

5 *The Liturgy in the time of Maximus the Confessor*

In the two centuries that followed Chrysostom's occupation of the see of Constantinople a number of developments took place in the celebration of the Liturgy in the capital. The Great Church itself, damaged in the disturbances which accompanied Chrysostom's expulsion from his bishopric in 404, was finally destroyed in the Nike riots under Justinian in 532, and replaced by the magnificent new Hagia Sofia, the mother church of Byzantine Christianity and increasingly the model for Byzantine liturgical worship. The new Great Church provided the architectural setting for a rite which during these centuries was steadily receiving additions to its prayers and other formulae, and whose ceremonial was steadily evolving. We have information from various sources about these developments, which produced the rite upon which Maximus the Confessor commented in his *Mystagogia* early in the seventh century, and to which he is the chief witness.

These developments took place against a background of continuing doctrinal controversy, which was not without its effect on the Liturgy in Constantinople, where the population took a lively interest in both doctrine and worship. Debate focused on the doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ, to which the theological traditions of Alexandria and Antioch took differing approaches. The former tended to emphasize the divinity of Christ, at what some thought to be the cost of his full humanity. The latter so emphasized the completeness of his humanity, that for others there was a less than perfect union of the two natures in the person of Jesus Christ. Early in the fifth century Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, doubted the appropriateness of calling Mary Theotokos, or Mother of God. As an Antiochene he preferred Christotokos. The Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431 affirmed the correctness of applying Theotokos to Mary, and the title passed into frequent liturgical use in the Byzantine tradition, always quick to reflect contemporary dogmatic definition.

The definition of the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451, proclaiming the union of the divine and human natures in the one person of Jesus Christ, was an attempt to reconcile the Alexandrian and Antiochene traditions in Christology. For political as well as doctrinal reasons the definition was unacceptable to those who eventually came to be called monophysite on the one side, and Nestorian on the other. Meanwhile in the latter part of the fifth century monophysite tendencies were influential throughout the Eastern part of the Church, and found imperial support. The accession of the Emperor Justin in 518 put a stop to this trend. The four ecumenical councils were included in the diptychs read at the Liturgy, and the names of the recent pro-monophysite patriarchs of the capital removed.

Under Justinian a policy designed to reconcile the monophysites to Chalcedonian orthodoxy was pursued. Leontius of Byzantium elaborated the view that while the humanity of Christ had no hypostasis, or centre of personal being, of its own, it found its centre in the hypostasis of the divine Word: it was enhypostatic. The Fifth Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 553 gave its authority to Leontius' teaching. At the same time it condemned aspects of the teaching of Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret, and Ibas of Edessa, whose followers had protested against Leontius' doctrine, and so finally divided the East Syrian Christians of Persian Mesopotamia from the Byzantine Church. Their Church of the East was called Nestorian by the orthodox.

At the same time monophysites began to form separate Churches, both within the Empire and outside its frontiers: the independent existence of the Coptic and Syrian Churches dates from this period. The imperial authorities attempted to find a basis for reconciliation by suggesting that, though there may be two natures, there is only one energy in Jesus Christ, both human and divine. But monoenergism was unacceptable to the strict Chalcedonians, as too was the monothelite doctrine that developed out of the controversy surrounding it. Maximus the Confessor was, with Patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem, one of their leaders in resisting imperial attempts to force the doctrine of one will in Christ on the Church of the Empire. It was for refusing to obey the imperial edict of 648 forbidding all discussion of the matter while leaving the doctrinal issue unresolved that Maximus suffered first exile and then the amputation of his tongue and right hand. Meanwhile he spent some time in Rome, where he helped to formulate the doctrine of two operations and two wills

in Christ, which eventually received the approval of the Sixth Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 680–1.

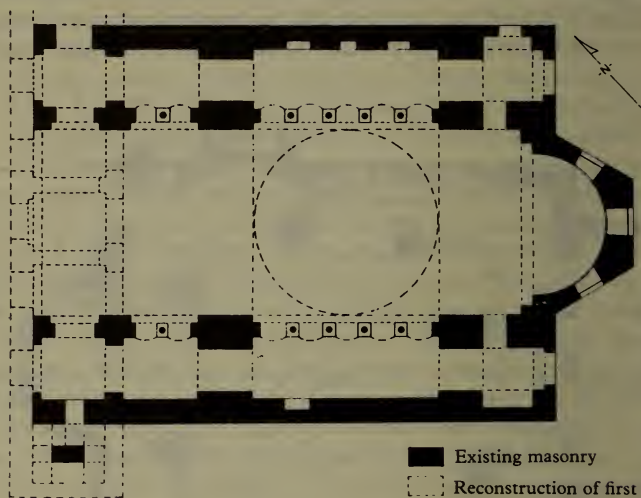
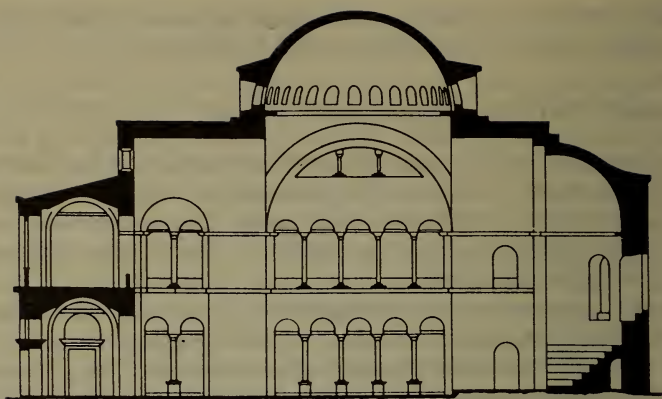
Justinian's Church of the Holy Wisdom

In the course of the fifth century a number of churches were built in Constantinople. Sufficient has been discovered by archaeologists about three of them to provide some idea of their interior layout. Their general plan was similar to that of the original fourth-century Hagia Sofia.

The sixth century saw the extensive building programme of the Emperor Justinian, which included in the City a large number of churches in addition to the masterpiece of the new Hagia Sofia. Enough of them have survived to enable us to form a reasonably good idea of the setting in which the Liturgy was celebrated in Justinian's time, and for several centuries after. Some were built

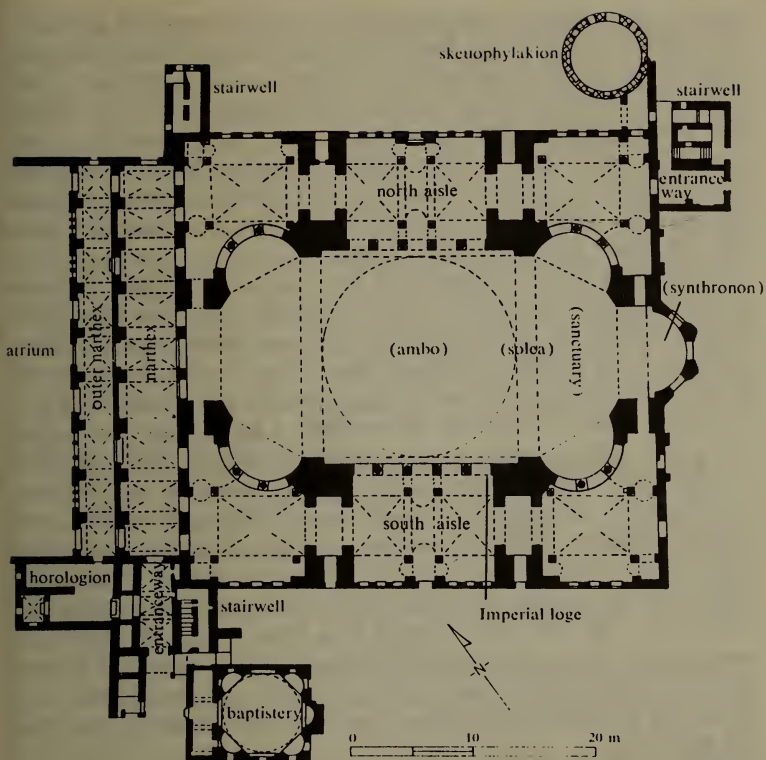


The church of Ss. Sergios and Bacchos, built by Justinian near his Hormisdas palace, and probably finished by 536.



