reference to the Antiochian school of thought represented by Theodore of Mopsuestia. We shall make further comments on this claim in our subsequent consideration of St. Germanos' commentary, which, according to Meyendorff, was influenced by Theodore. At this point, awaiting our further comments, we shall simply question Meyendorff's argument and point out that Theodore of Mopsuestia does not necessarily correctly and validly represent either the orthodox Antiochian school or the thought of the authors of the three commentaries in question.

We are obliged to note, too, that the idea of a unified development of liturgical thought, such as that which we have suggested in our three texts by Sts. Dionysios, Maximos, and Germanos and accepted by traditional Orthodox scholars, is challenged by no minority of scholarly witnesses. As Robert Taft has noted, the liturgical commentaries "...are not among our most esteemed theological literature today."<sup>6</sup> Father Schmemmann, in his introductory text on liturgical theology, though a sometimes confusing treatise, leaves the reader unconfused with regard to his assessment of the liturgical commentaries—these commentaries, in his mind, paralleling a decline in Byzantine worship in general:

In the Byzantine epoch the emphasis was gradually transferred from the assembly of the Church to the exclusive and actually self-sufficient significance of the clergy as celebrants of the mystery. The Sacrament was celebrated on behalf of the people, for their sanctification—but the Sacrament ceased to be experienced as the very actualization of the people as the Church. ...No less typical was the gradual development in the explanation of the Eucharist as a 'sacramental mysteriological') re-presentation of Christ's life, an explanation which acquired tremendous popularity in Byzantium. This was the replacement of the ecclesiological understanding of the Eucharist by one that was representational and symbolical—the surest sign of a mysteriological reformation of liturgical piety.<sup>7</sup>

Paul Meyendorff characterizes Father Schmemmann's reaction as

one which "...sees all this literature in a very negative light"<sup>8</sup>—a mild understatement, indeed. And while his view is perhaps hyperbolic here, Father Schmemmann represents a negative scholarly tradition that we should address, though certainly without overstating this tradition to the point of suggesting that a general consensus of opinion among Orthodox theologians does not indeed exist.

Taft, acknowledging the pejorative context in which Byzantine liturgical commentaries are received, nonetheless assures us that:

...only at the risk of one's credibility as an objective student of cultural history could one summarily dismiss so resiliently durable a literary genre as the Byzantine liturgical commentary. And indeed recent research has already prepared the ground for a more nuanced evaluation of this material.<sup>9</sup>

We would argue more strongly, along with other Orthodox scholars (Father G. Florovsky, Professor I. Fountoules, Archimandrite Justin Popovich, *et al.*), that the Byzantine liturgical commentaries are not only a "durable literary genre," but that they touch at the heart of Orthodox spirituality. In response to Father Schmemmann and as an addendum to the negative scholarly tradition regarding the Byzantine liturgical commentaries, we would maintain that Byzantine worship is devoid of abrupt reforms and ruptures in spiritual development. Just as the writers of the three commentaries under examination in the present paper are bound together by their acknowledged sanctity as "holy men" or Saints within the conscience of the Church, so the Divine Liturgy (and we would stress here the word *divine*) about which they write is encompassed by the Divine *oikonomia* and should under no circumstances be submitted to mundane critical analysis. The notion of guided development underlies the Orthodox view of history and ecclesiastical evolution. Let us cite here the words of the Russian émigré theologian, Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky:

The present rule of Divine Services was already contained in the idea of the Divine Services of the first Christians in the same way that in the seed of a plant are already contained the forms of the plant's future growth up to the moment when it begins to bear mature fruits, or in the way that in the embryonic organism of a living creature its future form is already revealed. To the foreign eye, ...the fact that our rule has taken a static form is presented as a petrification, a fossilization; but for us, this represents the finality of the form of growth, the attainment

of the possible fullness and finality; and such finality of the form of development we observe also in Eastern Church iconography, in church architecture, in the interior appearance of the best churches, in the traditional melodies of church singing.<sup>10</sup>

As Father Pomazansky so succinctly states, it is implicit in the very understanding which Orthodox have of ecclesiastical reality that the liturgical commentaries of three Byzantine Saints should be part of a natural development of liturgical thought within the unified, providential evolution of the Divine Services—again, a unity of thought and worship acknowledged by St. Dionysios' successors, Sts. Maximos and Germanos, and shared by the Areopagite with his own contemporaries.

In our comparative study of the three commentaries of Sts. Dionysios, Maximos, and Germanos, it is not our purpose to provide a careful analysis of the texts, the scholarly apparatuses, or such. Our scope is far more limited. We will offer a cursory summary of each commentary, drawing from the text some unifying central theme or motif. More specifically, we will focus on each respective author's understanding of the primary purpose or function of the Divine Liturgy, in an attempt to reveal the further unity of these commentaries as a whole with regard to their common exposition of the purpose and function of Eastern Christian worship. Our treatment, we should note, will not be confined to the texts themselves; we will also have occasion to examine certain theses put forth in the secondary literature, noting the problems solved or created within this analytical body of material. And finally, as a conceptual framework and tool for analyzing both the primary and secondary texts, we will place special emphasis on the Essence-Energies distinction championed by St. Gregory Palamas, the fourteenth-century Archbishop of Thessalonica. It will be our final argument that this conceptual tool serves to bring the *corpus* of liturgical commentaries into a critical focus that helps us to understand precisely the commonality of purpose and function that we see in Orthodox liturgical worship.

