

## CHURCH RITUAL AS ROLE-PLAYING IN HERNANDO DE TALAVERA'S TREATISE ON THE MASS

The first systematic treatises on the allegorical interpretation of the Mass, the *Eclogae de officio missae* (814) and the *Liber officialis* (821) of Amalarius of Metz, view the liturgy as a rememorative drama depicting the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.<sup>1</sup> While the celebrant is normally cast in the role of Christ, the faithful are called upon to participate in the sacred drama of the Mass by imagining themselves in a variety of roles—Jews awaiting the Messiah, the shepherds of the Nativity, the crowds that witnessed the Crucifixion, etc. Among the later writers who take up and elaborate upon the Amalarian tradition is Gonzalo de Berceo, whose *Sacrificio de la Misa* is probably the first work of its kind to be written in the vernacular.<sup>2</sup> The Amalarian method of interpreting allegorically the invisible realities of the liturgy is still very familiar to the faithful in the fifteenth century.<sup>3</sup> It is thus no surprise that a text like Hernando de Talavera's *Tractado de lo que significan las ceremonias de la misa* should appear in the Spain of the Catholic Sovereigns, but its appearance seems to respond to a specific need and its focus seems to reflect the peculiar socio-religious context of late medieval Spain.

Fifteenth-century Spain witnessed the breakdown of the medieval system of *convivencia* of Christians, Muslims, and Jews. The pogroms of 1391 and the choice of baptism or exile stipulated by the Edict of Expulsion of 1492 resulted in mass conversions among the Spanish Jews. The reconquest of the kingdom of Granada led to a wave of conversions, sometimes forced, sometimes voluntary, among the Spanish Muslims. The resulting castes of *conversos*, while nominally Christian, were often ignorant of even

<sup>1</sup> Amalarius' liturgical treatises have been edited by J.M. Hanssens: *Amalarii episcopi opera liturgica omnia*, 3 vols. (Citta del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1948-1950).

<sup>2</sup> Sister Teresa Clare Goode, *Gonzalo de Berceo: "El sacrificio de la misa." A Study of its Symbolism and of its Sources* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1933), pp. 145-146.

<sup>3</sup> It is no accident that two of the most celebrated preachers of the fifteenth century, Saint Vincent Ferrer and Girolamo Savonarola, preached sermons based on the allegorical interpretation of the Mass. See Sant Vicent Ferrer, *Sermons*, vol. 2, ed. Josep Sanchis Sivera (Barcelona: Editorial Barcino, 1934), pp. 246-259, and *Prediche di Fra Girolamo Savonarola* (Firenze: Alcide Parenti, 1845), pp. 89-108. For a bibliography of Spanish treatises on the allegorical interpretation of the liturgy, see Ricardo Arias, "Las fuentes de *Los misterios de la Misa* de Calderón," *Bulletin Hispanique*, 81 (1979), 212-216.

the most basic tenets of their new faith. Such a lack of religious instruction was a special concern to Hernando de Talavera, himself of New Christian origin. As the first archbishop of Granada, he endeavored to give the appropriate religious education to the recent converts from Islam and the New Christians of Jewish origin who sought refuge in the city.<sup>4</sup> One of the means he used to disseminate that instruction was the relatively new medium of the printed book. In a series of treatises on such subjects as confession, proper dress, the liturgy, and basic Christian doctrine, Talavera sought to teach the convert—and the Old Christian as well—what he must believe and how he must behave.<sup>5</sup> Two of the treatises seem to have been written previously while Talavera was *prior* of Santa María de Prado in Valladolid<sup>6</sup> and then “recycled” for the edification of the faithful of Granada.<sup>7</sup> The rest of the manuals, however, were probably composed with the specific needs of Talavera’s new diocese in mind.<sup>8</sup>

Talavera’s treatise on the symbolism of the Mass offered the faithful of Granada an opportunity to become better acquainted with the mysteries of the central ceremony of Christian worship. Already in the time of Amalarius it was remarked how the allegorical interpretation of the liturgy appealed particularly to the *simpliciores*,<sup>9</sup> the unlearned, for it undoubtedly gave them a sense of imaginative participation in the Mass. It is such a sense of belonging to a group that Talavera emphasizes in his treatise as he preaches the equality of all Christians, New and Old, united in the celebration of the Eucharist.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Since the Inquisition did not establish itself in Granada until 1526, the city became a haven for *conversos* fleeing from other parts of Spain. The Venetian ambassador, Andrea Navagero, observed during his stay in Granada in 1526 that “han venido en estos tiempos de todas partes de España muchos sospechosos para vivir más seguros” (*Viaje a España del magnífico señor Andrés Navagero, embajador de la república de Venecia ante el emperador Carlos V*, trans. José María Alonso Gamó [Valencia: Castalia, 1951], p. 74).