Longitudinal section and plan of Hagia Eirene, as first built by Justinian at the same time as Hagia Sophia.

in the basilican style. Others were of a new centrally-planned type, whose domed central space was surrounded by ambulatories and galleries. Some, like Hagia Sofia itself, combined a central dome with a rectangular ground plan. St Sergius and St Bacchus, still standing, though used as a mosque, has an octagonal nave, surrounded on most sides by an ambulatory below and galleries above. To the east the sanctuary extends from the nave into a



Plan of the Great Church of Hagia Sophia, Holy Wisdom, dedicated by Justinian in 537.

semicircular apse. It closely resembles the church of San Vitale in Ravenna. Similar to both was the church of St John the Forerunner in the Hebdomon suburb of Constantinople. Hagia Eirene, on the other hand, most of which has survived, had a rectangular ground plan, with a sanctuary apse at the east end. The six stone benches of its synthronon are still in place in the apse. As in Hagia Sofia the central portion of the nave is covered by an immense dome. Like most of the Constantinopolitan churches, it had a narthex at the west end, which was entered from an atrium.

It was the new Hagia Sofia that dominated not only the city but the whole Eastern Empire. It stands now substantially as it was built by Justinian's architects, Anthemius and Isidore. To the

west of the church was an atrium, which survived into the seventeenth century but had largely disappeared two centuries later. It was entered through large doors in the north and south sides, and had an arcade running round three sides. The fourth side was the outer narthex of the church. In the middle of the open courtyard stood a large marble fountain. It seems that the church had open courtyards on its other sides too, which enabled the light to penetrate unhindered into the building, and also provide space for the people to gather.

From the atrium five doors led into the outer narthex, three in the centre, one at either end. The remaining four bays were filled with windows. A similar pattern of doors leads into the inner narthex, from which nine doors give access to the church itself. From the inner narthex two doors, to north and south, lead into vestibules, one at each end, from which a large door opens onto the ramp which leads to the galleries above. The northern vestibule is a later Turkish addition. The southern vestibule too was probably an addition, though made before the eighth century. Originally the inner narthex, and the ramps as well, were approached directly from outside. It seems that to begin with there were also ramps at the north-east and south-east corners of the church, so that the galleries had four means of access, all approached from outside the building. A fifth stair was subsequently built outside the south-west pier, giving access to a section of the south gallery that was separated from the rest by a barrier.

Further entrances into the church were provided in the north and south walls, and also on the east side, on either side of the sanctuary apse. It is important to realize that there was only one apse at the east end of Hagia Sofia: there was no smaller flanking apse of the kind that later became standard in Byzantine church design, and served as diaconikon and prothesis. The central nave, rectangular in shape and covered by the huge central dome and the two supporting semi-domes, is flanked to north and south by aisles and galleries, each divided into three large bays by arches. The aisles open directly into the nave along the whole of their length. A section of the south aisle was originally screened by barriers to protect the Emperor's box.

Although the new Great Church incorporated new architectural features, its layout was basically conservative, and resembled that of earlier churches in the city. Not a great deal of evidence remains for reconstructing the arrangements of the

sanctuary, which was restored three times before its final destruction by the Turks. From the description given by Paul the Silentiary after its restoration following the collapse of the dome in 558 some impression of it can be built up. Round the apse the synthronon rose in seven steps: only the topmost bench was intended as seating, and its seats were of silver. The altar had a base, columns and top all of gold, ornamented with precious stones. It was surmounted by a silver ciborium. Its precise place is unknown: it may have been forward of the chord of the apse, for the sanctuary platform almost certainly projected beyond the apse into the nave. It was protected by chancel slabs, set into twelve columns which rose above them to support an architrave, on which were set images of Christ, the Virgin, apostles and angels. There were three entrances to the sanctuary, one in the centre, and one on each side.

From a little in front of the central entrance a solea, with low barriers, led to the great ambo, set in the middle of the nave, a little to the east of centre. Its oval platform rested on eight columns, and was large enough for the cantors to be stationed beneath it. Steps led up to it from east and west. The whole structure was enclosed by eight columns bearing an architrave, with chancel barriers between them.

The liturgical arrangements of Justinian's Great Church were those which had been characteristic of the city's churches for the past two centuries. But if it was conservative in this respect, the new Hagia Sofia marked the beginning of a new era in Byzantine church design. In particular the dome became a characteristic of Byzantine churches, and came to play a central part in the interpretation of the building itself as a symbol of spiritual realities. The interpretation of the dome as heaven was known before its use in Hagia Sofia. Although there is no need to see its use there as a deliberate attempt to incorporate its symbolism into the new building, it lent itself readily to the growing tendency to ascribe symbolic significance to the structure of the church.

Procopius' description of the new Great Church shows the impression it produced on those who first entered it. The interior

is too splendid to appear ordinary and too tastefully decorated to appear excessively rich. It is bathed in sunlight and the reflection of the sun's rays; one might almost say that it is not illuminated from without by the sun but that the radiance originates from within, so inundated with light is this

sanctuary . . . Upon this circle (the arcades with the pendentives) rises a sort of huge, spherical dome, an incomparably beautiful structure; it seems not so much to rest upon the solid substructure, as to cover the space with its golden dome suspended from heaven. And all this is fitted together on high with extraordinary harmony – one thing depends on the other and finds support only in what lies directly beneath, so that the total effect is exceedingly impressive, yet the eye of the spectator does not linger long on any one detail. Each detail attracts the gaze and draws it irresistibly to itself. Thus the eye constantly springs suddenly from one thing to another and the beholder finds it impossible to decide what pleases him most. Even they who are accustomed to exercise their ingenuity on everything are unable to comprehend this work of art but always depart from there perplexed at the shortcomings of eye and mind . . . If anyone enters to pray, then . . . his mind is lifted up and he walks in heaven; he thinks that God cannot be far away and that he gladly dwells in this place which he himself has chosen (Procopius, *On Buildings*, I, 1, 29–30, 45–9, 61–3).

All Justinian's churches were no doubt richly decorated, although practically no original mosaics have been left in Constantinople, except perhaps for some aisle vaulting decoration in Hagia Sofia. The basilican churches of the fifth century began to be decorated in accordance with a consistent scheme. The walls of the nave had on one side a sequence of New Testament scenes, matched on the other side with corresponding scenes from the Old Testament. The separate panels had rich mosaic frames. Any space between or around them was filled in with decorative patterns. Vaults were normally filled with conventional designs. Most striking of all were the figures in the semi-dome of the apse, which was not yet the almost exclusive preserve of the Mother of God. Christ Pantocrator, perhaps with apostles, was sometimes there, or the saint in whose honour the church was dedicated. In the sixth-century Basilica of the monastery of St Catherine in Sinai the transfiguration is depicted. While most of the upper part of the church was covered with mosaic, the lower part of the walls and pillars was generally covered with rich marble slabs, whose veining contributed enormously to their decorative value.

A sixth-century example of the decoration of a basilican church is provided by the church of San Apollinare Nuovo at

Ravenna, the seat of Byzantine government in Italy at that time. On the north side of the nave a procession of men saints, led by the three Magi, moves from west to east to offer homage to the Christ-child enthroned with Mary. On the south side a parallel procession of holy women comes to pay homage to the enthroned Christ. Between the windows above them are figures of the prophets, while above the windows small panels illustrate, on the north the teaching of Christ, and on the south his passion. Both sequences are linked with the biblical lectionary used then in the church.

The mosaics that have survived in San Vitale in Ravenna give a good impression of sixth-century decoration of the sanctuary of such a centrally-planned church. The upper part of the walls and the vaulting are covered with mosaic. In the semi-dome of the apse is a representation of Christ and his cortège. On the north wall is the famous representation of Justinian entering the church with Archbishop Maximian, on the south the Empress Theodora, both escorted by clergy and members of the court. In the vault four standing angels support a central medallion with the Lamb in it, while on the arch leading into the sanctuary two flying angels carry a medallion inscribed with a cross. The remaining space on the walls is filled with scenes from the life of Moses on the north, Old Testament figures of the Eucharist – Melchisedech bringing out bread and wine, and the sacrifice of Isaac – on the south, and by figures of prophets, evangelists, angels and saints. Floral and animal motifs mingle with other decorative patterns to fill the gaps between the main scenes.