*"The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy" of St. Dionysios the Areopagite.* Before examining St. Dionysios' text, we should perhaps address two important issues: that of who, in fact, wrote this text, and questions concerning the orthodoxy of the ideas set forth in it. Certainly one cannot adequately represent the impact of this commentary on the Byzantine commentators, without first understanding St. Dionysios as his contemporaries and the Byzantines understood him. Firstly, it should be pointed out that few Fathers in Byzantine times, with the possible exception of St. Photios—a man of such critical

perception that many credit him with the invention of the book review—, ever questioned that the teachings contained in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* were anything but those of St. Dionysios, the disciple of St. Paul and first Archbishop of Athens. So attuned is the modern ear to “Pseudo-Dionysios” that such a stark statement appears almost incomprehensible; we must, however, recognize it. As late as the fifteenth century, St. Symeon of Thessaloniki, in his treatment of the Divine Liturgy, accepts without question that the writer of *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* was indeed the disciple of St. Paul, converted by the Apostle of the Nations on the Areopagus. (Indeed, many contemporary Orthodox scholars, with the reservations which we shall subsequently cite, accept the teachings of this text as those of the true Areopagite.) This commentary, then, carried with it, for the Byzantines, the authority and sacred character that one might expect them to attach to such a preëminent figure. We must understand this if we are to grasp the subsequent respect shown to this text by St. Maximos especially.

How could the Byzantines have mistaken a text which we now know without question to date to the end of the fifth century as the work of a disciple of the Apostle Paul? How is it that a man of the genius of St. Photios the Great failed to show anything more than skepticism in the face of a document that could not have been a product of the epoch in which the alleged author flourished? And can we today actually believe that *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* genuinely contains the writings of the Areopagite? Writing in response to similar questions posed in a popular Orthodox journal, Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna gives us a view of St. Dionysios’ writings that deserves attention:

The fact that written texts of...[St. Dionysios’]...teachings post-date his life is taken as evidence that the real Areopagite did not write them. However, many Fathers have understood that, perhaps being part of oral tradition, they were written and composed after his repose.<sup>11</sup>

This is, of course, an elegantly simple answer to the problem of the Dionysian texts. At first glance, it seems too simple. But all too often modern historiography fails to heed the power and wide presence of oral transmission in textual traditions. Furthermore, even if a scholar is wont to dismiss such reasoning, it well may explain the ready acceptance of the Dionysian texts as the valid teachings of the Areopagite among the Byzantines. Transmission of a master’s teaching by word of mouth was ubiquitous in Byzantine monastic

communities, and it is not something wholly unknown among Orthodox traditionalists to this day. Moreover, it would certainly account for any anachronisms in the text and for what some commentators have called the text's often incoherent and inconsistent composition.

With regard to the orthodoxy of the teachings contained in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, once again we must exercise caution. It is not uncommon for scholars, for example, to find in St. Dionysios' treatise Monophysite thought and a style and philosophical methodology reminiscent of neo-Platonism. No less a sympathetic observer than Hans-Joachim Schulz says of St. Dionysios, after providing a rather accurate précis of his understanding of liturgical worship, that he employs a "neo-Platonic intellectual approach."<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, Schulz also points out that St. Dionysios may be guilty of nothing more than an extreme Alexandrian bent, noting his immersion into their theological tradition and his simultaneous loyalty to Chalcedon.<sup>13</sup> Along these lines, Archbishop Chrysostomos writes:

...Though...[St. Dionysios']...writings are extreme examples of the Alexandrian Patristic school, and set in language familiar to neo-Platonism, a careful analysis of neo-Platonism and Dionysian thought does not bear out what a cursory view has made *de rigueur* in scholarly circles. We might point out that many Orthodox Fathers are called neo-Platonists by those who misunderstand both the depth of Patristic philosophy and the intricate nature of neo-Platonism itself. As we have noted, St. Maximos knew and defended the works of St. Dionysios. So did St. Symeon of Thessaloniki and St. Gregory Palamas.<sup>14</sup>

Another Orthodox source, Vladimir Lossky, affirms without hesitation the orthodoxy of the Dionysian *corpus* for traditionalist Orthodox thinkers: "...The orthodoxy of the Areopagitic writings will never be questioned."<sup>15</sup>

In a fairly recent doctoral dissertation submitted to the Princeton Theological Seminary and soon to be published, Paul Rorem argues that, indeed, St. Dionysios should be regarded, not as a neo-Platonist or the writer of bizarre mystical texts, but as a Christian exegete. In a very thorough study of Biblical symbolism in St. Dionysios' writings, Rorem makes no judgment as to the accuracy of the Biblical interpretations put forth, but he vehemently and convincingly argues that St. Dionysios "...presented certain parts of his corpus as expositions of the biblical writings."<sup>16</sup> This correction of the prevailing notion of the intent of St. Dionysios—his constantly-

stated intent to form his teachings from and to remain loyal to Scriptural data—lends credence to another important point developed by Vladimir Lossky, a point which, without such a correction, might seem preposterous, given more popular attitudes towards the Dionysian *corpus*. Lossky argues that St. Dionysios is “...a Christian thinker disguised as a neo-Platonist, a theologian very much aware of his task, which was to conquer the ground held by neo-Platonism by becoming a master of its philosophical method.”<sup>17</sup> In support of this claim, Lossky presents a very compelling quotation from Father Ceslas Péras:

The position of Dionysios with regard to the thinkers of Greece is a relationship not of genetic dependence but of victorious opposition. He does not speak idly and there is no reason to doubt his sincerity when he mentions having been accused as a parricide for making impious use of the Hellenes against the Hellenes.<sup>18</sup>

The most important theme in St. Dionysios’ writings, one which is obvious in the very title of his commentary on the Divine Liturgy and the heavenly ranks, is the idea that Divine illumination is mediated *through* hierarchical relationships. This idea is more intricately developed in *The Celestial Hierarchy*, but is certainly a central feature in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. As Schulz observes:

According to Dionysius, the function of both the heavenly and the earthly [ecclesiastical] hierarchies is to mediate the divine illumination that radiates from the Most Holy Trinity, the source of all hierarchies, and descends through the ranks of the angelic world and the ordained priesthood to the believing people, and by means of this communication to lead the people to the knowledge of God.<sup>19</sup>

