

THE LITURGICAL THEOLOGY OF NICOLAS CABASILAS

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Chapter I

ECCLESIOLOGY

As all the oriental liturgists, Nicolas Cabasilas always considers the nature of the Church as primarily and essentially a priestly vocation since she participates in the priestly mission of her divine Bridegroom (cf. Exod. 18,6; I Pet. 2,5,9; Rev. 5,10). In the eucharistic service, the whole Church is associated with the sacrifice of Christ, united essentially with His flesh and blood, οὐ γὰρ ὀνόματος ἐνταῦθα κοινωνία μόνον, ἢ ἀναλογία ὁμοιότητος, ἀλλὰ πράγματος ταυτότης, and transformed in the very body of Christ, who is her Heart and Head (cf. I Cor. 12,27). «When she partakes of them (the holy mysteries)», our liturgist writes, «she does not transform them into the human body, as we do with ordinary food, but she is changed into them, for the higher and divine element overcomes the earthly one. When iron is placed in the fire, it becomes fire; it does not, however, give the fire the properties of iron; and just as when we see white-hot iron it seems to be fire and not metal, since all the characteristics of the iron have been destroyed by the action of the fire, so, if one could see the Church of Christ insofar as she is united to Him and shares in His sacred body, one would see nothing other than the body of the Lord»¹. Commenting on St. Paul's expression: «Ye are the body of Christ and members in particular» (1

1. cf. St. John of Damascus, In Sabb. Sanc. PG. 96, 637C-649AB; Def. Orth. 4,13. PG 94, 1149AB, Div. Lit. Int., Ch. 38. PG, 150, 452C-53AB. cf. Ch. 36, 448-49AB.

Cor. 12,27), he adds: «If he called Christ the head and us the members, it was not that he might express... our complete subjection to him... but to demonstrate a fact—to wit, that from henceforth the faithful, through the blood of Christ, would live in Christ, truly dependent on that head and clothed with that body» (I Cor. 12, 27).

Through the intermediary of the consecrated priest, the Church is the high priest of the new faith and intercedes for mankind *in Christo* before the throne of God². The worship of the Church, therefore, constitutes a liturgical and sacramental representation of the sacrifice on the Cross and of the heavenly priesthood of Jesus, in which the two aspects of His ministry (earthly and heavenly) are commemorated and portrayed. That is why our theologian not only compares but identifies symbolically «*the ieron thysiasterion*» with Christ himself, the victim and priest, the offerer and offering, *ιερεύς, ιερεῖον καὶ θυσιαστήριον*³ with Christ as the blessed heart, *μακαρία καρδιά*⁴. Inseparable eternally from her⁵, Christ is revealed to us by the permanent inhabitation in the Church of the Holy Spirit, which sanctifies because of the spouting source of this Heart. All here is grounded on an immense symphony dominated by the major theme: the crucified love and victor of death⁶. It should be remembered here that «Eastern theology never thinks of the Church apart from Christ and from the Holy Spirit. And yet this is in no way due to a feeble development of the doctrine of the Church. It signifies, rather, that for Eastern ecclesiology 'the ecclesiastical being as such' is something extremely complex; it is not of this world though taken from the midst of this world; it exists in the world and for the world. The Church cannot, therefore, be reduced purely and simply to her 'earthly aspect' and to her 'human implications' without abandoning her true nature which distinguishes her from every other human society»⁷.

Cabasilas, acknowledged also as a liturgist and faithful to the Eastern Patristic tradition, drawing an analogy between the creation of man and the reconstitution of our nature by Christ in the creation of His Church, writes: «He does not create anew out of the same matter

2. Nicolas Cabasilas, *Divinae Liturgiae Interpretatio*, Ch. 37, 452C cf. Ch. 30, 436BC.

3. *Ibid.*, Ch. 30, PG 150, 436 BCf. cf. Ch. 18, col. 499BC.

4. *De vita in Christo*, IV, 596CDf.

5. *Ibid.*, Ch. 18, 409BC.

6. *Divinae Liturgiae Interpretatio*, ch. I, PG 150, 369.

7. Vl. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London, 1957), p. 175.

with which He created in the beginning. Then, He made use of the dust of the earth, today He calls upon His own flesh. He restores life to us not by forming anew a vital principle which He formerly maintained in the natural order, but by shedding His blood in the hearts of communicants that He may cause life to spring up in Him. Of old He breathed a breath of life, now He imparts to us His own Spirit⁸.

