

WHY DOES THEODORE OF MOPSUESTIA INTERPRET THE LITURGIES IN AN ALLEGORICAL WAY?

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1. *Introduction*

The paper inquires into the meaning and function of Theodore of Mopsuestia's (died 428) interpretation of the liturgies. In his *Catechetical Homily on the Eucharist*, Theodore corrects himself once regarding the allegorical interpretation of the procession of the deacons carrying bread and wine to the altar. The preacher's change of mind can be interpreted as an indication that he does not intend to give standardized meanings of the ritual, but teaches the neophytes how to use the liturgies as a mental structure for the arrangement of biblical and theological knowledge.

The Catechetical Homilies reflect sermons preached to catechumens and neophytes. They explain the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the liturgies of initiation, including the eucharist.¹ The only extant witness, the Syriac translation, seems to belong to the category of free translations. This implies that retranslations into Greek are unreliable. Even Greek loan words in the Syriac text do not necessarily reflect the Greek terminology of the source.² The following observations are, therefore, based on the Syriac translation only.

¹ Alphonse Mingana, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Lord's Prayer and on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist*, Woodbrooke Studies 6 (Cambridge, 1933). Raymond Tonneau and Robert Devreesse, *Les Homélie Catéchétiques de Théodore de Mopsueste: Reproduction phototypique du Ms. Mingana syr. 561 (Selly Oak Colleges' Library, Birmingham)*, Studi e Testi 145 (Vatican City, 1949). The text of the homilies is quoted according to the facsimile edition and its pagination as: fol. no., recto/verso, line no. For the background of the homilies, cf. Vicenç-Sebastià Janeras, 'En quels jours furent prononcées les homélie catéchétiques de Théodore de Mopsueste?', in *Mémorial Mgr Gabriel Khouri-Sarkis (1898-1968)*, ed. François Graffin (Leuven, 1969), pp. 121-133.

² Joseph Reuss, *Matthäus-Kommentare aus der griechischen Kirche*, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 61 (Berlin, 1957), pp. 133f; no. 106: σύμβολον corresponds to *tupsā* (i.e. τύπος) in the Syriac parallel text in 119v7f; cf. Clemens Leonhard, 'Did Theodore of Mopsuestia Quote an Ancient "Ordo"?', *Studia Liturgica* 34 (2004), pp. 191-204, n. 20.

2. *Understanding Heavenly Meanings of Earthly Codes*

Brief attempts to describe Theodore's interpretation of the liturgies cannot exhaust his understanding of the eucharist as a 'memorial' or a 'reminder' of biblical events or of elements of a heavenly liturgy. It is, of course, clear that Theodore thinks in terms of a vulgarized Platonist structure of the world. Thus, the more abstract a thing or a ritual is, the more real, 'true',³ and the more heavenly it must be. The liturgies of the church represent heavenly realities. Yet, they hardly imitate them. The occasional observer of an ecclesiastical ritual cannot, therefore, ascend to the vision of the heavenly reality and to the less multiform status of the existence of the earthly images that he sees. For, the liturgy allows only those who have learned how to decode its images to participate in a preliminary and entirely undefined way in these heavenly realities. Theodore's interpretation of the liturgy only faintly resembles, for example, the way Plotinus would construct the structure of the universe. Rather Theodore's frequent quotations of the Letter to the Hebrews guide his readers to the most important source of his philosophical background.

Theodore begins his homilies on the eucharist by expounding the use of wine and bread in general terms (117r–122r6). He continues to explain the notion of sacrifice as an interpretative element of the Christian eucharist. As the eucharist is a sacrifice according to the New Testament, especially on the basis of Hebrews, Theodore blurs the meaning of *kāhnā*, which may refer to the president of the eucharistic liturgy and the risen Christ, the only true 'priest' who performs the only effective sacrifice in heaven for all times. Theodore clarifies the role of the earthly minister of the church who performs a

'memorial of that true sacrifice. For, he fulfills those celestial things by means of figures and signs. It is necessary that also this sacrifice should be a declaration (or manifestation, *buddāqā*) of those (celestial things). And the priest (bishop) makes⁴ a kind of image (*yuqnā*) of that celestial service,

³ 122r17; see the quotation below.

⁴ Note the expression of 'making' (things, images) in Mary Carruthers' summaries; e.g. p. 4f. Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 34 (Cambridge, 1998 [repr. 2006]). Carruthers also published a revised edition of her seminal study of 1990: *Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd ed., Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 70 (Cambridge, 2008). The latter volume substantiates and enlarges her theses. For the present purpose, *The Craft of Thought* sheds more light on late antique sources. I am grateful to Michael Jursa (University of Vienna) for having introduced me to the work of Mary Carruthers.

because we would not be able perform any priestly service outside of the law without having an image (*yuqnā*) of the celestial (things)' (122r17–23).