This system of hierarchical relationships is by no means an adventitious one. As Schulz notes, in St. Dionysios’ system, “...every ‘allegoresis’ (relating of one thing to ‘another’) is kept within bounds because in every case the meaning of the rite emerges from a ‘higher’ and never from ‘another’ irrelevant reality.”<sup>20</sup> We see, then, that the mystical bestowal of illumination on the Christian through the Divine Liturgy is, to be sure, correspondingly through the “mediation” of a clerical hierarchy. This mediation is not one of rank and privilege, separating the people from the clergy (a charge which we saw earlier in Schmemmann’s objection to the Byzantine liturgical commentaries); rather, the mediation of the clerical hier-

archy is determined by the authentic other-worldliness of the rite itself, by the power of God, and not by some human system of personal privilege—though natural human abilities are, of course, reflected in this relationship. As St. Dionysios observes:

Nevertheless, we must recall...that both that [the angelic] hierarchy and every other hierarchy we are now praising has but the one same power throughout the whole of its hierarchical functions, and that the chief of each sacred order himself receives an initiation in divine things according to his nature, aptitude, and rank. He is himself deified and makes his subjects, according to the merits [or, more accurately, “worth” or, in common usage, “ability”] of each, participants in the holy deification he has received from God himself. ...To speak truly, there is one to whom all the godlike aspire, but they do not partake of Him who is one and the same in the same manner, but as the divine ordinance assigns to each according to his merits.<sup>21</sup>

It is important to note that the Divine Liturgy has an allegorical meaning for St. Dionysios, though, as we have seen from his own words, this allegorical dimension rises above the mere anagogical and does, indeed, involve the human—even in such a way as to discriminate according to merit or ability—in a real participation in the divine. The ecclesiastical hierarchy, for example, is not simply an analog of the celestial or ontological hierarchy, but describes an actual hierarchy of relationships that dynamically communicate divine illumination to the individual soul. In terms of this spiritual reification of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, Father Taft, usually a reliable and deeply insightful observer, leads us away from the essence of the Dionysian understanding of the Liturgy when he comments that:

...in the Dionysian system...allegorical anagogy predominates: the liturgy is an allegory of the soul’s progress from the divisiveness of sin to the divine communion, through a process of purification, illumination, perfection imaged forth in the rites.<sup>22</sup>

Though the Liturgy is all of these things for St. Dionysios, at the highest level purification, illumination, and perfection are not so much imaged in the Liturgy as they are achieved, realized, and actualized within the spiritual power of the Liturgy itself, a power which we will define with greater care in our concluding remarks about the liturgical commentaries. Suffice it to say that St. Dionysios clearly states of the Eucharist, the very core of the Liturgy, that

“...it divinely accomplishes the gathering of the initiated into the One and completes his communion with God through the God-given gift of the perfecting mysteries.”<sup>23</sup>

One of the most important observations we can make about St. Dionysios’ understanding of the Liturgy is that it lacks an intentional appeal to a temporal-non-temporal interplay, whether in imagery or in mystical content, between salvation history (the Old Testamental exodus and the earthly life of Christ) and the spiritual realm. Taft expresses this lack in terms of the paucity of Biblical typology in the Dionysian liturgical text:

...There is little room for biblical typology. ...There is little reference to the earthly economy of Christ, and none whatever to His divine-human mediatorship, or to His saving death or resurrection. ...There is not a breath about ‘proclaiming the death of the Lord until He comes’ (I Cor. 11:26), or about Christ’s mediatorship, high priesthood, or self-oblation.<sup>24</sup>

Much to his credit, Father Taft does not overstate these observations about the lack of Biblical typology in St. Dionysios, noting that the Areopagite’s entire scheme is aimed at something other than such a typological model. As Paul Meyendorff so accurately states, in St. Dionysios “...the entire liturgy...is perceived as an ascent from the material to the spiritual, from the multiplicity of lower existence to the unity of the divine.”<sup>25</sup>

It would not be difficult to argue that St. Dionysios, rather than following an Origenistic or extreme Alexandrian course in his grasp of liturgical truth and thereby compromising the witness of Christ’s earthly mission—the common explication of his silence in things typological—, simply assumes the pivotal rôle of Christ’s earthly life, sacrifice, and death and Resurrection in the liturgical experience. This is an important rejoinder to which we must give serious attention. Would there be a Liturgy, the Eucharist, without these elements? And is not St. Dionysios’ silence on these matters not somewhat overstated? At least with regard to the Divine mediatorship and lordship of Christ, one could argue that the Dionysian hierarchies rest on the very efficacy of Christ’s Divine rulership:

Theology has taught us worshippers that Jesus Himself is the transcendently divine and supra-essential mind, the source and essence of all hierarchy, holiness, and divine operation, the divinely sovereign power who illumines the blessed beings superior to us in a manner at once more spiritual and clear, assim-

ilating them to His own light as far as possible.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, as is often the case with the Eastern Fathers, what is obvious and essential is often emphasized by silence. Is it not upon this witness of silence that Christian theology at least partially bases its Scriptural evidence for the Trinity if not, some would argue, the Divine Sonship of Christ Himself? As we shall see in St. Maximos' commentary, in which Biblical typology comes more to the surface than in St. Dionysios, the Confessor never questioned the absence of a profound knowledge of salvation history in his predecessor. Rather, he heeded the message of silence.