In a chapter offered to the dedication of the Christian Church and which forms an important part of the *De VITA IN CHRISTO*⁹, Cabasilas more clearly describes this mystical identity of Christ with the altar as well as with the intimate relationship between the «visible» sacred tabernacle and that of man, who is by faith its artisan and model. Also, all the actions of the officiating bishop ritually identified with Christ Himself, the hierarchic representative of the whole humanity, have no other purpose than to establish the house of prayer, οἶκος προσευχῆς, the temple of God, ναὸς Θεοῦ, «on which the eyes of God remain open during day and night»¹⁰, and to transform a stone into an altar. Since *there* is to be found the ontological center, the heart of the Christian temple's flesh in imitation of its living Chief. In order to succeed in this task «that exceeds the natural forces», the bishop should strive to achieve within him the same *metamorphosis*; he should collect his thoughts to «introduce God into his soul and make his own heart an altar». Cabasilas expressively insists on this point by writing: «Ἐπεὶ δὲ ὁ κοινὸς Δεσπότης τῶν δούλων οὐκ ἐξ ἐπιτάγματος προϋνοήθη, οὐδ' ἔπεμψε τοὺς ἐπιμελησομένους, ἀλλ' αὐτὸς ἦλθε, καὶ πάντων δι' ὧν ἔδει σώσωσιν αὐτουργὸς ἦν, τούτου χάριν τὸν ἱεράρχην τὸν ἐκείνου δεικνύοντα μαθητὴν αὐτοχειρὶα πηγνύοναι τὸ θυσιαστήριον εἰκὸς ἦν...»¹¹. The washing of the holy table, its preliminary unction with aromatic perfumes and pure wine, represents the offering of human skill. It symbolizes the role of man in the work of his proper sanctification. Then follows the deposition of the relics in the interior of the holy table with their particular «chrism». All these actions performed simultaneously reproduce the stages of our spiritual ascension. Parallelism, profoundly significant, is of particular interest. Cabasilas explains how the bishop, «because he himself is the temple of God», represents a model of the altar, «since only the human nature among all the visible creatures

8. Cabasilas, *De vita in Christo*, IV, PG 150, 617AB. Comp. *Divinae Liturgiae Interpretatio*, Ch. 37. PG 150, 452AB.

9. Book V, PG 150, 628D, 629Df., 635-37.

10. Cabasilas, *De vita in Christo*, V, PG 150. 628Df. 629Df. 635-637.

11. Cabasilas, *De vita in Christo*, V, 629Df.

can be truly an altar; and all the creations of man should have only one purpose: the reproduction of this image and type»¹².

Here we see a revelative profession of a true faith which casts forward plenty of light on the whole Cabasilian anthropology that is always Theocentric and especially Christocentric. In the cult of martyrs, particularly, we find the profound Cabasilian picture of the mystical identification of the Church with Christ Himself and her sacerdotal character. Before depositing the «sacred bones» on the holy table, the officiating bishop anoints them. Cabasilas also insists on the inner unity of Christ with these relics. They perform the real temple of God and the true altar, «thysiasterion», whereas the Church building, ὁ χειροποιητός is the imitation of that temple τᾶληθοῦς μίμημα.

He further explains the cause of such power and effectiveness of the sacred relics by saying that «nothing other can be so intimately united with the eucharistic Christ than the martyrs who have shared in His body and spirit and His kind of death; having all in common». Μαρτύρων γὰρ συγγενέστερον τοῖς τοῦ Χριστοῦ μυστηρίοις οὐδέν, οἷς πρὸς αὐτὸν τὸν Χριστὸν καὶ σῶμα καὶ πνεῦμα καὶ θανάτου σχῆμα καὶ πάντα κοινά, ὃς καὶ ζῶσι συνῆν καὶ τελευτώντων τοὺς νεκροὺς οὐκ ἀπολιμπάνει, ἀλλὰ ταῖς ψυχαῖς ἠνωμένος ἔστιν ὅπως καὶ τῇ κωφῇ ταύτῃ σύνεστι καὶ ἀναμέμικται κόνει, καὶ εἶπου τῶν ὀρωμένων τούτων ἔστιν εὑρεῖν τὸν Σωτῆρα καὶ κατασχεῖν, ἐπὶ τῶν ὀστέων ἔξεστι τούτων...»¹³.