Theodore goes on to quote Hebr. 8:4f and to explain the 'natural' difference between the celestial and earthly sacrifices. Thus, Christ performs a kind of high-priestly service in heaven by offering himself as a sacrifice (122v22–24). Human beings will see (*hāyrīnan* 124r10) these celestial things face to face (*appīn luqbal appīn*) after their ascent to heaven. For now, they can only see them in a mirror (*maḥẓitā*), in parables (*pell(') ātā*), figures (*tuṣṣē*), signs (*ātwātā*), etc. by means of their faith. The figures and signs of the liturgy allow them to approach these heavenly things in advance but only in a preliminary way.

Theodore says that 'we' should 'recall' (*m'ahhdīnan*) the Lord's death and think that the liturgy is a 'memorial of his passion' (*dukrānā dhāššeh*).⁵ Thus, Theodore is aware of the problem that the eucharist should refer back to the Last Supper, but that it should represent a kind of sacrifice at the same time. An expositor of the liturgy must thus overcome the obstacle that the liturgy may remotely resemble Jesus' and the apostles' actions at the Last Supper, but that it does not have any similarity whatsoever with the sacrifice of an animal, let alone with that of a human being.⁶ According to Theodore, the service is an image (*yuqnā* 124r26) of Christ's high-priesthood as a basis for those who are used to administer it on earth. This implies that

'each time when the service of this awe-inspiring sacrifice is performed, which is clearly a likeness (*dumyā*) of heavenly things — that (sacrifice) which as often as it is performed by means of food and drink (which) we are esteemed worthy to receive for the sake of the true participation in future benefits —, we must paint in our mind, as if by means of illusions⁷ that we were like that one in heaven, and that we inscribe by means of (our) faith the shape of the heavenly things into our mind, while we consider that

⁵ 122r9f cf. par. 124v24–125r1 where the same line of thought is taken up again. 1 Cor. 11: 26 says that the performance of the eucharist is a means to 'commemorate' (and 'to bring to remembrance, to remind' etc.: *ma'hdītōn* e.g. 84r12) Christ's passion.

⁶ One solution to bridge the chasm between sacrifice and eucharistic liturgy is the identification of *prayer* and salvific action. Christ 'prays' (Rom 8: 34, s. 123v2f) at God's right side. Praying is not just 'words', but actions ('*bādē* 123v5). Theodore does not continue this line of thought, which could have led him to explain the priest's recitation of the eucharistic prayer as establishing the link between earthly and heavenly liturgies.

⁷ Tonneau and Devresse, *Les Homélie Catéchétiques* (see n. 1) translate 'phantasmes' and give *šragragyātā* in the footnote. Cf. Richard Sorabji, *Aristotle on Memory*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, 2004 [repr. 2006]), and see n. 27. For the metaphor of painting, cf. Aristotle's 'drawing', idem, p. xvi referring to *De memoria et reminiscencia* 450b 15f and Carruthers, *Craft of Thought* (see n. 4), e.g. pp. 69–77, 130–142 and other contexts of Carruthers' study.

it is Christ who is in heaven; he who died for us, rose, and ascended to heaven, who is also now slain by means of those figures. For, each time when we looked with our eyes with faith upon those memorials ('*uhdānē*) that are performed now — namely that he dies again, rises, and ascends to heaven — we are dragged⁸ towards the shape of those (things) that happened a long time ago on our behalf. And because it is our Lord, Christ, who offers himself as a sacrifice on our behalf, and who is thus for us the high-priest in those things, we must think that this one who is now close to the altar paints (*ṣā(')yar*) an image (*yuqnā*) of that (heavenly) priest — this one who does not offer his own sacrifice in the same way as he is also not really a high priest, performs as if by means of a kind of image (*yuqnā*) the service of that ineffable sacrifice — (an image) through which he inscribes for you like by means of illusions a picture (*ṣalmā*) of those heavenly and ineffable things — and (an image) of the spiritual and incorporeal powers' (125r1–24).

The shape of Christ's high-priestly service is his own self-offering and the bishop's performance of the liturgy paints or inscribes Christ's liturgy into the minds of the faithful. Thus, Theodore suggests that the liturgy is a mimetic performance. He does not distinguish between performances in heaven and the biblical past as a reality that could be depicted in the liturgy. The paragraph emphasizes twice that Christ's liturgy that is mimetically performed in the mass is his death, resurrection, and ascendance — not Jesus' acts at the Last Supper.