*The "Mystagogia" of St. Maximos.* St. Maximos the Confessor begins his commentary with unqualified praise of St. Dionysios the Areopagite and his singular contribution to an understanding of the Divine Liturgy in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*: Indeed, St. Maximos speaks as though one cannot touch on the sacred commentary, enlightened as St. Dionysios was by the Spirit, stating that he would not dare tread where his predecessor has already walked:

Ἄλλ' ἐπειδὴ τῷ παναγίῳ καὶ ὄντως Θεοφάντορι Διονυσίῳ τῷ Ἀρεοπαγίτῃ ἐν τῇ περὶ τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς Ἱεραρχίας πραγματείᾳ, καὶ τὰ κατὰ τὴν ἱεράν τῆς ἁγίας συνάξεως τελετὴν ἀξίως τῆς αὐτοῦ μεγαλονοίας τεθεώρηται σύμβολα· ἰστέον, ὡς οὐ τὰ αὐτὰ νῦν ὁ λόγος διεξέρχεται, οὔτε διὰ τῶν αὐτῶν ἐκείνῳ προέρχεται. Τολμηρὸν γὰρ καὶ αὔθαδες καὶ ἀπονοίας ἐγγύς [sic], ἐγχειρεῖν τοῖς ἐκείνου πειραῖσθαι, τὸν μῆτε χωρεῖν αὐτὸν ἢ νοεῖν δυνάμενον· καὶ ὡς ἴδια προκομίζειν, τὰ ἐνθέως ἐκείνῳ μόνῳ διὰ τοῦ Πνεύματος φανερωθέντα μυστήρια....<sup>27</sup>

Despite this disclaimer, St. Maximos does, in fact, build his liturgical commentary on many of the observations of St. Dionysios. He retains the sacramental symbolism of St. Dionysios and certainly shares with him an understanding of the salvific force of the liturgical rite itself. Explicit in his writing, too, is the specific notion of deification and ascent to and union with God through the Divine Liturgy, joining him in perfect harmony with the views of the Areopagite. In fact, as we see in the following passages, many of his observations parallel the very style and modes of expression found in St. Dionysios:

In this light [the illumination of the soul accomplished and symbolized in the Divine Liturgy], the soul now equal in dignity with the holy angels, having received the luminous principles which are accessible to creation in regard to divinity and hav-

ing learned to praise in concert with them without keeping silent the one Godhead in a triple cry, is brought to the adoption of similar likeness by grace. By this, in having God through prayer as its mystical and only Father by grace, the soul will center on the oneness of his hidden being by a distraction from all things, and it will experience or rather know divine things all the more as it does not want to be its own nor able to be recognized from or by itself or anyone else's but only all of God's who takes it up becomingly and fittingly as only he can, penetrating it completely without passion and deifying all of it and transforming it unchangeably to himself.<sup>28</sup>

In discussing the Liturgy in terms of sacramental symbolism, St. Maximos concentrates on what he calls the "particular" meaning of the Liturgy (its meaning ἰδικῶς), emphasizing its significance for each individual, for the particular soul. This emphasis on the individual is expressed by the Confessor rather explicitly in the following comment on the Grace of the Divine Liturgy: "This Grace transforms and changes each person who is found there [in the Liturgy] and in fact remolds him in proportion to what is more divine in him and leads him to what is revealed through the mysteries which are celebrated."<sup>29</sup> It is interesting to note that St. Maximos, like St. Dionysios, also speaks of individual differences in the spiritual ascent ("...in proportion to what is more divine in him") (proportional worthiness or ability [ἀξιᾶ], in St. Dionysios), though with far less attention to the rigid hierarchical structures of St. Dionysios.

It is in his conception of the Divine Liturgy γενικῶς, or in a general way, that St. Maximos moves away from the anagogical process by which the individual soul participates in the Divine Liturgy, thereby greatly expanding St. Dionysios' conceptual apparatus. While he does not place striking emphasis on the Biblical typology by which St. Germanos will later characterize the Divine Liturgy, he nonetheless contends that, in a general way, the Divine Liturgy represents salvation history. Paul Meyendorff summarizes this aspect of St. Maximos' liturgical theology as follows:

...Maximos does pay attention to the economy of salvation, for he also sees the liturgy as representing all salvation history, from the incarnation to the final consummation in the world to come. His approach remains essentially Alexandrian, however, in that he pays little attention to the earthly events of the economy of salvation and emphasizes the incarnation of Christ, to the virtual exclusion of the paschal mystery.<sup>30</sup>

Though these observations are generally accurate, we might argue that the accusation set forth here by Meyendorff against St. Maximos with regard to an underemphasis on the economy of salvation in his liturgical theology is far too strong and unequivocal in tone. How, indeed, could any writer on the Liturgy be accused of virtually excluding the Paschal mystery? After all, the Divine Liturgy itself rests upon the mystery of the Resurrection. Once more, as in our defense of St. Dionysios against similar charges, we must invoke the “witness of silence” that characterizes so much of the apophatic theology of the Eastern Church, before which the writings of St. Maximos might enjoy a less severe treatment than that proffered by Meyendorff. The kind of focus on the Divine Liturgy as a “salvation event” is not to be found in an overstated manner in Byzantine liturgical commentaries. Putting aside expectations of such emphasis and heeding the witness of silence, one comes to a far more balanced view of these commentaries. Such is particularly true in assessing St. Maximos’ attention to the economy of salvation in understanding the Divine Liturgy. Let us examine, for example, a very fair assessment of St. Maximos’ views by Taft:

So for Maximus the liturgy represents not just the *earthly* economy of Christ, but *all* salvation history from incarnation to final consummation. Though basically a disciple of Denys, his originality is seen in the far greater emphasis he puts on the historical economy.<sup>31</sup>

Schulz has also made a rather profound observation about St. Maximos’ divergence from the sacramental symbolic model of St. Dionysios. He notes that there is an integration of the spiritual with the worldly and a subtle move away from the rigid hierarchism of St. Dionysios’ theology. In St. Maximos’ discussion of the Liturgy, Schulz quite rightly sees an interplay between the worldly and the spiritual which is expressed in a worldly-spiritual bipolarity and in a sense of reciprocity:

The relation of the church space to the realities represented—the cosmos, humanity, and sacred scripture—and the description of this relation by the words ‘image,’ ‘likeness,’ and ‘similarity,’ show that unlike Dionysius, Maximus makes no effort to develop a *graduated* symbolism of a sacramental or quasi-sacramental kind that *unmistakably ascends* from the reality of the church to the reality of heaven. We discern his intention rather in the constant emphasis on a ‘heavenly-earthly’ bipolarity within the church, cosmos, humanity, and so on, which sym-

bolize each other (only) because of this polarity, and this in a *reciprocal* way.<sup>32</sup>

“*The Ecclesiastical History and Mystical Contemplation*” of St. Germanos of Constantinople. The short commentary of St. Germanos of Constantinople is one of the most fascinating of Byzantine documents, if simply because it has been so widely used by commentators on the Liturgy. In fact, it was included in the text of the first *printed* edition of the Divine Liturgy. It enjoys great popularity today because it is thought to represent a synthesis of the Alexandrian interpretation of the Divine Liturgy (represented by St. Dionysios the Areopagite and St. Maximos the Confessor) and the Antiochian school. Next to the mystical texts of the Alexandrians, presumably permeated by hidden Origenistic presuppositions and an obfuscating emphasis on the ascended Christ over and against the Christ of salvation history, some liturgical scholars juxtapose the writings of Patriarch Germanos. In him, they find a fresh “synthesis” of the Alexandrian school with deliberate attempts to portray the Liturgy as it relates to the life and works of Christ, to an historical dimension, drawn from the more literal exegetical school of the Antiochian Fathers. Acknowledging both St. Germanos’ debt to the Alexandrians and his roots in a new Antiochian-inspired view of the Divine Liturgy, Paul Meyendorff comments that:

Germanus keeps much of this earlier Byzantine tradition, modifying it somewhat, and adds a more Antiochene perspective, far more historicizing and focusing on the human ministry of Christ. This is apparent from the very beginning of his commentary: ‘The Church is an earthly heaven in which the supercelestial God dwells and walks about. It represents the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Christ’ (Ch. 1). Immediately we are presented with this dual approach. As his readers would have been more familiar with the more traditional, eschatological approach, Germanus spends more time on the newer, less familiar interpretation.<sup>33</sup>

St. Germanos’ use of the symbolism of Sts. Dionysios and Maximos is obvious, as Meyendorff notes. Even liturgical vestments take on mystical symbolism, the Priests, for example, representing the Cherubim and their *epitrachelia* the wings of the Angels, in keeping with what Meyendorff has called earlier Byzantine images.<sup>34</sup> Thus, even though quotations from these two Fathers in Germanos’ text are assumed to be later interpolations, St. Germanos’ clearly sees

the Divine Liturgy as a counterpart of the Heavenly Liturgy. He avoids a hierarchical model in putting forth this traditional view, but the Heavenly Liturgy is always and everywhere the prototype for his comments on the earthly Liturgy.

With regard to the Liturgy as a symbol and reenactment of Christ's life on earth, Meyendorff clearly identifies this aspect of St. Germanos' thought in his direct quotation from the Saint. There is no doubt that, with an emphasis not to be found in other Byzantine commentators, St. Germanos blends the life of Christ into his interpretation of the Divine Liturgy. That he saw this emphasis, however, as something new, or as a departure from earlier commentaries, as Meyendorff suggests, is a claim about which we should be careful. St. Germanos makes no such claim for his attention to these issues and, as we have pointed out earlier, an exegetical fervor is not absent in St. Dionysios the Areopagite, too, who states that his commentaries are nothing more than Biblical interpretations. That St. Germanos is more literal about the matter of the earthly mission of Christ and its rôle in the Liturgy is not an indication of some shift in a conceptual understanding of the Liturgy, but may simply represent a genre of interpretation or treatment. One suspects that an overly hasty identification of St. Germanos with the Antiochian school of exegesis by some contemporary observers accounts more for this perceived shift in understanding than any intentional attempt at re-interpretation by the pious Patriarch himself. Indeed we have a clue to this in contemporary thought about Theodore of Mopsuestia.

Many scholars feel that St. Germanos' commentary on the Divine Liturgy was influenced by the liturgical theology of Theodore of Mopsuestia, who not only placed full emphasis, in his interpretations, on the historical image of the life of Christ in the Liturgy and on Old and New Testamental typologies, but who supposedly championed the Antiochian school of typological interpretation. For Mopsuestia, the entire Liturgy becomes a reenactment of the Passion of Christ, placing tremendous importance on "the man Christ." As Meyendorff writes of Theodore's view of the Liturgy, "...Here we see the man Christ Who, now risen, serves as our High Priest before the throne of God, but Who is still a man."<sup>35</sup> This hyperbolic anthropocentricity at times escapes them and, in their haste to draw parallels between St. Germanos and Theodore of Mopsuestia, they forget two important issues. Firstly, St. Germanos certainly does not use Biblical typologies, as we have demonstrated, without balancing them against the symbolic interpretations of Sts. Dionysios and Maximos. Nor does he overemphasize the historicity of the Liturgy

or the humanity of Christ.