This is a capital passage of basic significance for its many aspects: first of all it clearly explains the essential reason — the ontological reason — of the cult of relics; a cult founded on the presumed belief of the real presence in them of the Holy Spirit»... καὶ τελευτώντων τοὺς νεκροὺς οὐκ ἀπολιμπάνει... καὶ τῇ κωφῇ ταύτῃ σύνεστι καὶ ἀναμέμικται κόνει».

On the other hand, this is the profound reason of their ultimate and perfect union with the object of their ineffable *philtron*, ἀρρητον φίλτρον¹⁴, and inconceivable *eros*, ἔρωσ ὑπερφυής¹⁵, with Christ Himself. This union is not only spiritual but also bodily, since Christ divinized the whole human nature by assuming flesh¹⁶. In regard to *myron* (pneumatophore chrismatic unction) he writes, «It is this Holy Spirit that descended on the Apostles at Pentecost and baptized them in fire, in-

12. Ibid.

13. Cabasilas, De vita in Christo, V, PG 150, 636BCf.

14. Cabasilas, De vita in Christo, I, 516Df, 517AB. II, 560CD.

15. Ibid., II, 560 CD. IV, 672D. 677ABC. 680Af. VII, 693Df. 700Df. 720AB.

16. Cabasilas, De vita in Christo, I, 505BC, 508AB, VI, 560CD.

fusing in them the true love of Christ». This is an affirmation of deep illumination, since it established the causal bond between the Holy Spirit and the «acting» love, the igneous - aesthetic nature of the latter anticipating its own origin¹⁷.

Another basic characteristic of the Church, developed theologically by our liturgist, is its holiness: community of Saints, *κοινωνία ἁγίων*¹⁸. Commenting on the priest's saying in the liturgy, «Holy things to the holy», he writes:

«Those whom the priest calls holy are not only those who have attained perfection (*thriamvouvoua ecclesia*), but those also who are striving for it without having yet obtained it. Nothing prevents them from being sanctified by partaking of the holy mysteries, and from this point of view, being saints. It is in this sense that the whole Church is called holy and that the Apostle, writing to the Christian people as a whole, says to them: 'Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling.' (Hebr. 3,1) The faithful are called saints because of the holy thing of which they partake, because of Him whose body and blood they receive. Members of His body, flesh of His flesh, and bone of His bone, as long as we remain united to Him and preserve our connection with Him, we live by holiness, drawing to ourselves, through the holy mysteries, the sanctity which comes from that head and that heart. But if we should cut ourselves off, if we should separate ourselves from the unity of this most holy body, we partake of the holy mysteries in vain, for life cannot flow into dead and amputated limbs»¹⁹.

Nicolas Cabasilas follows, obviously, step by step the patristic tradition of the distinction of the heavenly Church, *θριαμβεύουσα Ἐκκλησία*, and the earthly, *στρατευομένη*. The two are especially connected through the holy eucharist.

17. Ibid., (II, 560CD. VI, 627D. 677ABC. 680Af. VII, 693Df. 700Df. 720AB) III, 573AB.

18. Ibid., Div. Lit. Int., ch. 38, 452-53AB; ch. 20, 412-13A.

19. Cabasilas, *Divinae Liturgiae Interpretatio*, Ch. 36, 448-49AB.

Both these two aspects of the nature of the Church are extensively developed in chapters XLII-L²⁰ of the *Divinae Liturgiae Interpretatio* where the effectiveness of the liturgical prayers and particularly of the eucharist on the living as well as on the departed members of the Church is carefully studied. It should be noted that there is no allusion to the theory of «purgatorium», foreign to the Eastern Patristic Tradition.

Speaking of the twofold nature of the Church, we should mention that «in the history of Christian dogma all the Christological heresies» come to life anew and reappear with reference to the Church. Thus, there arises a Nestorian ecclesiology, the error of those who would divide the Church into distinct beings: on the one hand the heavenly and invisible Church, alone true and absolute; on the other hand, the earthly Church (or rather «the Churches»), imperfect and relative, wandering in the shadows, human societies seeking to draw near her transcendent perfection. A monophysite ecclesiology, on the contrary, manifests itself in a desire to see the Church as essentially a divine being, whose every detail is sacred, wherein everything is imposed with a character of divine necessity, wherein nothing can be changed or modified because human freedom, «synergy», the cooperation of man with God, have no place within this hieratic organism from which the human side is excluded; this is a magic of salvation operative through sacraments and rites faithfully carried out. These two ecclesiological heresies of opposite tendency appeared almost at the same time during the course of the seventeenth century. The first was represented by Cyril Loukaris, Patriarch of Constantinople, the second developed in Russia in the form of the schism (raskol) known as that of the «Old Believers»²¹.