Theodore's approach becomes more pronounced in comparison with Cyprian's remark on the relationship between Christ and the president of the eucharistic assembly. For Cyprian, the president represents Jesus at the Last Supper. Cyprian ruled out that certain communities should use water instead of wine for the celebration of the eucharist. Although this approach created its own problems,⁹ it was a little easier to understand celebrations of the eucharist in terms of a mimetic representation of the Last Supper in Cyprian's time.

For Theodore, the bishop cannot represent Jesus reclining at the Last Supper. He represents Christ, the heavenly high-priest. In Theodore's

⁸ Cf. *lamdarrā'ū* in 120v21 (126v3) 'to take away one by the arm'. The consumption of the consecrated bread has the same effect as the risen Christ's pulling up Adam and Eve from hell on the Anastasis icons (more generally *dlkullan bkul porsin ltammān neggad* 123v1).

⁹ Cyprian uses the mimetic character of the priest's service to rebut his adversaries who consecrated water at their eucharists. A few lines later in the same letter, his argument collapses when he realizes that Christ performed the Last Supper in the evening, whereas Cyprian's community celebrated a kind of eucharistic service already in the mornings. Cyprian has recourse to an allegorical interpretation of the time of the day when the Last Supper was held in order to get rid of the need to abolish morning celebrations as a consequence of his claim that the president represents *and imitates* Christ at the Last Supper.

time, the celebration of the eucharist did not resemble a Roman symposium any more. As people still know what a symposium looks like, it was not plausible to claim mimetic parallels between the eucharist and the Last Supper. The idea that the eucharist should represent the service of the heavenly high-priest requires another kind of interpretation of the liturgies than simple imitation of the biblical past. The approach has another advantage. As nobody knows what the heavenly liturgy looks like, nobody can cast doubt on the accuracy and correctness of the shape of the earthly rituals and their interpretation. Finding parallels to heavenly liturgies simplifies the task of the apologist and the expositor. His explanations are arbitrary and hence unassailable.

Just in passing, Theodore mentions the heavenly hosts that are ‘painted’ into the mind of the faithful. After adding a few scriptural verses in order to support his reference to these angels (125v), he draws a mimetic link to the deacons who serve at the bishop’s mass — ‘displaying a likeness’ (*dumyā mḥāwwēn*) of the heavenly service.

Theodore is now carried away by his enthusiasm for associations of detailed mimetic correspondences between the liturgy and its spiritual interpretation. He explains even the vestments of the deacons as laden with spiritual meaning. The faithful who know the significance of the rituals are ‘drawn’ (126v4) into the visions as towards things of the future, ‘as if there was a kind of image in that ineffable dispensation...’ (126v4f). Theodore does not assert that his explanations reveal the eternal meaning of the liturgies. Yet, his remarks come close to this claim.

‘Therefore, we paint (*ṣāyrīnan*) into our mind (*re’yānā*) as if through a kind of picture (*ṣalmā*) by means of the priest Christ our Lord, whom we see as having redeemed us and revived us by the sacrifice of himself. We inscribe (*rāšmīnan*) into our mind (*madd’ā*) by means of the deacons who serve that which is performed (i.e. the liturgy) the invisible deacons — those (heavenly deacons) who served at that ineffable service (being represented by) these who bring out this sacrifice — or the figures of a sacrifice — and put it in an orderly way on the awe-inspiring table. There is an awe-inspiring thing (to be seen) for the spectators in the shape that is drawn into our mind (*madd’ā*). We must see Christ — by means of the figures — who is brought out to the passion. Another moment, he is stretched out for us on the table in order to be sacrificed. As soon as the offering (*qurbānā*) comes out in the holy containers, on the patens, and in the cups which will be placed (on the altar), you must meditate (verb: *lmernā*) that our Lord, Christ, is brought out towards the passion’ (126v7–21).

The grammatical subject of the action of painting has now changed: ‘we paint’ and ‘you must meditate’. It is not any more the priest or bishop

who paints, but the participants of the service. Both metaphors refer to the same mental action. Yet, it is the duty of the people to become actively involved in the creation of images. In this passage, Theodore is entangled within his own network of associations. He can say that the deacons bring out the ‘sacrifice or the figures (*tupsē*) of a/the sacrifice’ — as if there was no difference between the ritual and its interpretation.¹⁰ Theodore seems to draw the spectators into a performance where nobody should discern heavenly meaning, biblical narrative, and mundane actions of the liturgy any more.