One tendency in sixth-century representational decoration must be noticed. The practice of representing sacred figures facing the beholder originated in the religious art of Eastern Hellenism, in northern Mesopotamia or in Iran. It spread through Parthian influence into Syria and Anatolia, and exercised a decisive influence on Byzantine religious art. In sixth-century decoration its influence can be seen alongside the continuing Greek tradition of decorative art. But from the latter part of the sixth century onwards its influence came more and more to predominate. Its intention was to depict the figure as present to the beholder, who through the image could enter into a relationship with the person represented. It was from this tradition that the Byzantine theology of the icon was formed in the heat of the eighth-century iconoclastic controversy. Its influence can be seen in the sixth-century mosaics in the apse of San Apollinare in

Classe in Ravenna, and in the next century in the representations of St Demetrios in Thessalonike.

As this tendency grew stronger, it gradually drove out the rich variety of Greek decorative designs and patterns. The fully-frontal figure stood out against a severely plain background, and the older narrative compositions began to disappear from church decoration, though it was not until after the iconoclastic controversy that a new, coherent pattern of decoration emerged.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist and its Ceremonial

At the beginning of the fifth century the Eucharist was celebrated by and large in Constantinople with its early simplicity. The structure of the rite was clearly visible, and still retained its balance of word and sacrament. That was still the case at the beginning of the seventh century. But in the intervening two centuries a number of additions were made to the order of service, in Constantinople as in other churches, both Eastern and Western.

The Entry into the Church

In Maximus' time the Liturgy still began with the entry of the celebrant and the people into the church. As the Great Church, or at one of the other major churches of the city, the Emperor, on such occasions as he took a formal part in the Liturgy, arrived with his court in the narthex, and sat waiting for the patriarch. They entered the church together, at the head of the congregation. It is probable that the mosaic panels in San Vitale in Ravenna depict precisely this entry of Emperor and patriarch into the church: the Emperor and Empress carry with them the gifts custom prescribed they should offer on such occasions. The people then poured into the church through all available doors. It is not surprising to find that Hagia Sofia had one hundred doorkeepers on its staff.

The text of the Liturgy of St John of Chrysostom in the later Codex Barberini contains a Prayer of Entry, which in the late eighth century was said at what came to be called the Little Entrance, when after the introductory antiphons and litanies the clergy entered the sanctuary. It differs from the modern prayer, which is that of the Liturgy of St Basil in the Codex Barberini. It runs:

Benefactor and Creator of all creation, receive the Church which is advancing, accomplish what is good for each one: bring all to perfection, make us worthy of your Kingdom; by the grace and mercy and love for men of your only-begotten Son, with whom you are blessed, together with your holy and good and life-giving Spirit, now and always, etc.

This prayer fits exactly the situation in which the entry of the whole congregation into the church is the beginning of the service, and was in all probability said out loud by the bishop in the narthex immediately before he led the people in.

The Entry Chant

The entry in New Rome stood in contrast with that in Old Rome, where the people assembled in church to greet the bishop as he arrived. But in New Rome as in old, the entry was no longer made in silence. In the fifth century chant was introduced to accompany the entry of the clergy, and in Constantinople of the people after them. It consisted of a psalm, accompanied by a refrain, or troparion. The troparion was first repeated three times by the chanters, and then the people sang it three times. The whole troparion, or its final part, was then sung after every few verses of the psalm and after the 'Glory be to the Father' at the end. The whole refrain was repeated once more by the chanters, and finally by the people.

Early in the sixth century the refrain to the entry chant in Constantinople was the Trisagion: 'Holy (is) God, holy and strong, holy and immortal! Have mercy on us'. The monk Job who provides this information may well have been right when he explained the text as made up of the 'Holy, holy, holy' of the cherubim in Isaiah 6.2 and of verse 3 of Psalm 41 in the liturgical psalter then in use which describes God as 'strong' and 'living', the latter having been replaced by 'immortal'. The present manner of singing the Trisagion, from which the psalm itself has long since disappeared, represents the initial threefold repetition of the refrain, the 'Glory be' at the end of the psalm, the repetition of the final clause of the refrain, and a single repetition of the whole. Traces of the psalm remain in the Trisagion sung at an episcopal Liturgy: the bishop uses parts of verses 15 and 16 of Psalm 79 (80) in between the repetitions while blessing the congregation. The alternation of choir and clergy in chanting the

Trisagion when the bishop celebrates corresponds to the ancient alternation of chanters and people.

The chant, 'As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Alleluia!', sung instead of the Trisagion on certain festivals, has a similar origin. At one time it was sung on Holy Saturday as the refrain between the verses of Psalm 31 (32) during the procession which conducted the newly-baptized from the baptistry to the church for the Eucharist. Both chants still mark the beginning of the Liturgy on certain days, such as Holy Thursday and Holy Saturday, when it is immediately preceded by another service.

There is evidence to suggest that at the end of the fifth century the Trisagion was considered suitable for use as the refrain to psalms sung in rogation processions – acts of solemn intercession in times of trouble. The verses of Psalm 79 (80) sung by the bishop when he blesses the people during the Trisagion may derive from this custom. They were originally sung by the deacon, and perhaps represent the end of the processional psalm, sung as the procession entered the church.

This use of the Trisagion may be reflected in the legendary story of its first introduction into liturgical use. In the time of Patriarch Proclus (434–46) the people of Constantinople were engaged in fervent prayer during a severe earthquake. A young boy was rapt up to the third heaven, where he heard the angels singing the Trisagion. The people were told to sing it, and when they did so the earthquake ceased. The story may at any rate point to the time when it first began to be used liturgically in the capital. It was certainly well known by 451, when the Eastern bishops sang it as an acclamation at the Fourth Ecumenical Council.

Perhaps then to begin with the Trisagion was used only when the Liturgy was preceded by a procession of a penitential, intercessory character. On other occasions variable troparia may have served as refrains to the psalm sung during the procession to the church where the Liturgy was to be celebrated, or simply at the entry into the church. In time the Trisagion, ultimately detached from any psalm, became a fixed chant in the Liturgy, preceded by the entrance psalm used on other occasions which eventually became the third antiphon of the enarxis, and followed by the variable troparia, equally detached from the psalm they had originally accompanied.

The Trisagion soon became a focal point of doctrinal contro-

versy. In the early years of his episcopate at Antioch the monophysite Patriarch Peter the Fuller (468/70–88) added to it the phrase, 'who was crucified for us'. He clearly understood the Trisagion to be addressed to the second Person of the Trinity, the incarnate Word. The addition reflected the monophysite insistence, following the Alexandrian tendency in Christology, that it was perfectly proper to say that God died for us, because the 'I' in Jesus Christ was the divine Word. The followers of Theodore of Mopsuestia, on the other hand, were still hesitant about the appropriateness of calling Mary 'Theotokos', and so of saying that God was born. The addition was adopted in monophysite circles, but was fiercely contested by the orthodox Chalcedonian Byzantines. Byzantine interpretation of the Trisagion referred it to the Trinity: 'Holy God' to the Father, 'holy and strong' to the Son, 'holy and immortal' to the Spirit. The controversy between orthodox and monophysite points of view continued for some centuries. It flared up in the capital when in 513 the Emperor Anastasius ordered the addition to be sung in the church of St Theodore of Sphorakios close to the Great Church.

It may be that historically neither was correct, and that to begin with the Trisagion was meant to be addressed to God, principally as Father, exactly like the liturgical Sanctus in the eucharistic prayer. This seems to have been the way in which it was understood by the composer of the Prayer of the Trisagion found in the Liturgy of St Basil in the Codex Barberini. This prayer is now common to both Liturgies, although in the Codex Barberini a different prayer is provided for the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom. Both prayers are addressed primarily to the God who loves mankind and has mercy on him, that is, to the Father. Of course the Christian belief that God is Trinity is always present. But neither of these prayers suggests that their authors thought of the Trisagion they accompanied as addressed specifically to the Trinity. The trinitarian doxology at the end of each prayer may well be a late addition, reflecting the Byzantine tendency to make all doxologies trinitarian.