The intimate nature of the Church, moreover, is not merely an expectation of the Kingdom of God; she is a foreshadowing of that Kingdom already in existence now, on earth. By her very nature the Church is placed between the two «aeons» — the old «aeon» of sin, under the domination of the powers of evil in which we are still waiting and striving for the final victory of God, and the new «aeon» when God's Kingdom shall be consummated. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that His Kingdom is already present especially in the eucharistic life of the Church on earth: «the Kingdom itself is none other than this chalice and this

20. PG 150, 457B-485A.

21. L o s k y, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p. 186.

bread»²². On the other hand, «she has already shared in the heritage of this Kingdom in actual fact, through the thousands of her members (especially the martyrs — the first members of the mystical body of Christ; whom she has sent to their heavenly home and whom St. Paul calls 'the first born,' who are written in heaven...» (Hebr. 12, 23)²³.

If, finally, we consider Nicolas Cabasilas' image of the union of the Church with Christ — the image of the union of the bride and bridegroom — it would appear identical with that of St. Paul: Christ is the head of His body, head of the Church, in the same sense in which the husband is the head of the single, unique body of the man and woman in marriage—«οἱ δύο εἰς σάρκα μίαν (Eph. 5, 31). In this mysterious union—τὸ μυστήριον τοῦτο μέγα ἐστὶν — ὁ γάμος ὁ πολυύμνητος, καθ' ὃν ὁ πανάγιος νυμφίος τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν ὡς παρθένον ἄγεται νύμφην»²⁴, the one body, the nature common to two persons, receives the hypostasis of the bridegroom: the Church is «the Church of Christ». But she does not cease to be the other person in this union, subjected to the bridegroom, distinct from Him as bride. In the Song of Songs, as in other passages of the Old Testament, which according to the Fathers, express the union of Christ and His Church under the image of fleshly union, the bride necessarily possesses personal characteristics: she is a person, loved by the bridegroom and reciprocating His love. The Church in her own being is considered, then, as the bride of Christ and would appear as a multitude of human persons. That is why in their commentaries on the Song of Songs, the Fathers see in the figure of the bride not only the Church, but also every person entering into union with God. Our theologian, faithful to this tradition of the Fathers, sees in the figure of the bride the chorus of Christ, τὸν περὶ αὐτὸν χορὸν; His followers as the mystical members who are nourished through His flesh and blood of the holy eucharist²⁵.

Chapter II

WORSHIP

The heavenly dimension of the Orthodox liturgy springs from the very nature of the Church. This celestial dimension is expressed with

22. Cabasilas, *Divinae Liturgiae Interpretatio*, Ch. 43, 461CD.

23. Cabasilas, *Divinae Liturgiae Interpretatio*, Ch. 40, PG 150, 388CD.

24. Cabasilas, *De vita in Christo*, IV, 593Df.

25. Cabasilas, *De vita in Christo*, IV, 593Df. 596AB.

remarkable constancy throughout the Orthodox liturgy. The Fathers of the Church insisted upon this. «According to the traditional conception of the liturgy», writes M. Lot-Borodine, «this solemn office is only the earthly tradition of the office celebrated in heaven by the angelic powers, led by the high priest after the order of Melchisedec, hence the name *theia* (divine) *liturgia*»²⁶. The liturgy recreates for us the earthly life of the Word «Incarnate» and His ascension in glory. It is not restricted, like the Latin mass, to the accomplishment of the non-bloody sacrifice, preceded by appropriate readings and prayers²⁷.