This kind of rhetoric corresponds to the method of artists who depict scenes of the liturgies in their works. Among many examples, a beautiful ivory pyxis of the Metropolitan Museum in New York depicts the women who approach Christ’s tomb on Easter Sunday.¹¹ Yet, the whole scene takes place in an arched building. The women carry censers and approach a structure that is clearly an altar and not a grave. The women’s gestures signal that they are silent in the same way as Theodore mentions that the liturgy of the preparation of the gifts is performed in total silence (128r13). The deacons who approach the altar with censers *are* the biblical women who come to Jesus’ tomb carrying censers with ointments for Christ’s body. On the back of the pyxis, three of the five¹² women are depicted in praying gestures with the same head covers as the other two and with women’s breasts. These figures are definitely not men (i.e. male deacons). The artist tries to capture in ivory what a well trained Christian should be able to imagine during the procession with the gifts and the preparation of the altar.

Theodore explains his hermeneutical method. At the beginning of his homilies on baptism, saying: ‘Every sacrament¹³ (*rāzā*) is an indication

¹⁰ Theodore is not interested in theological precision, cf. n. 17 below.

¹¹ Pierpont Morgan Collection 17.190.57. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York: <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/17.190.57> [12.09.2010]. Cf. Archer St. Clair, *Early Christian Pyxides Carved with New Testament Scenes* [PhD Dissertation, manuscript] (Princeton University, 1977), pp. 159-181 and eadem, ‘The Visit to the Tomb: Narrative Liturgy on Three Early Christian Pyxides’, *Gesta* 18 (1979) pp. 127-135, esp. 129-131. I am grateful to Harald Buchinger, who has brought the pyxis to my attention.

¹² A harmonistic approach to the four gospels (Matth 28.1; Mark 16.1; Luke 24.10; John 20.1) can find a total of five *different* names of women, hence five distinct persons.

¹³ ‘Sacrament’ translates *rāzā* here. The Greek word(s) that are translated by *rāzā* cannot be recovered; cf. n. 2. For Theodore’s purposeful avoidance of terminological and theological precision, cf. n. 17 below. In several cases, *rāzā* plausibly renders *μυστήριον*. The Catechetical Homilies are not, in any case, mystagogy: cf. John Chrysostom: Philippe de Roten, *Baptême et mystagogie: Enquête sur l’initiation chrétienne selon s. Jean Chrysostome*, Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen 91 (Münster,

(or narration, *š(u) dā'ā*) by means of signs (*ātwātā*) and sacraments (*'rāzē*) of invisible and ineffable things' (82r7–9). The definition is tautological and thus of limited explanatory value. The statement receives its meaning from the following lines that reveal Theodore's interpretation of the role of the preacher vis-à-vis his audience.

'Thus, an explanation and an interpretation are needed for things like these, if someone who wants to approach (the sacraments), should know the power (or sense and meaning, *ḥaylā*) of the sacraments. For, if it was (only) the things (themselves, i.e. the mere actions), a word would have been superfluous, while the (mere) sight (of the actions) would sufficiently indicate for us everything that exists (in the sacrament). Because in the sacrament are signs (*ātwātā*) of that which has been (in the past) or that which will be (in the future),¹⁴ a word is required which interprets the power (sense/meaning) of the signs (*ātwātā*) and sacraments (*'rāzē*)' (82r9–15).

Theodore goes on to explain the methodology of typological exegesis according to Heb. 8: 5, 10 that alludes to the distinction between the Old Testament 'shadow', the 'image (*yuqnā*)' that is available to the Church, and the celestial 'reality' that can somehow be approached in one's mind, but which human beings will only enter in the future. Although the rituals that were prescribed for the performance at the Temple in Jerusalem were just a shadow of the heavenly things, they contained already some low degree of mimetic similarity to the truth as the celestial reality. The expositor of the liturgies may, therefore, use elements of the Old Testament rituals, especially those which were already used by the Letter to the Hebrews. If the Christian liturgy is understood as a *yuqnā* (*eikōn*), one may assume that it contains some degree of mimetic similarity to the heavenly liturgies. Nevertheless, the spectators need the preacher who identifies the 'images'. On their own, spectators are not able to see heavenly realities in

2005), pp. 47-107. Also for John Chrysostom, the candidates should 'imagine' future or celestial realities, *ibid.* p. 102. Their didactic explanation is not *μυσταγωγία*. For, 'mystagogy' is the celebration of the liturgies or the whole process that makes a neophyte out of a candidate for baptism and not a sermon that explains elements of the ritual. The ritual (gestures and words, i.e. mystagogy) guides the celebrating people towards the understanding of the truths of the Christian faith and way of life (the mysteries); p. 59f. Yet, the spiritual meaning or sense of the ritual (i.e. its celestial or biblical reference) is inseparably linked with its gestures and words, '...de sorte qu'on pourrait aussi bien parler, à propos de Jean Chrysostome, d'une "initiation aux mystères" (on pense d'abord à la réalité spirituelle), que d'une "initiation par les mystères" (on pense d'abord à la célébration sacramentelle)', p. 91.