Secondly, St. Germanos remains silent about Theodore of Mopsuestia in his commentary. And this he does for a reason. He understood Theodore to be a heretic, condemned, as he was, by the Fifth Œcumenical Synod. And the reason for his condemnation? Nestorianism: an improper understanding of the nature of Christ—an unbalanced view of His humanity. There are, of course, those who have argued that Theodore of Mopsuestia was unjustly condemned by the Church. Such a view is not, however, universally held. As Archbishop Chrysostomos has noted, the Orthodox Church certainly does not consider the Œcumenical Synods in and of themselves infallible. Their infallibility lies in their very survival, through the ages, in the conscience of the Church. If anyone were justified in doubting the condemnation of Theodore of Mopsuestia, it would have been those contemporary to him. Centuries later, in a spirit of reform, to suppose that the enduring, historical conscience of the Church has contained within itself error—and false condemnation at that—is to question Providence and the guidance and presence of the Holy Spirit which traditional Orthodox theology attributes to Holy Tradition. His Eminence continues:

Many modern reappraisals of this figure are the result of such naive and unsophisticated scholarship that one is embarrassed to criticize it, even though it has a certain vogue reputation in some theological circles. Father John Romanides, in an article which almost ridicules this poor scholarship, puts to rest any question whatever about Theodore's guilt. He was without doubt a Nestorian and wholly worthy of absolute condemnation. (See Romanides, Rev. John S., "Highlights in the Debate over Theodore of Mopsuestia's Christology and Some Suggestions for a Fresh Approach," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, V [2], pp. 140-185.)<sup>36</sup>

In the brilliant article by Father Romanides, cited in Archbishop Chrysostomos' foregoing comments, we find evidence of a more empirical kind with regard to the condemnation of Theodore of Mopsuestia. In a stinging and compelling analysis of contemporary reassessments of Theodore's theology, Romanides observes that:

The opinion generally prevails that Theodore's Christology is based on an inductive historical-biblical method which begins by recognizing the full humanity of Christ and tries from this point to solve the problem of the unity of subject in Christ. This is clearly a myth. Theodore, like many others of the Oriental

Diocese, is a moralistic metaphysician who applies concepts and definitions to the divine nature and in advance determines what is for God possible and what is not. According to his doctrine of divine relations it is impossible for God to unite Himself by nature to human nature. His starting point is not the human nature of Christ, nor is it the biblical witness as history, but rather a definition and limitation of divine nature in terms of a necessity distinguished from will. It is exactly because of this transcendental starting point that Theodore's doctrine of the Trinity has no room for any real distinction between hypostasis and essence. In Cappadocian and Alexandrian Triadology, the reality of the Divine Hypostases as distinguished from the divine essence is grounded in the belief that the Second Hypostasis of the Trinity really and truly lived and willed and suffered as a real and complete man and that He really and truly was resurrected in the flesh to become the first-born from the dead. For Theodore there is no need to distinguish between the hypostasis of the Logos and the nature of the Logos because the one person effected by the union of natures not only is not the Only-Begotten Son of God..., but also *cannot* be a hypostasis of the Trinity. ...The dogmatic decisions of the Fifth Council are no different from those of Chalcedon and any claim that Theodore passes the test of chalcedonian Christology is unrealistic.<sup>37</sup>

No less an authority than the late Protopresbyter Georges Florovsky, in discussing the distinctions and similarities between the Alexandrian and Antiochian exegetical schools, also places Theodore of Mopsuestia in a very negative light:

Furthest from the Alexandrian tradition was Theodore of Mopsuestia, but as a result of his views on theology and his particular brand of humanism, his Biblical exegesis is almost devoid of religious significance. It was in his extreme doctrines that the Antiochene school was condemned.<sup>38</sup>

A further observation should be made about the Alexandrian-Antiochian synthesis that we ostensibly find in the liturgical commentary of St. Germanos. Not only does it seem unwise to imagine that Theodore of Mopsuestia, in his liturgical understanding (or misunderstanding, as the case may be), represents the orthodox school of Antioch, or that he provides a link between the earlier liturgical commentaries and St. Germanos' treatise on the Liturgy, but it seems equally incautious to accept *prima facie* the idea that the Alexandrian and Antiochian schools were at such great odds in their

Patristic theology. The somewhat artificial polarity assumed by certain modern scholars is not necessarily representative of the differences that separate the two schools, and certainly it does not reflect the similarities in approach that more thorough students find between the two Patristic traditions. Let us once again turn to the words of Father Florovsky:

Both Alexandrians and Antiochenes alike tried to grasp and interpret the 'inner' or 'spiritual' significance of Scripture. Their disagreement was limited to their methods and did not extend to their goals. This divergence in methodology can be partially explained by the difference in the philological traditions from which they developed. The distinction and struggle between 'allegorical' and 'historical-grammatical' approaches can be observed even among the ancient interpreters of classical texts. However, this divergence is primarily connected with the difference in the way that the religious significance of history was perceived by them. ...Their ultimate goal always remained the discovery and explanation of the meaning of Scripture, whether that meaning was found in the word or in the event.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, when we identify St. Germanos with an exegetical tradition or school, thereby suggesting that his predecessors in liturgical commentary, Sts. Dionysios and Maximos, were not exegetical in their approach, we run the risk of misunderstanding exegesis or of limiting its definition. As we have already said, an argument can be made that St. Dionysios, at least in terms of stated intent, is an exegete. More importantly, we can argue that the content of exegesis relates not only to a confessional affirmation or principle, but also testifies to a spiritual dynamic. That is, exegesis is not simply the study of the word, as Father Florovsky has noted; rather, it encompasses, we might argue, the extraction of a spiritual power, a dynamic and living spiritual "fact," as it were, from the text itself. This is analogous to an Orthodox understanding of Patristics. One not only discovers arguments and ideas in Patristic texts, but within the very study of arguments and ideas he finds a "Patristic consensus," the "mind" of the Fathers, that is contained in and yet supersedes mere study itself. To exegesis one might also apply such an understanding. And in that understanding, there is to be found a unity between our three liturgical commentators that rises above methodology, emphasis, and style.