In the Orthodox liturgy everything, the sign of the cross, holy water, the words of the Scripture, the chants, the ornaments, and the incense and lighted candles are all symbols in the realistic sense of the word, i.e., material signs of the presence of the spiritual world. Ritual symbolism is more than a representation addressed to the senses in order to remind us of spiritual realities. The word «ἀνάμνησις» does not mean only commemoration; rather it denotes an initiation into a mystery, the revelation of a reality which is always present in the Church. It is in this sense that Nicolas Cabasilas speaks of liturgical symbols. There is a good deal of ingenious symbolism in his classical work entitled ΕΡΜΗΝΕΙΑ ΤΗΣ ΘΕΙΑΣ ΛΕΙΤΟΥΡΓΙΑΣ²⁸. For Cabasilas, the Liturgy from the beginning to the end constitutes a memory of the earthly life of Christ: «Do this in remembrance of me». (Luke 22, 19). These words, according to Cabasilas, apply not only to the bread, but to the whole Liturgy; the priest begins with this commemoration and ends with it. For it was after our Lord had fully completed the mystery that He pronounced the words: «Do this in remembrance of me»²⁹.

The Liturgy presents to us the «whole scheme of the work of redemption»; «it is like a unique portrayal of a single body, which is the work of the Saviour; it places before us the several members of this body, from beginning to end, in their order and harmony. That is why the psalmody as well as the opening chants, as well as the preparation of the offerings, *proskomidi*, symbolize the first period of the scheme of redemption. That which comes after the psalms — readings from the Holy Scripture—symbolizes the second period. What precedes the sacrifice re-

26. M. Lot-Borodine, Un maître de la spiritualité Byzantine au XIV^e siècle, Nicolas Cabasilas (Paris, 1959) p. 23.

27. L. Bouyer, Les catholiques Occidentaux et la Liturgie Byzantine, in Dieu Vivant, No. 24, p. 22.

28. Cabasilas, Divinae Liturgiae Interpretatio.

29. Ibid., Ch. 7, 384A.

calls what happened before the Lord's death: His coming on earth, His first appearance and His perfect manifestation. The sacrifice commemorates the death of Christ, His resurrection and His ascension, up to the moment when He transforms through the Priest the precious gifts into His actual body. The consecration which follows, the act of sacrifice commemorates the promise of the Father, i.e., the descent of the Spirit upon the Apostles, the conversion of the nations through the Apostles, and the divine society³⁰. Not only the chants and readings but the very actions themselves of the priest throughout the Liturgy have this part of play; each has its own immediate purpose and usefulness. But at the same time each symbolizes some part of the works of Christ, His deeds, or His sufferings, or the various stages of His earthly life³¹. So the rite of the *prothesis* (the preparation of the eucharistic elements) is made to symbolize the Incarnation. The placing of the *asterisk* over the bread symbolizes the visit of the Magi³².

The Liturgy of the Catechumens, or the Liturgy of the Word, opens with the Trinitarian benediction: «Blessed be the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit... This is so because it was through the Incarnation of the Word that mankind first learned of the Trinitarian God. Therefore, the mystery which is being performed, the mystagogy, is centered in the Incarnation of the Lord and from the very beginning, the Trinity must shine forth, προσλάμπειν, and be proclaimed, καὶ κηρύττεσθαι³³. In the Liturgy of the Catechumens, the prophetic texts — the antiphons which precede the Little Entrance — represent the first stage of Christ's coming. Although present on earth, He was not known to the multitudes... that is to say, the period before John the Baptist. These chants represent the time before John the Baptist and are taken from the prophetic writings; for this reason, during this time the offerings, which are still symbols of Christ, are not shown to the faithful but are kept at the Prothesis and remain covered³⁴. The Little Entrance itself and the showing of the Gospel-book symbolize «the obscure and imperfect manifestation of the Lord, τὴν ἀμυδρὰν ἔτι καὶ ἀτελεῆ, when He began to appear to the multitudes». The actual opening of the book represents «His more perfect manifestation during which He mingled

30. Cabasilas, Div. Lit. Int., Ch. 1, 372ABf. Comp. Ch. 16, 404B. Ch. 37, 452AB.

31. Ibid., Comp. Ch. 1, 372Df; 16,404.

32. Ibid., Ch. 11, 389CD.

33. Ibid., Ch. 12, 392Df.

34. Cabasilas, Divinae Liturgiae Interpretatio, Ch. 18, 408CD.

with the crowd and made Himself known». As for the Grand Entrance—the Offertory Procession, «this ceremony signifies the last and most perfect manifestation of Christ, when He rode into the Holy City on the back of an ass, escorted by a cheering crowd (Palm Sunday)»³⁵. Each of these Entrances serves a practical purpose: the one that the Gospel may be read and the other that the sacrifice may be performed³⁶. «There are, however, certain ceremonies which fulfill no practical purpose, but have only a figurative meaning, such as the action of piercing the Host, symbolic of the pattern of the crucifixion or again the fact that the metal instrument used for this perforation is shaped like a lance; there is also the ceremony, which takes place near the end, of mixing a little warm water with the wine»³⁷.