¹⁴ Cf. Carruthers, *Craft of Thought* (see n. 4), pp. 12ff and 66-69; Sorabji, *Aristotle on Memory* (see n. 7), p. 47 (the beginning of Aristotle's treatise and p. 13) for the debate whether or not memory must contain *past* things.

the liturgical performance. This indicates both the high dignity of the liturgies as well as the enormous importance of their explanation.

Such observations together with tenets of other theologians — like the priest's office to represent Christ in the liturgy — could suggest an essentialist interpretation of Theodore's explanation of the liturgies. Theodore seems to say that the visible performance of the liturgy refers the spectators to celestial realities. The neophytes, who have learnt to decode the symbols of the rites, would be watching heavenly things and participating in heavenly rituals in a preliminary way.¹⁵

Thus, Theodore's audience watches the procession of ministers carrying bread and wine to the altar, seeing Jesus, who is being dragged towards the cross by the Roman soldiers or in the minds of 5th century Christians, rather by the Jewish mob — no doubt, a terrible vision.

3. *The Necessarily Unlimited Repertoire of Meanings and the Necessity to Limit the Repertoire of Meanings*

After having invited his listeners to draw this awe-inspiring images into their minds, Theodore continues:

'It is not, however, the case that the Jews bring him. For, it is not allowed and lawful (*mappas wšallit*) that there should be any kind of an evil likeness within the figures of our life and redemption. But these (figures, actually the deacons) send us (or rather our minds) to the invisible hosts of the service; those who were also present when the passion of (our) redemption was accomplished and who fulfilled their service there. For, they served the whole economy of our Lord Christ in their service. There is nothing imperfect (unworthy, mean, etc.; *bšir*)' (126v21–127r3).

A few minutes earlier, Theodore had begun to interpret the details of the liturgy to represent celestial realities. If the procession of the gifts refers to the events of the passion, the deacons represent the perpetrators of Jesus' murder. Theodore's anti-Judaism cuts his train of thoughts here. In the minds of the spectators, the liturgy would become a passion play with lots of bad characters and very few good ones.

Theodore could have thwarted such an interpretation, if he had followed his earlier train of thought that envisions Christ being 'stretched out for us on the table in order to be sacrificed' (126v17f). For, there is

¹⁵ Cf. Reinhard Meßner, 'Zur Hermeneutik allegorischer Liturgieerklärung in Ost und West', *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 115 (1993), pp. 284-319 and 415-434.

no biblical, mimetic background for this idea. He could have tried to infer the shape of the heavenly liturgy from the ritual of the eucharist or vice versa. He chose, however, to follow the crude, mimetic line here. Thus, elements of the liturgy depict scenes and persons of biblical narratives.

Theodore quickly discovers a loophole from this problematic situation: For, there were also angels present at the passion. He continues:

‘You must thus think that the deacons have the likeness of the invisible powers of the service when they now carry out the piece (of bread) to the offering (*qurbānā*); and just through their services the (deacons) do not send Christ, our Lord, to the life-giving passion by means of these commemorations (*‘uhdānē*). As soon as they bring out (the bread), they place it on the holy table for the full completion of the passion, in order that we should think about it thenceforward that he (Christ) was put in a kind of tomb on the table and that he already underwent (lit.: received) the passion. Therefore, some of the deacons who spread veils¹⁶ on the table give a likeness (*dumyā*) of the burial shrouds by means of this (action). Those who are standing on both sides as soon as it/he (the bread or Christ) is already placed (on the altar) and flapping away all the air which is above the holy body, and who prevent anything from taking hold of it (corrections in the right margin); they too indicate by means of this behavior (*eskēmā*) the importance of the corpse which is put (there). For, it is also the custom regarding the important people of this world...’ (127r16–127v6).

The text goes on to expand the imagery of a burial. The ministers of the church represent the heavenly hosts who stand in silence watching Jesus’ burial, waiting eagerly for Christ’s resurrection.

Theodore has no interest in the determination of an exact time of the consecration of the gifts during the ritual. He is talking about the placement of the host on the altar before the recitation of the eucharistic prayer. The preparation of the gifts now depicts Christ’s burial and not his passion. Theodore indicates why he has changed the meaning of the liturgy. He did not want the spectators of the liturgy to imagine (too) violent images of the passion during the liturgy.