*The Unified Witness of the Byzantine Liturgical Commentaries.* Within the three important Byzantine commentaries on the Divine

Liturgy that we have examined in this paper, we find a unity of witness—with regard to the purpose and function of the Liturgy—which transcends occasional divergences in style, tone, and thematic emphasis in each individual treatise. Notwithstanding various contemporary scholarly traditions which find significant differences between the two earlier texts of Sts. Dionysios and Maximos and the later text of St. Germanos, we have failed to find ample evidence to support such a charge. There are indeed differences in emphasis in all of the texts, so that St. Maximos and St. Germanos are prone to use Biblical typology more often than St. Dionysios. The tone of these later writers, too, is more consistent with that of Patristic writers who develop their arguments within the framework of Divine economy or along the lines of salvation history. And Sts. Dionysios and Maximos write in a style that is reminiscent of the more profound “mystical” Fathers, inviting images of Origen—though evoking, just as validly, parallels with the mystery language of St. Gregory of Nyssa—, while there is a certain historical dryness to some of St. Germanos’ passages. Yet, in the final analysis, not a single feature of any particular treatise is missing in another. If St. Germanos emphasizes the historical dimensions of the salvation experience in the Divine Liturgy, he does so without ignoring the mystical symbolism present in the other two texts. If it can be said that St. Dionysios understates the historical-Biblical dimension of the Divine Liturgy, he does so without wholly disregarding that dimension. It is indeed implicit in his subject, as we have argued. Indeed, even where the course of centuries prompts differences in style among the three writers, the unity of Patristic expression is nonetheless everywhere present in their common piety. If one text rings forth with one note and another text with yet a different note, there is always a consonance and symphony in their message.

With regard to the purpose and function of the Divine Liturgy, whatever the divergences in theme, style, and tone among the commentaries, each writer sees the Liturgy as a means by which the individual is brought into direct contact with the Divine; the explicit purpose of the Liturgy lies in that encounter, whether it be in terms of an hierarchical ascent, as in St. Dionysios, or in the bipolar interaction, as in the two latter commentators, between God and man. The greater function of the Liturgy is that of offering the means by which the individual soul is deified, whether that *θέωσις* is couched in terms that apply only to the individual soul, as in the Dionysian *corpus*, or the individual soul in consort with the whole people of God, as we see in the imagery of Sts. Maximos and Germanos. With

regard to the Divine Liturgy as a genuine encounter with the Divine, its preëminent purpose, and as a real participation in the Divine (deification), its function *par excellence*, there is no disagreement whatever in our three commentaries.

One might wonder why we find such unity in these commentaries, while some scholarship finds such a wealth of thematic and theological differences in the very same texts. Firstly, we must say that these three liturgical commentaries are short, written in a very difficult Greek (especially so in the case of St. Maximos the Confessor, who writes in a particularly eloquent style), and, quite frankly, open to abuse. Much is read into the texts which simply is not there. Many differences and divergences in the text are more likely the result of attribution than careful interpretation—attribution engendered more by what some scholars take *into* the text, because of certain historiographical or theological presuppositions, than by what they take *from* it. Secondly, as we observed earlier in our considerations of each particular text, within Orthodox theological thought there operates a certain principle of commonality in belief. What has stood the test of time persists in the *corpus* of Orthodox literature because it belongs to that which is accepted into the consciousness of the Church [ἡ γενικὴ συνείδησις τῆς ἐκκλησίας], the φρόνημα τῶν Πατέρων, the “mind” of the Fathers, that “golden thread,” as Father Florovsky calls it, that unites the Orthodox Fathers of today with their predecessors in the past in a oneness of thought and faith. One is thus more reticent, in the context of Orthodox scholarship, to find differences and opposition in enduring Patristic texts than he might be in a more general scholarly context.

Thirdly, we would contend that many scholars find opposition and divergences in these three liturgical commentaries simply because they do not embrace the unifying theological assumption upon which each of them is based. Not only do the authors of these commentaries share a common understanding of the purpose and function of the Divine Liturgy, but they also understand the whole Divine economy in a unity of Orthodox theological thought that scholars do not always grasp. We have contended that the function of the Divine Liturgy is to provide for the deification of the human being: θέωσις. Because this central theological notion is usually associated with the Palamite controversy of the fourteenth century, many non-Orthodox scholars believe, and quite wrongly so, that St. Gregory Palamas’ ideas and concepts are innovative and unique to his epoch. They thus fail to take seriously Palamas’ own statements to the effect that he is simply reflecting a long Patristic tradition of

the Eastern Church. They ignore the theme of θεοποίησις in the Early Church Fathers and fail to acknowledge the obvious significance of constant and clear references to deification in the Byzantine liturgical texts. In fact, θέωσις as sought by the hesychastic aspirants of the fourteenth century is the same deification to which one attains in the course of liturgical growth as set forth by the liturgical commentators.

Once we come to realize the nexus between Palamite thought and the theology of the commentators on the Divine Liturgy, we can expand our thinking about the interplay between the Divine and the worldly in the liturgical sphere. As in the theology of deification proper, where a sharp distinction is made between the transcendent Divine (the Essence of God) and the fully Divine, but limited Energies of God, the liturgical commentators deal continually with a balance between participation in God's Energies and the spiritual vision of the unknowable God in the awesome aspects of worship. It is this tension which modern observers often mistake for a certain ambiguity in liturgical commentaries or which they misinterpret, as it is differentially expressed or manifested in each liturgical commentator, as a divergence in thought or theological conceptualization. This is a very subtle point and one which can only be fully appreciated by those who take with sufficient seriousness the implications of deification language in the liturgical commentators and who understand the tradition of Essence-Energies distinctions, though in varying nomenclatures, in the whole of the Eastern Christian Patristic witness, if not Old and New Testamental texts, as some Eastern Fathers would claim.