There is, obviously, in the whole liturgical theology of Nicolas Cabasilas a gradual and unfolding manifestation of Christ's redemptive work and revelation. The Liturgy of the Catechumens «is a slow but constant movement of the souls upward towards heaven»³⁸, culminating in the solemn procession with the Gospel and the singing of the *Trisagion* (Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy and Immortal, have mercy upon us). As Cabasilas explains: «The Church which is the assembly of those who believe and profess the Trinity and Unity of God, played its part... she wished to show, on the one hand, the harmony of the Old and New Testaments, for the *Hagios* (Holy) which is repeated trice, is the angelic acclamation (Isa. 6,3. Rev. 4,8); the words «Mighty and Immortal God» are those of the blessed David, who exclaims: «My soul thirsts for the strong and living God», (Psalm 42, 2) and on the other hand, that angels and men form one Church, a single choir as a result of Christ's coming who was both heavenly and earthly, ὑπερουράνιος καὶ ἐπίγειος. That is why we sing this hymn after the ostension and entry (procession) of the Gospel, thus proclaiming that by coming among us, Christ has placed us with the angels and established us amid the angelic choirs»³⁹. The *Trisagion* is a Christian form of the chant «Holy, Holy, Holy» sung by the cherubim in Isaiah's vision (Isaiah 6,3) and by the four beasts in the Book of Revelation (Rev. 4,8)⁴⁰.

35. Ibid., Ch. 1, 372Df; 16,404; 22,416Cdf. 24, 420BCf.

36. Ibid.

37. Cabasilas, *Divinae Liturgiae Interpretatio*, Comp. Ch. 37, 452AB.

38. M. Lot-Borodine, *Op. Cit.*, p. 33.

39. Cabasilas, *Divinae Liturgiae Interpretatio*, Ch. 20, 412-413A.

40. According to Byzantine Tradition, the *Trisagion* hymn (Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy and Immortal) was revealed to the Christians in Constantinople

The Liturgy refers many times to the singing of the *Sanctus*, which stresses the direct participation of the angels in the mystery of the Eucharist and the unity of the Church—militant and triumphant—centered in the glorified Christ (represented on the altar). The angels, surrounding the divine throne and continually praising God, are invisibly present at the Church's Liturgy with all the members of the Church in heaven, gathered around the lamb⁴¹. That is why during the *Prothesis*, the officiating priest speaks not only of the living and the dead, but also of the members of the Church Triumphant, of the Virgin Mary, the Saints and Angels, thus commemorating the participation of the whole Church in the heavenly sacrifice symbolized upon the altar⁴².

As the solemn moment of the «mysteries» approaches, the priest invokes secretly God's mercy and implores Him to make us worthy to stand before His holy altar without reproach or condemnation, for the altar before which the priest stands is the seat of God's glory, though He is invisible to our eyes. In Cabasilas' day, this secret prayer came before the *Trisagion*, not during the chanting of this hymn as today⁴³.

The Liturgy of the Faithful, or Eucharist, opens with the *Grand Entry*, a slow procession down the nave towards the sanctuary, in which the priest carries aloft the unconsecrated elements above his head. The chants sung at this moment are splendid and are excellent illustrations of our subject. The best-known is the one called the «Cherubicos Hymn», to which, strangely enough, Cabasilas makes only an obscure allusion⁴⁴. This hymn is as follows:

«We, who mystically represent the Cherubim, sing the thrice-holy hymn (the *Trisagion*) to the life-giving Trinity. Let us put away all earthly care, so that we may receive the King of All, invisibly escorted by the Angelic Hosts. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia»⁴⁵.

in the fifth century by angels. The Christians are said to have added the words «Have mercy upon us». St. John of Damascus, *De fide orth.* I. III, Ch. X, PG 94, 1021A.