At this time, and perhaps for some time before, the entry procession was led by a deacon carrying the book of the Gospels, escorted by candles and incense. The Gospels, symbol of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, were enthroned on the altar when the procession reached the sanctuary. As earlier, the bishop and his clergy mounted the synthronon in the apse, and when the bishop had given the greeting 'Peace be with you all' took their seats for

the scripture readings. The procession in the Great Church must have taken some time – hence the need for an entry chant of some length.

The Readings and Sermon

In the seventh century the readings followed immediately after the entry. There were still three of them, from the Old Testament, from the Epistles, and from the Gospels. Between the readings psalms were chanted, with antiphons before and after, and between the verses. For these the cantors ascended the ambo. The first two readings were read by lectors, of whom the Great Church had one hundred and ten in Justinian's time, and one hundred and sixty in that of Heraclius, in the first half of the seventh century. The reading of the Gospel was certainly by this time accompanied by the splendour due to this manifestation of the presence of Christ in and to his Church. The Gospel book itself was richly covered with precious metals and stones. Candles and incense escorted it as the deacon carried it to the ambo, and on his return to the sanctuary along the solea the people pressed forward to venerate it. In his description of Hagia Sofia, restored after the collapse of the first dome in 538, Paul the Silentiary writes of the solea and its protecting barriers:

Now for these fence walls they have not placed lofty slabs, but they are as high as the navel of a man passing by them; and here the gosseller, as he holds the golden Gospel, passes along, and the surging crowd strives to touch the sacred book with their lips and hands, while moving waves of people break around.

Liturgical celebration in Constantinople was never dull.

It may be that by the seventh-century preaching had declined in Constantinople. Maximus the Confessor does not mention a homily in his exposition of the rite. The Council 'in Trullo' of 692 lays it down that bishops should preach every day, but especially on Sunday. Since what is already being done does not have to be enforced, we may presume that at least some bishops were neglecting their duty, even on Sundays. Justinian's repetition of a law of the Emperor Theodosius, which proclaimed it sacrilegious for a bishop to preach inaccurately or not at all suggests that Chrysostom's high standards in this respect did not long survive him. There is certainly no body of sermons comparable to his from the sixth or seventh centuries in Constantinople.

That is not to say sermons were never preached. But it was clearly possible to go to church and not hear one.

The Dismissals and Prayers of the Faithful

After the readings, or the homily if there was one, the customary prayers for the catechumens were said before they were dismissed, and the doors of the church closed. The discipline of penance had fallen into disuse by the seventh century, and since there were no penitents to dismiss the prayers said on their behalf had dropped out. It may be wondered how vigorous the catechumenate was in Constantinople at this time, or whether the prayers for the catechumens were not already an anachronism. Since the Liturgy was still at this time capable of receiving additions, we may suppose that it was also still capable of rejecting elements that no longer expressed the actual life of the Church. The catechumenate may have survived, even if in an attenuated form, to provide for converts from the many foreigners who had business in the city. By the time the catechumenate finally disappeared, the Church had become too rigid in its attitudes to allow the redundant prayers to disappear too.

Although there is no mention of the prayers of the faithful in Maximus' *Mystagogia*, it may be presumed that, in the form of a diaconal litany, they still had their place in the rite after the dismissal of the catechumens.

The Entrance of the Mysteries

There is no doubt that in the seventh century the bread and wine for the Eucharist were, at the Great Church, brought in from the skeuophylakion which stood near the northeast corner of the church. Similar architectural arrangements existed at other churches in the City. In the skeuophylakion the holy vessels and books were kept, and here too the clergy prepared themselves and the gifts of the people for the service. Small churches as well as large had their separate skeuophylakia.

The deacons went to the skeuophylakion while the bishop was reciting the prayer for the catechumens. Having collected the paten and chalice, or patens and chalices, they returned, escorted by candles, incense and fans. Their precise route is not certain. They may, at the Great Church, have passed along the outside of the building along the north wall, and entered the church by the

great door in the middle of the north side; or they may have entered the church at the east end of the north aisle and passed along it to its mid-point, turning into the nave in order to reach the solea by the ambo. Certainly they passed down the solea to the sanctuary. The bishop meanwhile waited to receive the gifts at the altar. When the Emperor attended the Liturgy officially he came to meet the procession at the entrance to the solea, and accompanied the procession as far as the holy door in the middle of the chancel barrier. He then returned to his place in the south aisle.

The procession with the gifts was clearly a prominent feature of the rite, and at any rate by the sixth century the ideas we have already seen expressed in Theodore of Mopsuestia's *Catechetical Lectures* had become popular in Constantinople too. They were not without their critics. In his sermon on the Paschal feast and the holy Eucharist Eutychius, Patriarch of Constantinople 552-5, 577-82, disapproves strongly of the popular reverence displayed to the bread and wine as they pass through the church:

They act stupidly, who have taught the people to sing a certain psalmic chant when the ministers are about to bring up to the altar the bread of oblation and the recently-mixed chalice. In this hymn, which they consider suitable to the action being performed, the people say that they bear in the King of glory, and refer in this way to things being brought up, even though they have not yet been consecrated by the high-priestly invocation – unless perhaps what is sung means something else to them. For as Athanasius the Great says in his sermon to the baptized: 'You will see the Levites (i.e. the deacons) bearing in bread and a chalice of wine and putting them on the table. And as long as the supplications and the prayer have not been completed, it is nothing but plain bread' (Taft, *The Great Entrance*, p. 84).

Eutychius' strictures on misplaced popular devotion reveal that the entrance of the gifts was accompanied by singing. In all the churches the fifth century saw the introduction of chant here, as well as at the beginning of the Liturgy. It was usually a psalm with a popular refrain. Eutychius' remarks seem to point to this as the form taken by the chant in Constantinople, since he speaks of it as a psalmic chant. Moreover his reference to the King of glory suggests the use of Psalm 24, in which psalm alone the phrase occurs. On the basis of all available evidence it seems

likely that in the early sixth century the chant that accompanied the entrance of the gifts was Psalm 24, verses 7–10, probably with 'Alleluia' as the refrain.

Later in the sixth century the present Cherubic Hymn was added. The historian Cedrenus says that the Emperor Justin II decreed that it should be sung, in the ninth year of his reign (573–4), presumably at the entry of the mysteries. At the same time it was decreed that on Holy Thursday the hymn, 'At your mystical supper,' should be sung. The only other hymn now used at the Great Entrance is that sung on Holy Saturday, 'Let all mortal flesh be silent'. This hymn seems to have been introduced into the rite of Constantinople only much later, in the eleventh or twelfth century. It may have been borrowed from the Liturgy of Jerusalem, and was at first an optional alternative on Holy Saturday to the Cherubic Hymn.

When the Cherubicon and other troparia were introduced, it was almost certainly as refrains to the psalm, attached to the earlier refrain 'Alleluia'. The whole chant would have been sung in the same way as the entry chant. The troparion was sung three times by the chanters, and then three times by the people. The chanters then sang the psalm verses, and in between them the people sang the final phrase of the troparion, in the case of the Cherubicon 'Alleluia', in that of the Holy Thursday troparion 'Remember me, Lord, in your Kingdom'. After the 'Glory be' the final phrase was sung, followed by the whole troparion sung by the chanters, and repeated by the people. Such a lengthy chant was of course necessary to accompany the procession in the Great Church. Fewer verses of the psalm might suffice in smaller churches, where too the priests and deacons might have to take over the role of the chanters. Few if any churches had the services of so large a range of singers as Hagia Sofia.

While the deacons were bringing in the mysteries with a good deal of solemnity, the bishop was preparing to receive them. At this time it was probably during the procession that he, and perhaps the presbyters with him, washed his hands in a symbolic gesture of purity, and said in a low voice the prayer in preparation for the anaphora. When the deacons arrived, the gifts were set in order on the altar, and may have been censed.