One may wonder how Theodore could change the basic metaphor of the interpretation of the liturgy within the range of a few seconds of the same sermon. This quick abandonment of one bit of interpretation in favor of another poses a problem to an essentialist understanding. If both images — Christ being dragged to be sacrificed *and* his burial — were acceptable, one must theorize about multiple meanings of the liturgies in

¹⁶ Although *persā* later indicates the cloth spread over the consecrated bread during the eucharistic liturgy, it seems that the deacons are depicted here as spreading a cloth on the table as part of its preparation for the eucharistic liturgy.

Theodore's approach. Yet, both images exclude each other, although both are the result of the attempt to decode the liturgies in a mimetic way.

The fact that Theodore can propose, discard, and replace a bit of interpretation within the same sermon suggests that the purpose of his interpretation cannot be the identification of a definite celestial reference of the ritual. The act of interpreting the liturgy must have other functions in the spiritual life of the neophytes. This suggestion can be substantiated.

4. *A Container for Memories – Not Its Contents*

Similar to Mary Carruthers' observations regarding St. Augustine,¹⁷ Theodore uses his exegetical or psychological terms and imagery freely and inconsistently. There is no trace of any interest in the creation and application of a succinct technical terminology. This is no accident and Theodore's translator is not to blame for it. This feature of the liturgical homilies is part of Theodore's genuine approach to explain liturgies. Theodore says, for example, that (in baptism) 'we are born in an anticipated birth by means of *some kind of figure* (*tupsā meddem*)' (117v2). In the same way, Christians are nourished with the grace of the Holy Spirit 'by means of some kind of figures (*tupsē meddem*)' (117v9) where the plural obviously refers to bread and wine. Theodore also uses *tupsā* without *meddem*, simply saying 'by means of a figure', i.e. 'figuratively'.¹⁸ This does not reflect a nuance of technical terminology. It is meant as an abbreviation. When Theodore introduces a new concept, he often indicates its deliberate doctrinal and terminological fuzziness by adding *meddem*¹⁹ ('some kind of'). He leaves out this particle in the ensuing discussions.

If the neophytes paint some kind of image in their minds, this image will consist of elements of past experience, including images that the

¹⁷ Augustine's rhetoric '...blurs a crucial distinction in philosophy between "idea" and "image". ... He does freely say (and this is also characteristic of him) that he doesn't quite know what he's describing'; Carruthers, *Craft of Thought* (see n. 4), p. 32.

¹⁸ Cf. *btupsā* 118v1, 122r2. The terminology is not standardized, cf. *b(')ārwātā wabtupsē* 119r9, *badtupsē d(')rāzē* 120r13, 120v6.

¹⁹ Cf. 122r7 *debhtā meddem damšmlēnan* 'a kind of sacrifice that we perform (or celebrate)', 122r12f *gelyā-(h)y dabtešmeštā dhālēn a(y)k debhtā meddem mmallēnan* 'it is evident that we fulfill something like a sacrifice by means of this service', 122v22 and 124r26 'a kind of high-priesthood', 123v6 'a kind of intercession', 125r20f (126v4, 7) 'a kind of image (*yuqnā/šalmā*)' (occurring in the middle of a rhetorical paragraph), 127r24 'a kind of tomb' referring to the altar. The same terminology introduces the beginning of the exposition of the rites of baptism: 'a kind of figure' 85v9.

neophytes have already created during their study of the bible. Yet for Theodore, as for other practitioners as well as theoreticians of rhetoric, 'memory' does not exclusively or even typically refer to the storage of images of past events.²⁰ One must also memorize the future or places that no living human being has ever seen, such as heaven.

The right use of one's mind and memory is a craft. The training and application of that craft is a virtue. The well-trained and active mind disposes of the necessary sources to make the right moral judgments. If Theodore shows the neophytes how their minds can profit from observing the preparation of the altar before the eucharistic prayer, he does not teach them theological contents of liturgical actions. He invites them to develop a useful habit. Thereby, the members of Theodore's audience retain full discretion to shape and organize their own memories: '...we paint into our minds...' and '...you must meditate that our Lord, Christ, is brought out towards the passion...'. With regard to the specific contents of the memory, this is a bit of advice, not a religious commandment.