41. «Lamb» — symbolic name given to the consecrated bread, recalling the sacrifice on the Cross (John 1,29-36) and the celestial adoration of glorified Jesus in the vision of the book of Revelation (Rev. 5, 8-14).

42. Cabasilas, *Div. Lit. Interpretatio*, Ch. 10, 388Df. Ch. 41, 389.

43. Cabasilas, *Divinae Liturgiae Interpretatio*, Ch. 21, 413AB.

44. *Ibid.*, 413Df.

45. *Liturgies of St. John Chrysostom and St. Basil the Great.*

On Holy Saturday, this hymn is replaced by a hymn drawn from the Liturgy of St. James, which Cabasilas does not mention at all. It is as follows:

«Let all mortal flesh keep silence and in awe and trembling stand, laying aside all earthly thoughts; for the King of Kings and Lord of Lords cometh to be slain, and to give Himself to be the food of the faithful.

Before Him come the archangels with the principalities and powers, the many-eyed Cherubim, and the six-winged Seraphim, veiling their faces, and crying: «Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia».

Finally, in the Liturgy of the «Pre-Sanctified», and at the moment of the Great Entry the choir intones this hymn:

«Now the powers of heaven with us invisibly do minister. For lo, the King of Glory entereth now. Behold the mystical sacrifice, all accomplished, is ushered in. Let us with faith and longing (inflamed love) draw near, that we may become partakers of life everlasting. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia».

These three hymns and other secret prayers mention the common theme of the invisible presence of the angelic powers (mystically represented by the believers), which accompany the King of Glory as He mounts the altar of sacrifice. This theme of the presence of the angels and their participation in the worship of the Christian congregation shows the extent to which the Church is conscious of the indivisibility of the liturgy and the worship of the heavenly hosts; and how the whole Church Militant forms part of that heavenly adoration and of the ceaseless hymns sung by the angels and the Church-Triumphant in praise of the Lamb. The Kingdom of the Holy Trinity, the invisible presence of the angelic powers, the heavenly sacrifice, the propitiation before the sanctuary of the Father's glory, the expectation and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Christian congregation in a sacramental Pentecost — these are the spiritual themes of the Orthodox Liturgy, which is deeply anchored in the spirit of the New Testament and of the early Church⁴⁶.

46. Cabasilas, *Divinae Liturgiae Interpretatio*, Ch. 1, 388CD.

After the Grand Entry and some prayers of intercession comes the *Anaphora*. This opens with the traditional words of the ancient eucharistic liturgies: «Lift up our hearts» (*Sursum corda*) which means «Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth» (Col. 3,2). The faithful give their allegiance that where their treasure is, there their hearts are also, (Matt. 6, 21). «We have lifted them up to the Lord»⁴⁷. The Church always commemorates the upward movement of the Liturgy through which earth and heaven meet⁴⁸.

In the Liturgy we participate in the one, eternal Liturgy of heaven; and heaven itself stoops toward us and enfolds us, raising up our transfigured humanity to heaven. The whole of temporal time is sanctified and receives the harmony and value of eternity⁴⁹. The Liturgy is the eschatological sacrament in the sense that what is accomplished in time, on earth, is a manifestation of what is heavenly and eternal, and enables us to participate in those heavenly things. «Heaven on earth» is the apparent paradoxical formula in which the Eastern Church has from the earliest times expressed this reality, manifested in the Liturgy as the sacrament of the age to come, the heavenly Kingdom revealed on earth. Christ has entered into heaven itself (Hebr. 9,24), and our priestly acts will therefore always be the work of Christ in heaven, although they are accomplished on earth»⁵⁰;

With regard to the *Anaphora*, I will mention the *Sanctus* again when the priest says: «Holy things to the holy» and the faithful reply: «One is Holy, One is Lord, Jesus Christ, in the glory of God, the Father»⁵¹. During the singing of the *Sanctus*, the priest says:

«And we also, O Lord, who lovest mankind, in company with these blessed powers do cry aloud and say: 'Holy art thou, and all-holy thou, and thine only-begotten Son, and thy Holy Spirit; holy and all-holy; and majestic is thy glory', thou who hast so loved thy world that thou gavest thine only begotten Son»⁵².

47. Cabasilas, *Divinae Liturgiae Interpretatio*, Ch. 26, 424D.

48. *Ibid.*, Ch. 41, 485AB. Ch. 43, 489BC. De V. in Ch., I, 504-405A.