It is important to realize that the chant at the entry of the mysteries in the Byzantine rite forms an introduction to the whole of the subsequent part of the Liturgy, and is not just an accompaniment to the procession with the gifts. It has commonly

come to be understood in the light of the fully-developed symbolic interpretation of the Liturgy as referring to the coming of Christ, represented by the gifts, in the procession itself. But the texts themselves show that they have a wider bearing. The Cherubic Hymn urges the worshippers to lay aside every worldly care so as to be ready to receive Christ in Communion. It looks forward to the singing of the Sanctus, the thrice-holy hymn of the angels. The chant for Holy Thursday is in fact a communion chant, emphasizing still more the relation between the chant at the Great Entrance and all that is to follow. The Holy Saturday chant speaks of Christ coming forth to be slain and given as food to the faithful, again looking forward to Communion.

The Cherubic Hymn and the Holy Saturday chant reflect the common Eastern view, popularized by Dionysius the Areopagite, that the earthly liturgy is a reflection of the heavenly: Christ, symbolized by the bread and wine, is escorted by angels, represented by the deacons. In these chants the symbolism first found in Theodore of Mopsuestia found its way into the Liturgy in Constantinople. The Holy Saturday chant in particular is very close to Theodore in its content.

The gifts now placed on the altar, the bishop gave his greeting: 'Peace be with you all', and the kiss of peace was exchanged, as earlier, by both clergy and people. But by the seventh century the anaphora no longer followed immediately.

The Creed

By the time of Maximus the creed now commonly called Nicene, the symbol of 'the one hundred and fifty fathers assembled in Constantinople' in 381 for the Second Ecumenical Council, was already well-established in the Liturgy. Its text made its first appearance in the Acts of the Fourth Ecumenical Council held at Chalcedon in 451. Its function there was to serve as an expression of orthodox belief both as regards the doctrine of God as Trinity and as regards that of the person of Christ. It is probably an adapted version of a local baptismal creed, for the original context in which credal forms developed was that of initiation into membership of the Church.

Creeds certainly played no part in the early liturgy of the Eucharist. Exactly when, where and why the creed was introduced into the service is unclear. Peter the Fuller, the monophysite Patriarch of Antioch towards the end of the fifth century, is

said to have started the practice there in 473. A passage of Theodore the Lector's *Ecclesiastical History* relates that

Timothy (Patriarch of Constantinople 511–18) ordered that the symbol of faith of the three hundred and eighteen fathers be recited at each synaxis out of disparagement for Macedonius, as if he did not accept the symbol. Formerly it was recited only once a year, on Good Friday, at the bishop's catechesis (cf. Taft, *ibid*, p. 398).

The three hundred and eighteen fathers were the members of the First Ecumenical Council of 325. This need not be taken to mean that the creed introduced by Timothy was not the formula agreed in 381, but the earlier one of 325. The creed used in Constantinople in the rite of baptism since 451 had been what is now called the Nicene Creed (but should more accurately be called the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed) and there is no evidence that any other was ever used at the Eucharist. 'The faith of the three hundred and eighteen fathers' referred to the essentials of Nicene faith, and not necessarily to a precise text. None of the succeeding councils was held to have altered the faith of Nicaea in any way, only to have made it explicit in the face of heretical opinions.

The introduction of the creed into the Liturgy at Constantinople was a piece of ecclesiastical manoeuvring. The Macedonius to whom Theodore the Lector refers was Timothy's Chalcedonian predecessor. He had been deposed by the monophysite Emperor Anastasius I. Timothy introduced the creed which had been incorporated into the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon to demonstrate his own orthodoxy, and to disparage thereby his unfortunate predecessor. At the same time he might hope to please the Emperor by introducing into the capital a practice begun under the monophysite patronage of Peter the Fuller. The monophysites had no quarrel with the second Ecumenical Council which had produced the creed.

Despite this somewhat dubious background, the recitation of the creed secured a permanent place in the rite of Constantinople. When the bishops of the capital once more became orthodox, they could hardly remove the formula sanctioned by the Council they professed to venerate. It was a popular piece, sung by the whole congregation. There is no good reason to doubt that it was introduced in the position where it now is, though why there is not clear. In Spain in the sixth century it was inserted in the Mass before the Lord's Prayer. In Rome, when it was eventually

adopted in the eleventh century, it came after the readings and sermon. Perhaps in Constantinople they did not want the catechumens to hear it until the appropriate moment in their preparation for baptism. But in whatever position it came, the basic reason for using the creed in the Eucharist was the same: it served as a test for orthodoxy in a time of doctrinal controversy. It also, in the Byzantine rite, broke the intimate liturgical link between the bringing in of the bread and wine and the prayer by which they were offered and consecrated.

The Anaphora

The creed sung, the bishop began the anaphora, usually that of Basil, less frequently that of Chrysostom. Maximus says nothing about the eucharistic prayer, except that the Sanctus is sung by the whole congregation. He gives no indication as to whether or not the prayer was still chanted out loud. We know that at the end of the eighth century most of the anaphora was said silently by the celebrant, as in present Orthodox practice. It is worth attempting to trace the origin and spread of the custom of silent recitation.

It is clear from a law of Justinian that celebrants in mid-sixth-century Constantinople and its province were beginning to recite certain prayers in both the eucharistic and baptismal liturgies in an inaudible voice. The Emperor protested vigorously and forbade the practice. His *Novella* 137 of the year 565 sought to regulate various abuses in the life of the Church, and in its last chapter prescribed as follows:

Moreover we order all bishops and priests to say the prayers used in the divine oblation and in holy baptism not inaudibly, but in a voice that can be heard by the faithful people, that the minds of those who listen may be excited to greater compunction.

Justinian was concerned to stamp out an innovation which he rightly considered harmful to liturgical devotion. He was unsuccessful, and his failure opened the way to a fundamental change not only in liturgical practice but in popular eucharistic piety. From the latter part of the sixth century the central prayer of the Liturgy passed out of the hearing, and therefore out of the knowledge, of the great majority of Byzantine Christians who had no service books in which they could at least read what they could

not hear. Few changes in the Church's worship have been so far-reaching in their implications and consequences. The principal prayer of the service became a prayer for the clergy only, for those close enough to the altar to hear it. The exclusion of the laity from the common thanksgiving and offering of the gifts powerfully reinforced the already marked clericalization of the Liturgy.

It seems that the clergy of sixth-century Constantinople were following the example of their brothers further east. The first mention of the silent recitation of prayers in the Eucharist that we have occurs in the *Liturgical Homilies* of Narsai. Narsai was a leading Nestorian teacher, who taught for twenty years in Edessa. When the followers of Ibas of Edessa, who with Theodore of Mopsuestia and Theodoret had been among the closest friends of Nestorius, were driven from Edessa, Narsai established the famous Nestorian school at Nisibis, where he remained for forty-five years until his death in 502. Narsai's description of the East Syrian Eucharist makes it clear that most of the anaphora was said by the priests inaudibly. After the introductory dialogue there was silence in the church until the priest raised his voice for the introduction to the Sanctus. The church returned to silence, while the priest began to commune with God. He raised his voice at the end of his prayer to make it audible to the people, and they concurred and acquiesced in his prayer by saying 'Amen'. The priest continued with the intercession. Narsai says nothing about inaudibility, either at this point or in his description of the invocation of the Holy Spirit, but it seems that the priest raised his voice only after the invocation, when the mysteries had been accomplished.

It was, then, in East Syria that the practice began which by the middle of the sixth century had caused the eucharistic prayer at Constantinople to become silent. It is not clear why the practice began; but it was no doubt linked with the attitude of fear and awe in the presence of the mysteries which became widespread from the middle of the fourth century, particularly in the East.