Mary Carruthers explains the urban liturgies of Jerusalem in a similar way. Historical accuracy, or even plausibility, in attributing certain biblical events to certain places of the city is not important. Even in cases where the attribution of an historical event to a certain place is correct, it is not necessary for the main purpose of the performance of a public procession or the visits of single persons during their pilgrimages. The people — apparently not by accident many monks who are supposed to practice this kind of exercises in their minds anyway — walk and read or commemorate in the urban landscape where and what they would pass by and commemorate in their own mental 'memory-palaces', too.²¹ Thus, they establish and maintain 'commonplaces'. Even if not each member of the congregations thinks exactly the same thoughts at certain places, the common experience influences the memorized contents of these places. The community is thus created by the fact that people share the activity of creating meanings and organizing their memories at certain places. It is not made up of brainwashed individuals who have the same associations at the same time.²² The creation of such common places for shared memories may be used as part of that community's *paideia* or *res memorabilia*.²³ Ancient and modern discussions of the craft of memory

²⁰ Carruthers, *Craft of Thought* (see n. 4), pp. 66-69.

²¹ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 40-44.

²² Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 37-40.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 44-46.

advise adepts to organize the contents of their memory in terms of an imagined and preconceived architecture. The pilgrimage to Jerusalem furnishes a link between the liturgy and this use of grids and buildings or of buildings as grids. Liturgies could be useful in this context. Pilgrims may visit holy places or participate in liturgies in order to create and renew the images of the mental place and of the contents that is stored there.²⁴ Theodore teaches the neophytes to do exactly that.

The urban landscape of Jerusalem is, however, ambiguous in this respect, because of the remote possibility of actual historical links between places and narratives. Yet, the pilgrims, theologians, monks, and nuns who learned such methods of memorization, know that the combination of contents and sites is arbitrary. Any means that enhances the power of one's memory is welcome. Thus, the wildest pseudo-etymology of a term may be a powerful tool for the organization of memorized content. It has the same function as the act of placing mental images of a biblical account into an envisaged niche in one's real as well as imagined cloister. It is not, therefore, important and, for Theodore, no more than a question of good taste or political correctness whether, upon watching the preparation of the gifts (or the Great Entrance), one associates Jesus being led to his execution or Jesus' burial procession.

Theodore's liturgical hermeneutics thus contains bits of advice to train one's memory. Like the many places of the city of Jerusalem, the pontifical liturgy is a common place that invites the observer to organize memorabilia along its course — to create a sense of *paideia*. The procession with the gifts does not *mean*, *express*, or *enact* this or that event of the passion narratives. In fact, it does not mean anything. The procession is used as a means to store pious memories. There is no use asking whether or not a bit of interpretation is true; it must be asked whether or not it is useful.²⁵

This also explains why the allegorical discussion is attached to this procession. For, the procession is a marginal event of the whole liturgy. Yet more importantly, it is a piece of liturgy that is entirely made up of actions performed in silence (128r13). Thus, it invites the creative imagination of the participants in the liturgy more intensively than a presidential prayer or a biblical reading, the words of which already carry a certain meaning. The Western Middle Ages will interpret those events in a similar way and thus anticipate the modern knowledge that texts — especially in rituals — can serve several functions and that the simple

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 49.

²⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 73.

meaning of the words may or may not indicate any function of the utterance within the ritual.

Theodore's audience is thus free to associate elements of a heavenly liturgy as well as imagery of worldly biblical events. Theodore does not need to pass each liturgical action off as a mimetic representation of a certain celestial archetype. The spectators' vision does not reveal, but create the reference or meaning of the ritual. The allusions to Platonistic ideas and to the terminology of the Letter to the Hebrews legitimate the process. The emphasized fuzziness of the approach indicates that these allusions are not meant to make the interpretation pass off as a stringent philosophical framework.

At the beginning of the homilies on baptism, Theodore adds to his quote of 1 Cor. 11:26 and the institution narrative (Matth. 26:26, 28):

'...in a way that it should be clear that if the service of these (the eucharist) and if the taking of the offering (i.e., the reception of Holy Communion) is a remembrance (or reminder, *'uhdānā*) of Christ's death and resurrection, from which there was what belongs to the participation in it, we are all looking forward to fulfilling in the sacrament signs of that which belongs to Christ, our Lord, (i.e. elements of the New Testament narratives) in order that the participation in him (his actions etc.) should strengthen our hope by means of that (which) has been revealed to us. It is now convenient that we should say to you the cause (*'elltā*) of all the sacraments and signs' (84r15–21).

The contents or the things to be remembered are attached to 'signs'. Theodore thus explains the *'elltā* of the signs. This evokes again a concept studied by Mary Carruthers: *'Memory's "rationes" are not reasons of the sort that engage a philosopher, but "schemes" or "ordering devices" ...*²⁶. This characterizes Theodore's method to teach people how to participate in liturgies.