49. *Ibid.*, Ch. 1, 369.

50. *Div. Lit. Int.*, Ch. 43, 461AB-D. *Comp.* Ch. 53, 489BC; De v. in Ch., IV, 624-25; II, 580ABf.

51. Cabasilas, *Divinae Liturgiae Interpretatio*, Ch. 36, 449BC.

52. John 3,16 - Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.

Then follows a passage commemorating the Last Supper and the account of the Passion. After the Words of Institution comes the *Epiklesis*. Here, it is no longer a question of mere symbolism: «The consecration of the elements — the sacrifice itself commemorates the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Saviour, since it transforms these precious gifts into the very body of the Lord, that body which was the central figure in all these mysteries, which was crucified, which rose from the dead, which ascended into heaven»⁵³. A true Pentecost is accomplished at this moment when the Holy Spirit descends not only upon the gifts, consecrating them as the life-giving body and blood of our Lord, but also upon the whole congregation⁵⁴.

The fundamental importance of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Church during the Liturgy, has not been sufficiently stressed. This invocation, repeated several times by the priest between the consecration and the communion, has not been noticed adequately: «Judge us worthy to find grace in thy sight, that our sacrifice may be accepted by thee and that the Spirit of thy grace may rest upon us, upon the gifts which we offer to thee, and upon all thy people» (Liturgy of St. Chrysostom). The prayer which follows is particularly remarkable:

«Let us pray the Lord that our God, the lover of mankind, having received the precious gifts upon his holy, heavenly, and spiritual Altar, as a sweet-smelling savour (cf. Eph. 5,2) may in return send down upon us his divine grace and the gift of his Holy-Spirit»⁵⁵.

The ceremonies which follow recall «the promise of the Father, the conversion of the nations which the Apostles brought about, and their divine society»⁵⁶. In particular, the pouring of warm water into the chalice symbolizes also «the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Church, for the Holy Spirit came down when the whole plan of redemption had been completed. And now the descent of the Spirit comes about when the sacrifice has been offered and the holy offerings have reached their perfection... Since this warm water is not only water, but shares the nature of fire, it signifies the Holy Spirit, who is sometimes represented

53. C a b a s i l a s, *Divinae Liturgiae Interpretatio*, Ch. 27, 425CDf.

54. *Ibid.*, Ch. 37, 452BC.

55. *Liturgy of St. Chrysostom*.

56. C a b a s i l a s, *Divinae Liturgiae Interpretatio*, Ch. 1, 372ABf.

by water...»⁵⁷. Obviously, in all these symbolisms and prayers of intercession, the theme of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the believers recurs constantly. The last prayer especially, carries us into the spiritual atmosphere of the Epistle to the Hebrews, within the setting of the celestial Liturgy and the sacrificial drama of the Lamb accomplished within the sanctuary of God (Hebr. 9,14)⁵⁸.

A word of dismissal follows, and to conclude the chapter, I will quote Nicolas Cabasilas again:

«The sacrifice being ended... and all the rites of the divine service being completed, the priest seems to take leave after his union with God and gradually to come down from those heights through proper prayer, first within the sanctuary where he cannot be heard by the people, then leaving the sanctuary, standing in the midst of the people so that they can all hear him...»: «...Τοῦ πλήθους μέσος γενόμενος, ὡσπερ ἀπολύων ἑαυτὸν τῆς μετὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ συνουσίας, καὶ τοῦ ὕψους ἐκείνου, εἰς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὀμιλίαν φαίνεται κατὰ μικρὸν καταβαίνων· καὶ τοῦτο ἱεροπρεπῶς. Καὶ γὰρ εὐχόμενος (Saying the *Opisthamonos* prayer: «O Lord, Who blessest those that bless thee...») τοῦτο ποιεῖ· καὶ ὁ τρόπος τῆς εὐχῆς καὶ ὁ τόπος δεικνυσιν αὐτὸν καταβαίνοντα...»⁵⁹.

After Ascension and Pentecost we return to the realities of every day, bearing witness to what has been seen and heard, which no human words can describe (II Cor. 12, 4).

(To be continued)

57. Ibid., Ch. 37, 452BC.

58. Cf. Cabasilas, Div. Lit. Int., Ch. 38, 452Df.

59. Ibid., Ch. 53, 489BC.