Preparation for Communion and Communion

The Lord's Prayer and the invitation to Communion, 'Holy things for holy people', followed as they had done in Chrysostom's time. By the beginning of the seventh century, however, a new custom had been introduced before the clergy received Communion. The ceremony known as the *zeon* consisted in

pouring a little hot water into the consecrated wine. It is usually thought that the Armenian Catholicos Moses II was referring, somewhat contemptuously, to this custom when he rejected an invitation from the Emperor Maurice (582–602) to come to Constantinople for theological discussions: 'I will never cross the River Azat, nor eat bread cooked in an oven, nor drink what is warm', he is said to have replied. It was a time of controversy about the kind of bread which should be used for the Eucharist, and about the mixing of water with wine in the chalice. The Armenians had taken to using unleavened bread, and wine unmixed with water. The Byzantines saw this as a denial of the two natures in Christ, since the leaven and the water, they held, symbolized his humanity. Since the Armenians did not even mix cold water with the wine before the anaphora, they were hardly likely to approve of adding hot after. They seem to have regarded unmixed wine as symbolizing the immortality of Christ's risen life, free from the corruptibility represented by water. Leaven, too, for them was a sign of corruptibility. But for the Byzantines the use of water in the wine meant that the mysteries showed forth, as they should, the death as well as the resurrection of Christ.

It was perhaps as a complement to the addition of cold water before the consecration that hot water came to be added after: if the cold represented the death, the warm could stand for the new life of the resurrection. It has also been suggested that the background to the custom could be the teaching of the Aphthartodocetae, the extreme monophysite group towards which Justinian is sometimes thought to have leaned at the end of his life. They taught that the blood and water which flowed from the side of Christ were warm, since being God Christ did not really die. The zeon could have expressed this belief at the time of its introduction, though it was later provided with a different explanation. For several centuries no formula indicating its significance seems to have been attached to the action.

Maximus implies that lay Communion still took place, though he gives no description either of the distribution of Communion or of the conclusion of the service. Communion was no doubt accompanied by psalmic chant. It was given as it had been in the fifth century. A little later in the seventh century, the Council in Trullo of 692 found it necessary to give some explicit instructions. The clergy were not to ask for a fee for giving anyone Communion. Lay people were to receive the consecrated bread

into their hands, and not into a cloth or any receptacle: 'Thus if anyone at the time of the synaxis wishes to partake of the immaculate Body and to come forward for Communion, holding his hands in the form of a cross let him come forward and receive the Communion of love.' The implication of these directives is that Communion was not a frequent practice: at any given liturgy there were many who abstained. Communion must have been distributed either, as now, in front of the holy door in the sanctuary barrier, or, in churches where the solea connected directly with the holy door without a gap, to one side or other of the door. When the Emperor communicated he did so in the sanctuary itself, his procession following the same path as it had done at the entrance of the mysteries.

Conclusion of the Service

From the year 624, in which, according to the *Chronicon Paschale*, it was introduced by the Patriarch Sergius, the hymn 'Let our mouths be filled with your praise, O Lord' was sung after Communion. The original text qualified the mysteries only as 'holy'; 'divine, immortal and lifegiving' were added later. The hymn was probably to begin with a troparion used as a refrain to the communion psalm. The prayer of thanksgiving followed, the deacon dismissed the people, and the service was over.

Towards the end of the sixth century the Patriarch Eutychius compared the end of the Liturgy with that of the Last Supper. Then, the disciples sang a hymn and went out. At the Liturgy, 'after receiving the precious Body and Blood we say a prayer of thanksgiving, and then we go out, each one to his own home'. The bishop and clergy went out, too, probably back down the solea, and so out by the route by which the mysteries had come in. The deacons carried the sacred vessels, to be returned to the skeuophylakion. There the deacons removed their stoles, the bishop his omophorion.

By the end of the eighth century, and perhaps earlier, the bishop stopped somewhere beyond the ambo to recite a final prayer, that 'said behind the ambo', in the midst of the dispersing congregation. The Liturgy had begun with a prayer as the people were about to flock into church: it finished with a prayer as they prepared to stream out of it.

The Interpretation of the Liturgy

The meaning of what is done in the Eucharist is conveyed to the worshipper in the first place by the prayers which are said during the celebration. But an understanding of the rite can grow up alongside that expressed in its text. We have seen how a symbolic interpretation of the service was given as early as the third century. The first full-scale interpretation of the Liturgy in Constantinople was provided by Maximus the Confessor in his *Mystagogia* in the first half of the seventh century. But before we look at the meaning Maximus saw in the rite, we must glance at the interpretation given over a century earlier by the so-called Dionysius the Areopagite in his treatise on *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*.

The writings ascribed to Dionysius – a convert of Paul's in Athens – are generally held to belong to the late fifth or early sixth century, and to come from somewhere in Northern Syria. Their real author is unknown. It is possible that they come from a background not unfavourable to monophysitism, since they are first quoted in the works of the monophysite Severus, Patriarch of Antioch 512–18. The Chalcedonians seem first to have heard them in the course of theological conversations with Severian bishops in 532. Until recently the attribution to Dionysius was generally assumed to be authentic. His writings carried therefore considerable authority. Maximus the Confessor made use of them, and so in the fifteenth century did the last of the Byzantine liturgical commentators, Symeon of Thessalonike. Dionysius' interpretation of the Eucharist must be set in the context of his whole presentation of Christianity. He drew upon the Alexandrian theological tradition, and on the philosophy of the Neoplatonists. The goal of the Christian life is union with God, whom Dionysius refers to as the One. He is the spiritual reality from whom all other spiritual realities have come, and to whom they must return. Dionysius is not afraid to speak of man's deification. But because of his disobedience man finds himself separated from God, separated from his fellows, and a prey to internal disruption. He is incapable by himself of rising above the passions which tear him apart and the material world which holds him down, and prevents him from finding his lost immortality in union with God. His mind is darkened and he cannot see where he is going.

But God, in his love for man, took on him our human nature,

sin only excepted, so that we might be united to his divine nature. Man's mind is enlightened, his soul freed from impure passions, and he is to the fullest extent possible united with God. The individual Christian must appropriate this divine gift by a process of purification and illumination, leading to union with God. He does so within the Church, whose hierarchy enables him to rise by contemplation from material realities to the spiritual realities to which they point. The real world, for Dionysius, is the spiritual world.

But we are incapable of apprehending this world directly: it is communicated to us by means of symbols. The divine mystery, which is one and spiritual, is revealed to us through what is multiple and material. So in the celebration of the sacraments the visible and tangible rites are the image of spiritual realities. From the multiplicity of the sign the human spirit can rise to the unifying vision of the One. It does so by means of contemplation, *theoria*, which is an activity of the human spirit sustained by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

To be able to contemplate the reality behind the symbol requires previous purification. That is why those who have not attained a sufficient degree of purification cannot see the Eucharist for what it most truly is, the sacrament of union with God. For them the scripture readings and psalms give instruction in the life of virtue, and in the necessity of being purified from evil. Communion for them is a reminder that they must learn to live in harmony with those with whom they have exchanged the kiss of peace. It recalls the Last Supper in which Jesus did not allow Judas to participate because he did not have the requisite purity, and so they learn that sharing in the Eucharist will only divinize them if they do so inwardly conformed to the life of Christ.

It is against this background of his general concept of the Christian life that we must understand Dionysius' interpretation of the Eucharist as above all the sacrament of union with God. He calls the rite the *synaxis*, a common term in early Christian usage for the Christian assembly, the gathering together of the church. But it is particularly apt for the rite as Dionysius understands it, for the Eucharist gathers us out of our separation from one another into a unity which gives us communion and union with the One. That is why, in Dionysius' view, the Eucharist is the sacrament which is the necessary complement of all the others, which without it are incomplete.

The union which the Eucharist mediates is primarily union with God. But that union is only possible when we have achieved unity within ourselves, for only those who are like God can enjoy communion with him. The Eucharist stands in sharp contrast with the sinful passions which are the cause of division within human beings and among them. The union of the individual with God entails necessarily the unity of those who enjoy communion with him among themselves.