<sup>5</sup> The New Christians were the object of constant suspicion and vigilance on the part of their Old Christian neighbors, who regarded the slightest deviation from accepted norms of exterior religious practice as evidence of judaizing. With regard to the liturgy, the result was, as Stephen Gilman phrases it, “the conversion of the Mass into an occasion for displaying fervor and for trapping unwary heretics.” See his *The Spain of Fernando de Rojas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 295.

<sup>6</sup> The treatises *De cómo se ha de ordenar el tiempo* and *De vestir y de calzar* exist in a manuscript conserved in the Escorial library. The rubrics of both works mention that they were written while Talavera was *prior* of the monastery of Santa María de Prado. The treatise on proper attire states more specifically that it was composed in 1477. See Julián Zarco Cuevas, *Catálogo de los manuscritos castellanos de la Real Biblioteca de El Escorial*, vol. 1 (Madrid: Imprenta Helénica, 1924), pp. 62-63.

<sup>7</sup> All eight treatises are quite literally *manuales*, averaging about twenty-five folios in length. Although they are normally bound together in a single volume with a common title page and table of contents, it seems likely that the treatises were intended to circulate independently of one another. They were probably printed at Granada in 1496. See Conrado Haebler, *Bibliografía ibérica del siglo XV*, vol. 1 (La Haya: Martinus Nijhoff and Leipzig: Hiersemann, 1903), pp. 303-304.

<sup>8</sup> The rubrics of the remaining treatises as well as the title page of the entire collection mention Talavera only as archbishop of Granada.

<sup>9</sup> O.B. Hardison, Jr., *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), p. 38.

<sup>10</sup> This significant aspect of the treatise was mentioned by Francisco Márquez Villanueva in the important chapter on Talavera contained in his *Investigaciones sobre Juan Alvarez Gato*, Anejo 4 of the *Boletín de la Real Academia Española* (Madrid, 1960), p. 115.

Talavera's deliberate choice of certain episodes and allegorical glosses reveals a conciliatory purpose. During the more than six hundred years that had elapsed between the time of Amalarius and that of Talavera, commentators had developed multiple interpretations for every aspect of the liturgy. Talavera stresses that his explanations are in no way original; he is but a compiler of the teachings of the Church Fathers.<sup>11</sup> And indeed, in several instances Talavera suggests multiple interpretations of a given moment in the Mass. In other cases, however, Talavera has carefully chosen a specific explanation in order to impose a definite perspective on the significance of the liturgical experience.<sup>12</sup> All allegorical treatises on the liturgy deal, either explicitly or implicitly, with the imaginative role-playing of the congregation. Talavera uses that role-playing to emphasize his belief that social roles, with their odious distinctions, have no place in the Church.

Talavera begins his treatise with a consideration of the symbolism of the altar, the sacred ornaments, and the priestly vestments. The altar represents the table of the Last Supper, the Cross, the humanity of Christ, and the joining together of the faithful into one Church. It is this last meaning that Talavera singles out for special attention, as he goes on to refine his previous definition of the Church by relating it to the positional symbolism of the altar:

E como la sancta humanidad del Redemptor descendiese de judíos e de gentiles, aunque por la mayor parte de judíos, e como la Iglesia, según dicho, no es sino ayuntamiento e confradía de fieles cristianos que de judíos e gentiles a su santa fe fueron e son convertidos, la parte derecha del altar representa al pueblo de los judíos, que era pueblo de Dios antes que el Redemptor padesciese, e la izquierda significa el pueblo gentil, que de su conoscimiento estava mucho apartado. (Capítulo I, p. 81)

In the context of late medieval Spain, the notion that the Church was and is composed of *conversos*, both Jewish and Gentile, is particularly significant.<sup>13</sup> If everyone, whether of New or Old Christian origin, is descended from a *converso*, how can anyone presume to attach a stigma to such an origin?

Talavera goes on to say that the priest begins the Mass on the right side of the altar because Christ came first and primarily to the Jews (Capítulo IX, p. 83). The priest or subdeacon who reads the Epistle represents both Saint John the Baptist and the Old Testament prophets who announced the coming of Christ. The Epistle is read from the right side of the altar, "que

<sup>11</sup> *Tractado de lo que significan las ceremonias de la misa*, in *Escritores místicos españoles*, ed. Miguel Mir, Nueva Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, 16 (Madrid: Bailly-Balliere, 1911), Prólogo, p. 80. Quotations from this edition will be indicated by the chapter and page numbers in parentheses.

<sup>12</sup> Other liturgists choose other emphases. Berceo, for example, consistently views the Mass as the typological fulfillment of Old Testament practices.