It behooves us to explain our understanding of the motivations which underlie the observations of some heterodox scholars, who see in the Byzantine commentaries a liturgical image at odds with that of most Orthodox scholars. Certainly such scholars are not unable to grasp the points which we have put forth in the context of Orthodox scholarship. And equally certainly, in an age of cordial exchange between religious traditions that encourages an objective view of the religious and theological presumptions of others, they foster no sectarian resistance to looking at traditional views of the Divine Liturgy in the Eastern Church. Rather, we think that there is a conceptual misunderstanding of the Orthodox view of the unity of Patristic thought about the Liturgy. If, to be sure, one courts the idea that the Divine Liturgy is integrally entwined with the salvation process and that liturgical rites and acts contain within themselves revealed spiritual powers—if, indeed, the earthly Liturgy participates

in and reflects the reality of the Heavenly Liturgy—, it becomes impossible to speak of liturgical reform in the contemporary sense, of “creating presence,” or of the liturgical experimentation that we see in much of the Western Church. The acceptance of our understanding of Liturgy obviates much of what is today popular liturgical study for Western Christians.

\*This article originally appeared in *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, Vol. XXXII (1987). Reprinted by permission.

---

#### Notes

1. *Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite: The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. Trans. Thomas L. Campbell. Washington, D.C., 1981. Cf. the Greek text, *PG*, III, 369-584. [Hereafter, “Dionysius.”]

2. In *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*. Trans. George C. Berthold. New York, 1985, pp. 181-225. Cf. the Greek text, *PG*, XCI, 657-718. [Hereafter, “Maximus.”]

3. St. Germanus of Constantinople, *On the Divine Liturgy*. Trans. [with Greek parallel text] Paul Meyendorff. Crestwood, NY, 1984. [Hereafter, “Germanus.”]

4. With regard to the precursors of the genre of liturgical commentators, see the thorough study of René Bornert, *Les Commentaires Byzantins de la Divine Liturgie du VII<sup>e</sup> au XV<sup>e</sup> Siècle*. Paris, 1966. Father Bornert, while a careful student of these precursors, fails to see the nexus between St. Dionysios and the later liturgical commentators. He includes the Dionysian text among the Alexandrian catechetical treatises that formed the liturgical commentaries. This curious view of St. Dionysios’ work is shared by Alexander Schmemmann in his essay, “Symbols and Symbolism in the Orthodox Liturgy,” in *Orthodox Theology and Diakonia*, Brookline, MA, 1981, pp. 94-95. Fathers Bornert and Schmemmann do not reflect the opinions of most Orthodox writers, and certainly their separation of St. Dionysios’ text from the liturgical commentary is not within the mainstream scholarly convention. We might, however, suggest that Father Bornert was not so much making the conceptual distinction understood by Schmemmann, as he was separating the work of Dionysios from what he saw as distinctly “Byzantine” commentaries *vis-à-vis* an historical convention.

5. See note 3.

6. Robert Taft, S.J., “The Liturgy of the Great Church: An Initial Synthesis of Structure and Interpretation on the Eve of Iconoclasm.” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 34-35 (1980-1981), p. 45. [Hereafter, “Taft, ‘Great Church.’”]

7. Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*. Trans. Asheleigh E. Moorhouse. London, 1966, pp. 99-100.

8. Germanus, p. 39.

9. Taft, “Great Church,” p. 45.

10. Protosphyter Michael Pomazansky, “The Liturgical Theology of Fr. A. Schmemmann.” *The Orthodox Word*, Nov.-Dec., 1970, n.p.

11. Bishop Chrysostomos of Oreoi, "Questions and Answer about the Orthodox Faith." *Orthodox Tradition*, IV (2), p. 60. [Hereafter, "Chrysostomos, 'Questions.'"]

12. Hans-Joachim Schulz, *The Byzantine Liturgy*. New York, 1986, p. 27. [Hereafter, "Schulz."]

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28 *passim*.

14. Chrysostomos, "Questions," p. 60.

15. Vladimir Lossky, *The Vision of God*. Trans. Asheleigh Moorhouse. Bedfordshire, England, 1963, p. 99. [Hereafter, "Lossky."]

16. Paul E. Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols in Pseudo-Dionysius*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, 1980, Princeton Theological Seminary.

17. Lossky, pp. 99-100.

18. This passage is cited by Lossky from Ceslas Péras, "Denys le Mystique et la Theomachia." *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques*, 1932, p. 62.

19. Schulz, p. 25. We should point out that Schulz does not properly understand, here, "knowledge of God" as it is understood in the mystical theology of the Orthodox Church. Knowledge of God refers to participation in God, not to a contemplative cognitive or even supra-cognitive knowledge of God. Knowledge of God, in Orthodox mystical thought, comes forth out of a spiritual epistemology, in which participation in the Divine transforms one's "way of knowing." Indeed, it might be more proper to speak of this new knowing as "knowledge *in* God," rather than "knowledge of God." In this sense, one can see why the common translation of the Greek θεωρία, an aspect of mystical knowledge, as "contemplation" is wholly inappropriate and misleading.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

21. Dionysius, pp. 18-19.

22. Taft, "Great Church," p. 61.

23. Dionysius, p. 33.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

25. Germanus, p. 27.

26. Dionysius, p. 17.

27. *PG*, XCI, 660-661.

28. Maximus, p. 206.

29. *Ibid.*

30. Germanus, p. 38.

31. Taft, "Great Church," p. 71.

32. Schulz, p. 44.

33. Germanus, pp. 42-43.

34. An interesting commentary on the mystical significance of Orthodox liturgical vesture, drawing at times from St. Germanos' commentary, can be found in Archimandrite [now Archbishop] Chrysostomos, *Orthodox Liturgical Dress*, Brookline, MA, 1981. There are also, in passing, some insightful comments about the traditional mystical view of the Liturgy developed by the early Byzantine commentators.

35. Germanus, pp. 32-33.

36. Chrysostomos, "Questions," IV (3), pp. 33-34.

37. Rev. John S. Romanides, "Highlights in the Debate over Theodore of Mopsuestia's Christology and Some Suggestions for a Fresh Approach." *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, V (2), pp. 184-185.

38. Georges Florovsky, *The Eastern Fathers of the Fourth Century*. Belmont, MA, 1987, p. 262.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 261-262.