Furthermore, in antiquity and the Middle Ages, memory images are said to be 'composed of two elements: a "likeness" (*similitudo*) that serves as a cognitive cue or token to the "matter" or *res* being remembered, and *intentio* or the "inclination" or "attitude" we have to the remembered experience, which helps both to classify and to retrieve it. Thus, memories are all images, and they are all and always emotionally "colored".'²⁷

²⁶ Carruthers, *Craft of Thought* (see n. 4), pp. 33 ff. The line quoted above is correctly understood as a conclusion of a paragraph, not the heading of what follows as in Tonneau and Devresse, *Les Homélie Catéchétiques* (see n. 1), p. 333.

²⁷ Cf. Carruthers, *Craft of Thought* (see n. 4), pp. 14, 25–29, 32. 'Sex and violence, strangeness and exaggeration, are especially powerful for mnemonic purposes' (29). Cf. Sorabji, *Aristotle on Memory* (see n. 7), pp. xiv–xx, 14ff for Aristotle's terminology and

Theodore emphasizes that the liturgy of the preparation of the gifts is 'awesome' or 'terrible'. The readers are taught to attach emotions to the contents of their memory and Theodore singles out for interpretation and contemplation parts of the liturgy that conjure up strong emotions — just not too strong ones.

5. *Concluding Remarks*

Theodore of Mopsuestia's homilies on the eucharist contain a passage that looks like an explanatory error, because he corrects his interpretation immediately. Nevertheless, the tradition preserved both versions within the same homily. This indicates that Theodore does not understand his interpretation of the liturgies as an exposition of their meaning. The tradition of the sermon indicates that also redactors of his homilies understood it in the same way. Theodore teaches the spectators of ecclesiastical rituals to train their memory in order to use the sequence of ritual acts that they watch and perform many times in their lives as a grid for the storage of bits of information. Following the advice of the masters of rhetoric, the pious participant in the liturgies thus creates meanings of the liturgies. The neophytes are invited to enter the liturgies as common places where Christians celebrate and commemorate elements of their tradition. The specific contents of each person's memory are likely similar. Their details are, however, chosen and shaped by the individual.²⁸ It is the individual's duty to develop and maintain his or her mental repertoire. Thus, Theodore's fuzzy and multifarious explanations are not inconsistent. On the contrary, the inconsistency of the terminology as well as his changes of interpretative backgrounds and root metaphors reveal and emphasize the arbitrariness of the procedure and thus the freedom of the individual participant in the liturgies to determine the structure of the contents of his mind.

Three hermeneutical suggestions emerge from a generalization of these observations. They must be applied to — and challenged by — other texts that use similar methods to explain liturgies.

for a more general explanation of *φρικτός* etc. De Roten, *Baptême et mystagogie* (see n. 13), ch. 2.4.

²⁸ Cf. Carruthers, *Craft of Thought* (see n. 4), introduction, p. 2: 'Monastic meditation is the craft of making thoughts about God', and p. 19 *et passim* for the responsibility of the individual to create the structure of his memory.

First, rituals can be used as an ordering grid for an arbitrary collection of mental images. Cases of mimetic bridges between rituals and mental images do not support the plausibility of the link between ritual and meaning, but help to maintain and use this essentially arbitrary link in order to retrieve information from the storage of one's mind. Texts like Theodore's do not claim that the contents that they suggest the listeners to attach to certain elements of the rite should be theologically normative or true. Liturgies are not understood, but performed. As soon as the members of the congregation are well trained in their performance, they can use the sequence of its actions in the same way as an imagined building that they inhabit mentally and whose chambers they use as storage places for information. The liturgy — like the rhetor's empty 'memory-palace' — does not mean more than the sequence of the letters of the alphabet. Yet, both are powerful tools for ordering contents such as words of a dictionary.

This implies, secondly, that liturgical interpretation was not similar to biblical exegesis for all ancient expositors. Theodore was regarded as the paragon of anti-allegorical biblical exegesis in several texts that were handed down by the scholars of the Apostolic Church of the East. At the same time Theodore remains one of the most important and creative allegorical expositors of the liturgies. Although the distinction between Antiochene and Alexandrian approaches to biblical exegesis cannot be drawn as neatly as historical interconfessional polemics would like to have it, there is a grain of truth in it. Theodore was aware of the fact that biblical exegesis differed profoundly from teaching neophytes what to do when watching (or remembering) the ritual of the mass.

Third, propositions like 'ritual element W always means X and Y, and can never mean Z' or 'ritual A elevates the mind to celestial reality B (and C)' may or may not be plausible in later epochs. Such Platonizing interpretations of the liturgies do not, in any case, continue Theodore's way of thinking about liturgies.