The unifying effect of the Eucharist is symbolized at the very beginning of the rite when the bishop, having prayed in front of the altar, leaves the sanctuary in order to cense the whole assembly before returning to his place. The worshipper is to see in this the symbol of God, who while transcending all that is and remaining unchanging, comes forth in order to communicate himself to created beings and draw them into unity with himself. He is also to see in it a symbol of the Eucharist itself, which is one and indivisible, and yet, out of love for man, becomes diversified in a wealth of sacred symbols, which nevertheless return into unity, at the same time unifying all who worthily communicate. The censuring, finally, symbolizes the function of the hierarchy – the bishop – himself, who in his goodness towards the lower orders in the Church leaves his contemplation of the One in order to communicate his knowledge of God to them in material signs, and then returns to his contemplation, which enables him to see clearly the single reality which lies behind the manifold symbols that constitute the visible rite. All three applications of the same basic symbolism point to the love of God which condescends to man in order to raise him to the spiritual contemplation of the One.

The service continues with the readings and psalmody, from the Old Testament, the New, and, most of all, the Gospels. The psalmody, which celebrates the words and deeds of God and of godly men, prepares those who take part in its harmonious singing to receive or to administer the sacraments. It conduces the worshipper to harmony with God, within themselves, and with one another. What the psalms enunciate in brief and obscurely is expounded more fully and clearly in the readings. Because they are inspired by the one divine Spirit the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments concur, the former predicting the works of Jesus and the latter relating them. The purpose and effect of the readings and psalmody is to prepare the worshipper for the celebration of the mysteries by drawing together those

who are prepared for divinization in contemplation of the works of God.

There follow the dismissals of the catechumens, those possessed by demons, and the penitents: for they have not yet attained a purity sufficient to enable them to participate in the mysteries. The catechumens have not yet received illumination in baptism, for which they are being prepared by hearing the Scriptures. Those possessed by demons, although they have been initiated to some degree into the sacramental life of the Church, have not attained sufficient stability in their contemplation to be able to resist the attractions of the material world. Having become again a prey to distracting and corrupting passions, they too are only capable of hearing the Scriptures, which teach them to return to a better way. The penitents have already been admitted to the celebration of the mysteries. But their imperfection has prevented them from yet rising to a state of likeness with God, and therefore they too are incapable of admission to the mysteries.

After the dismissal of all those who have not yet attained a sufficiently high degree of purity, the sacred ministers and all the people sing what Dionysius calls a song of universal, or catholic, praise. It is not clear from his description of its contents what precisely this might have been. It is often thought that he is speaking of the creed, though he describes this part of the service as an act of praise for all the works of God, which have effected our union with him.

The holy bread, covered with a veil, is then presented, together with the cup of blessing, and the kiss of peace is given. The kiss unites the worshippers among themselves, and so enables them to be united with the One, for union with God is impossible for those who are divided among themselves. The diptychs of the dead are next read. They celebrate those who have achieved perfection of virtue in their life, and live now for ever united with Christ. The mention of their names in the Liturgy is a reminder to the worshippers of that union with God in perfect holiness to which we are called.

The bishop and clergy wash their hands in preparation for the most holy sacrifice; for those who approach it must be as free as possible from anything which diminishes their conformity with it. That the clergy wash their hands in the presence of the holy symbols signifies that it is only Christ who can purify us completely, and so prepare us for union with God. The bishop is

united with the One in order to celebrate and distribute the sacrament of union; and in the eucharistic prayer he praises God for all he has done to unite our nature with his own.

Having celebrated the mysteries, the bishop divides and distributes the bread, and shares the chalice among all. So he mysteriously divides and distributes the unity, in which the most holy sacrifice is consummated, and to which the communicants are conformed. The act of Communion sums up in its symbolism the whole economy of our salvation. The divine Word leaves his mysterious sanctuary and descends to our lowly level because of his love for us. He unites human nature with himself without absorbing it, and so, being in his own nature one and indivisible, he shares in our fragmented nature. But he does so only so that we might share in his own life and unity with God. That demands of us a life as like his as possible, freed from corrupting passions. By reflecting on his incarnate life and following the example of his holy innocence, we shall ourselves become pure and godly, and be united with him.

So Dionysius presents the Eucharist as the sacrament *par excellence* of unity with God. It effects for those who take part in it that deifying union with the One which the incarnation has made available for the whole human race.

The *Mystagogia* of Maximus the Confessor

Maximus gave up a distinguished career in the imperial service to become a monk not far from Constantinople. The Persian invasion of 626 caused him to move to Africa, where he met the future Patriarch of Jerusalem, Sophronius. Together they were to oppose the monenergist and monothelete heresies favoured by the Emperor Heraclius and Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople. Maximus played an important part in the Lateran Council in Rome in 649, at which the doctrine of the two energies and two wills in Christ was affirmed. Because he refused to support imperial policies aimed at reconciling the monophysite communities through promoting monotheletism, he was eventually arrested, mutilated, and exiled.

Maximus was first and foremost a monk, in the tradition of Evagrius of Pontus. His defence of orthodox christological doctrine sprang as much from a spiritual as from a dogmatic concern, for he held the union of the two energies and the two wills in Christ to be a model for the union of the soul with God. His

monastic spirituality was nourished by the ascetical and mystical tradition of the desert, which he integrated, in the *Mystagogia*, with the liturgical tradition of the Church. One of his great achievements was to relate Christian mysticism firmly with the mystery of Christ, from which the teaching of Evagrius and of Dionysius ran the risk of detaching it.

Maximus wrote the *Mystagogia* somewhere between 628 and 630, on his way to, or already just arrived in, Africa. It is the first of the Byzantine liturgical commentaries of which we know, and is generally assumed to be based on the rite of Constantinople. He wrote it in all probability for monks, and interprets the liturgical rite as a means of mystical ascent to union with God. He draws largely for his material on Origen, Evagrius, and Dionysius, to whose *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* he refers twice, once to disclaim any intention of dealing with the same matters as so great a spiritual master had already treated. But he has woven the themes he has found in the tradition into an original synthesis.

By calling his work *Mystagogia* Maximus shows he intends it to lead his readers to a knowledge of the mystery of God, which though hidden can be known by revelation. The mystery is revealed in creation, in Scripture, and in the symbolism of the Liturgy, and in all three it can be apprehended by contemplation. Contemplation pierces through the symbolism of the rite to grasp the reality which is presented in the symbols, just as it perceives in nature the real meaning of created things, and discerns in Scripture the spiritual meaning contained in the letter. In all three instances contemplation is an activity of the human spirit prompted and inspired by the Holy Spirit.

In the *Mystagogia* Maximus makes frequent use of the terms figure, image and symbol to point to the presence of the mystery. These three words seem to be more or less synonymous. For Maximus, standing within the Platonic tradition, a symbol is not so much the sign of an absent reality, as the reality itself present in the symbol; and this concept lies at the root of his liturgical and sacramental symbolism. His interpretation of the Liturgy has to be set in the context of his understanding of God's plan of redemption. The figure or foreshadowing of the Old Testament is followed by the image of the New. The latter points to the reality to be realized at the end of time. The incarnation of the Word is the source of man's divinization in all these stages, present with increasing intensity in each successive phase of the divine economy.

Maximus is the first commentator to give an interpretation of the church building as well as of the Liturgy which is celebrated in it. He makes no use of the potential symbolic value of the dome, although he gives no fewer than five interpretations of the church's significance.

First, the Church – that composed of souls rather than of stones – is an image of God himself, since it gathers into one the different men, women and children to whom it has given new birth by the Holy Spirit. All form one body in Christ, all are of one heart and one soul within the Church, in whose fellowship all the characteristics which distinguish and separate people from one another are transcended. In the same way God unites all that exists in his creation, binding them together among themselves by uniting them with himself.

The church made of stones, which for Maximus is a kind of icon of the Church composed of people, is from another point of view an image of the world, which is made up of things visible and invisible. The sanctuary, reserved for the priests and ministers, represents the invisible, spiritual universe; the nave, reserved for the faithful people, represents the visible, material creation – though both are inseparably united. The nave is potentially the sanctuary, the sanctuary is the nave in action. The church made by hands reveals that not made by hands, the created universe, which is a kind of church.

The church is also an image of the visible, tangible world: for the sky it has the sanctuary, for the earth, the beauty of the nave. Conversely, the world is a church, whose sanctuary is the sky and whose nave the earth.