<sup>13</sup> Here, as in other places, in choosing his interpretations Talavera frequently touches upon arguments used by Alonso de Cartagena, Alonso de Oropesa, and others in their defenses of the *conversos*.

significa, como dicho es, al pueblo judiego, al cual principalmente fueron dadas la ley e profecías que esto contenían” (Capítulo XV, p. 85). The congregation is thereby placed in the role of the Jews to whom St. John preached and to whom the prophets delivered their prophecies. Without condemning the Old Testament, Talavera uses the symbolism of the liturgical vestments to show how the New Testament represents the perfect fulfillment of the Old:

Y por esto [el subdiácono] tiene vestida una saya llamada túnica o dalmática, de mangas estrechas, que demuestran la imperfección de aquella ley y la brevedad y escaseza de gracias que entonces había en comparación de la perfección del evangelio e de la largueza abundosa de gracias que en él son dadas; lo cual se representa por las mangas más anchas que el diácono tiene. (Capítulo XV, p. 85)

The lighting of the candles before the reading of the Gospel further underscores the perfection of the New Law:

Para decir el evangelio encienden cirios, que representan la claridad e luz de la santa doctrina que en él se contiene, ca no es así obscuro como la ley de Moisés e profecías, entendidas por la epístola;... (Capítulo XXI, p. 86)

The Gospel is read from the left side of the altar to symbolize the great numbers of Gentiles who were converted through the preaching of Christ:

Pasa el sacerdote o el diácono a decir el evangelio a la parte izquierda del altar, por representar que del pueblo gentil, por la parte izquierda entendido, muchas más personas sin comparación rescibieron la doctrina y fe de Jesucristo en el evangelio contenida que no del pueblo judiego. (Capítulo XXI, p. 86)

The faithful who hear the Gospel being read are thereby placed in the role of the Gentiles to whom Christ preached and whom He converted. Thus, within a relatively brief span of time, the congregation has been cast in the roles of both Jews and Gentiles, and that regardless of whether their ancestors were of one origin or the other.

When the priest intones the *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, he represents the angels who announced the Nativity to the Jewish shepherds who were watching their flocks outside of Bethlehem. The faithful are thus cast in the role of the first Jews who were privileged to receive Christ's message of peace. Christ's Incarnation reconciled God with man, man with the angels, and Jews with Gentiles, "haciendo de entramos linajes un pueblo." Talavera goes on to relate the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles to the ox and the ass that were traditionally associated with the manger where Christ was born: "...el buey en la Sagrada Escritura significa al pueblo judiego que traía sobre sí el yugo de la ley de Dios; mas el asno sin seso representa al pueblo gentil, que como sin seso adoraban las criaturas por Criador" (Capítulo XI, p. 84). The faithful should pray, especially for that peace of good will toward every Christian, "de cualquier seta e linaje que haya

venido." Thus, although cast for the moment in the role of Jews, the congregation is immediately made to see in the Incarnation of Christ the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles, and by extension, that of Old and New Christians.

At the moment of the Offertory, the faithful should present their offerings while remembering how the three Magi presented their gifts to the Child Jesus. Now the congregation is playing the role of Gentiles. The incensing of the altar with myrrh and incense on feast-days underscores this moment of role-playing, for such were the offerings of the Three Kings (Capítulos XXIV y XXV, p. 87). During the Sanctus, when the priest says "Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini," he represents the "niños e simples judíos cuando entró el Señor en Jerusalem confesando el misterio de la Encarnación del Hijo de Dios" (Capítulo XXIX, p. 88). The congregation is thereby assimilated to the crowd of Jews who welcomed Christ into Jerusalem.

At the moment of the Consecration the ringing of bells and the lighting of candles serve to stimulate an imaginative recreation of the events of the Passion. Christ's Arrest is specifically recreated here. The candles represent "las linternas que levaban los gentiles e los judíos cuando al Señor prendieron," while the bells recall "las trompetas, boces e alaridos que entonces sonaban" (Capítulo XXXI, p. 89). While the exact role that the faithful are expected to play here (the sleeping disciples? the Jews and Roman soldiers?) is not made clear, Talavera's view of the sacred event and its significance is sufficiently evident. Jews and Gentiles were equally responsible for the Passion of Christ and must therefore share the blame. The Passion, like the Nativity, signifies the unity of all Christians. Whether Old or New Christians, the faithful are seen to gather together around the Cross as they gathered before around the manger.

At the end of the Mass the sprinkling of holy water over the congregation represents Saint Peter's baptism of thousands of Jews: "...significa el bautismo con que cinco mil personas el primero día, e tres mil el segundo, fueron bautizadas del pueblo judiego, comenzando Sant Pedro a predicar en el templo de Jerusalem" (Capítulo XLVIII, p. 92). The congregation is thereby placed in the role of the Jews whom Saint Peter converted. In this way all the faithful undergo the experience of symbolic conversion; all are baptized. This is the last moment of the Mass upon which Talavera chooses to comment. Thus, the faithful, Old and New Christians alike, leave the church cast in the role of *conversos*.

Talavera's treatise on the Mass puts the faithful through a series of spiritual exercises in which all must play the same roles. By forcing Old Christians to play the role of Jews and New Christians to play the role of Gentiles, Talavera underscores the equality of Old and New Christians before God. In that way, Talavera's definition of the Church as the "ayuntamiento e cofradía de fieles cristianos que de judíos e gentiles a su santa fe fueron e son convertidos" becomes literally true. At least for the duration of