It represents man, too, and is his image and likeness, as he is created in God's. The nave symbolizes his body, and the acquisition of a virtuous life. The sanctuary is his soul, giving to his contemplation of nature a spiritual interpretation. The holy altar is his spirit, penetrating into the mystical knowledge of God. Conversely, man can be considered a mystical church.

But the church is also the image of the soul by itself. The sanctuary represents man's spirit, the principle of the contemplative life; the nave represents his reason, principle of the active life. The sanctuary points to the ascent of man's spirit, which by contemplation arrives at knowledge of the truth. The nave points to the elevation of his reason, which by practice of the virtues attains to the good. The fruit of the active and contemplative life

together is the soul's divinization, which is symbolized by the mystery celebrated on the holy altar.

So the church is the symbol both of God's condescension in love for man and of man's attempt to find God. In it the mystery and mysticism meet, to effect man's divinization in union with God. It is an icon of the Church not made with hands, but composed of people: an icon too of the Church which is eternal, in the heavens. For although there is an inseparable unity between visible and invisible, material and spiritual, in the world, in man and in the Church, nevertheless the visible and material is destined to die in order to be raised to a new and glorious existence, in which it will have become like that which is invisible and spiritual.

Of the Liturgy itself Maximus gives a twofold explanation. First, it represents the whole history of God's saving plan, from the incarnation to the second coming of Christ. The entry of the bishop into the church is the figure of the first coming of Christ in the flesh. By his incarnate life Christ frees human nature from the corruption and mortality into which it had fallen by sin. Having given himself as a ransom for us in his life-giving passion, he led us back into the grace of his Kingdom. Then he ascended into heaven and reoccupied his heavenly throne, of which the bishop's entry into the sanctuary and ascent to his throne are the figures.

The entry of the people signifies the passage of those who believe from ignorance and error to the knowledge of God, as well as their passage from evil and ignorance to virtue and knowledge. It symbolizes every act of repentance and return to the life of virtue. The readings of the Old and New Testaments instruct us in God's purposes, and show us how we are to wage the spiritual warfare to which we are called. The psalms signify the joy which reveals the good things of God, and which moves us to hatred of sin and pure love for God. The bishop's greeting, 'Peace be with you', before each reading represents the favours dispensed by the angels, to assist us in the struggle against evil, and to give us peace and freedom from the passions as the fruit of our acquisition of virtue.

The proclamation of the Gospel signifies the end of the world. The descent of the bishop from his throne symbolizes the second coming of Christ to judge the world, and to separate the just from the unjust, giving to each the recompense his life has deserved. The closing of the church doors and the dismissal of the catechumens signifies the folding-up of the material order, and the

entry of those who are worthy into the spiritual world, the bridal chamber of Christ.

'The entry of the holy and venerable mysteries' is the beginning of the new teaching there will be in heaven about God's purpose for us: it is the revelation of the mystery of our salvation hidden in God. The kiss of peace represents the harmony and concord that will bind all together in the world to come, when those who are worthy of it will enjoy an intimate union with the Word of God. The creed symbolizes the eternal thanksgiving to God for all his providence towards us, while the Sanctus in the anaphora represents our future union with the bodiless spiritual powers of heaven.

Maximus passes over the rest of the eucharistic prayer, to interpret the Lord's Prayer as the sign of our adoption as true sons of God, which we shall receive by the gift and grace of the Holy Spirit. The people's acclamation 'One is holy, etc.' at the end of the mystic ceremony represents the gathering of all who have been initiated into God, and their union with God, one and simple, whose glory they will contemplate, sharing the purity of the angels. Finally, Communion both points to, and in part realizes, man's divinization in the world to come:

Afterwards, as the climax of everything, comes the distribution of the sacrament which transforms into itself and renders similar to the causal good by grace and participation those who worthily share in it. To them is there lacking nothing of this good that is possible and attainable for men, so that they can be and be called gods by adoption through grace because all of God entirely fills them and leaves no part of them empty of his presence (Maximus Confessor, *Selected Writings*, p. 203).

As well as this general significance the Liturgy has a special significance, according to which the Eucharist symbolizes the mystical ascent of the soul to God. Maximus therefore goes on 'to consider and perceive how the divine precepts of holy Church lead the soul, by a true and active knowledge, to its own perfection'. His exposition in chapter twenty-three is concise, and we can follow it largely in his own words.

Maximus invites 'the genuine lover of Christ's blessed wisdom' to see in the entry into the church the soul's flight from 'the outside error and confusion of material things' and their warring, destructive appearances 'to an inviolable shelter of peace in the natural contemplation in the Spirit', and to consider

how free of any fighting or disorder it enters (the church) together with reason and before the Word and our great and true High Priest of God. There it learns, by symbols of the divine readings which take place, the principles of beings and the marvellous and grand mysteries of divine Providence revealed in the Law and the Prophets, and it receives in each, by the beautiful instruction divinely given in them through the holy angels who spiritually communicate to it the true understanding, the peaceful meanings with the strengthening and preserving enchantment of the divine and ardent desire for God by means of the spiritual appeal of the divine chants singing in it mystically. And consider again how the soul passes beyond this and concentrates on the one and only summit, the holy Gospel, which collects these principles together into one and in which pre-exist in one form all the principles both of Providence and of existing things in a single burst of meaning. Following this, it is permitted to those who love God to see by a divine perception with the undaunted eyes of the mind the Word of God come to it from heaven and symbolized by the bishop's descent from his priestly throne. He separates as catechumens the thoughts which are still formed from the senses and divisible because of them from its perfect part. And thence again it leaves the world of sense as suggested by the closing of the doors of God's holy church, and leads it to the understanding of immaterial things signified by the entrance into the unutterable mysteries, an understanding which is immaterial, simple, immutable, divine, free of all form and shape, and by which the soul gathers to itself its proper powers and comes face to face with the Word, having united by a spiritual kiss both the principles and ineffable modes of its own salvation and teaching through the symbol of faith to confess this with thanksgiving.

From this moment on the soul is rendered as far as possible simple and indivisible by its instruction, having encompassed by knowledge the principles of both sensible and intelligible things. The Word then leads it to the knowledge of theology made manifest after its journey through all things, granting it an understanding equal to the angels as far as possible for it. He will teach it with such wisdom that it will comprehend the one God, one nature and three Persons, unity of essence in three persons and consubstantial trinity of persons; trinity in unity and unity in trinity; not one and the other, or one without the

other, or one through the other, or one in the other, or one from the other, but the same in itself and by itself and next to itself, the same with itself . . . one, single, undivided, unconfused, simple, undiminished, and unchangeable divinity, completely one in essence and completely three in persons, and sole ray shining in the single form of one triple-splendoured light. In this light 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 having 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 centre 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 (*ibid.* pp. 204-6).

So the salvation which God has made available to all by the incarnation and passion of the Word is made available to individual Christians according to their capacity to receive it. No wonder that Maximus exhorts all to be in regular attendance at church, and never to miss the holy synaxis which is celebrated there

because of the holy angels who remain there and who take note each time people enter and present themselves to God, and they make supplications for them; likewise because of the grace of the Holy Spirit which is always invisibly present, but in a special way at the time of the holy synaxis. This grace transforms and changes each person who is found there and in fact remoulds him in proportion to what is more divine in him and leads him to what is revealed through the mysteries which are celebrated, even if he does not himself feel this because he is still among those who are children in Christ, unable to see either into the depths of the reality or the grace operating in it, which is revealed through each of the divine symbols of salvation being accomplished, and which proceeds according to the order and progression from preliminaries to the end of everything (*ibid.* pp. 206f.).

The *Mystagogia* of Maximus the Confessor seems to have had a fairly wide readership, to judge from the number of manuscript copies which have survived, though it probably never attained the popularity of some of the later commentaries. It had a special appeal for those living the monastic life, who could appreciate the mystical interpretation of the Liturgy. But as the first Byzantine work of its kind, it helped to establish a tradition, and to popularize a way of understanding and living the Liturgy which became an accepted part of Orthodox Christianity.