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# “THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD”: SINAI, ZION, AND EDEN IN BYZANTINE HYMNOGRAPHIC EXEGESIS<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

In the manifesto of the “Theophaneia School,” Alexander Golitzin ventures the following bold statement:

Theophany permeates Orthodox Tradition throughout, informing its dogmatic theology and its liturgy. That Jesus, Mary’s son, is the very One who appeared to Moses and the prophets — this is the consistent witness of the ante-Nicene Fathers, and remains foundational throughout the fourth century Trinitarian controversies and the later christological disputes.<sup>2</sup>

In the pages to follow, I would like to show that, aside from the history of creeds, councils, and condemnations, and accompanying the patristic works of Christology or trinitarian theology, the identification of the Son of Mary with “the Lord of Glory whom Moses saw of old” is also affirmed by the hymnographic tradition of the Christian East. The witness of Byzantine hymnography is extremely relevant, as no single patristic work has been read so extensively and with such unconditional acceptance throughout the ages. Nevertheless, as I will show, the exegetical dimension of Byzantine hymnography is difficult to define using the categories commonly used for early Christian exegesis (“allegory,” “typology,” etc); I submit that a more suitable category

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(1) Except where indicated, the English translation of the hymns is taken from *The Festal Menaion* (trans. Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware; London—Boston: Faber&Faber, 1969) and *The Lenten Triodion* (trans. Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware; London—Boston: Faber&Faber, 1977), modified only to conform to contemporary use of pronouns and verbs. For biblical references, in cases of divergence between biblical book, or between the numbering of chapters or verses in the LXX and the MT, the first abbreviation and number refers to the LXX, the second to the MT.

(2) A. GOLITZIN, *Theophaneia: Forum on the Jewish Roots of Orthodox Spirituality*, *Scr 3* (2007) xviii.

is that of “rewritten Bible,” developed by scholars working with Old Testament pseudepigrapha.

As the title indicates, I will discuss hymns that interpret theophanies associated with Sinai, theophanies associated with Zion, and theophanies associated with the primordial mountain of Eden. This approach to understanding biblical texts and traditions is suggested by a passage in *Jubilees* — “the Garden of Eden was the holy of holies and the dwelling of the Lord. And Mount Sinai [was] in the midst of the desert, and Mount Zion [was] in the midst of the navel of the earth. The three of these were created as holy places, one facing the other” (*Jub.* 8.19) — and it is the established way of “entering the Scriptures” in both Jewish and Christian tradition.<sup>3</sup>

### “Byzantine Hymnography”

It is a commonplace that Byzantine hymnography is “dogmatic,” in the sense that the hymns function as a vehicle for dogmatic statements. One may think, for instance, of the hymns celebrating the achievements of Ecumenical Councils, or of certain hymns to the Theotokos, aptly called “Dogmatika.”<sup>4</sup> With reference to these “dogmatic hymns” one can rightly speak of “the era of hymnographers” (successive to “the era of the councils”), which produced “a rich popularized theology ... formulating, clarifying, supporting and defending the Orthodox faith against heretical deformations,” and thus supplying the Church with “one of the most secure means of protection ... against the return of the great heresies.”<sup>5</sup>

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(3) I have in mind Jon D. LEVENSON’s beautiful and influential book *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1987). See also B. G. BUCUR, *Sinai, Zion, and Thabor: An Entry into the Christian Bible, Journal of Theological Interpretation* (forthcoming).

(4) For instance, the “dogmatic hymns” in praise of the Theotokos constantly remind worshippers that the incarnate Word is *truly God and truly human*, double in *ousia*, yet one according to *hypostasis*, etc. Many of the hymns of Pentecost or those celebrating the restoration of icons in 843 (“Sunday of Orthodoxy”) provide little else than sound doctrinal instruction.

(5) E. BRANIȘTE, *Le culte byzantin comme expression de la foi orthodoxe*, in: *La liturgie expression de la foi: Conférences Saint Serge XXV<sup>e</sup> semaine d’études liturgiques, Paris, 1978* (Rome: Edizioni Liturgiche, 1979) 77; A. KNIAZEFF, *Hymnographie byzantine et confession de foi*, in: *La liturgie expression de la foi...*, 179.

I hasten to say, however, that the hymns to be discussed in this article are *not* of the dogmatic type, but rather of a more primitive kind, originating in early Christian Paschal celebrations in Jerusalem.

“Byzantine hymnography” as we know it today is the result of intense interaction between the liturgical centers of the Christian East — namely, St. Sabbas Monastery in Palestine, the “Great Church” and the Stoudion monastery in Constantinople, and the monastic community of Mount Athos — over a period ranging from the end of the iconoclastic crisis to the end of the Hesychastic debate (9th–14th centuries). The hymnographic material itself, however, existed prior to the codification, scattered in loose collections of hymns.<sup>6</sup> The Studite emphasis on hymnography was inherited from St. Sabbas, and can be traced back to fourth or fifth-century Jerusalem. Indeed, within the complex theological exchange that characterizes the “tale of two cities” (Jerusalem and Constantinople) that shaped the Byzantine liturgical tradition, the monastery of St. Sabbas near Jerusalem supplied the hymnography, receiving “in exchange” the lections. The synthesis created by the monks at Stoudion — “a Palestinian horologion with its psalmody and hymns grafted onto a skeleton of litanies and their collects from the euchology of the Great Church” — was later adopted by the monastic community of Mount Athos from where it then spread to the entire Byzantine world.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, there is evidence of “a

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(6) The codification of the Triodion dates to the tenth century. Yet, “before the constitution of hymnographic anthologies, such as the Oktoechos, the Triodion, and the series of Menaia, the hymnography contained therein was spread out in loose collections of *kanones*, *stichera*, *kontakaria*, *tropologia*, and *kathismata*” (Th. POTT, *La réforme liturgique byzantine* (Rome: Edizioni Liturgiche, 2000) 107; R. F. TAFT, *The Byzantine Rite: A Short History* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992) 75, 83). About two centuries prior to the most ancient manuscript of the Triodion (dated around 1027–1029, POTT, *Réforme liturgique...*, 106, n. 42), the Studite emphasis on hymnography was in full swing; yet, as Pott notes (*Ibid.*, 118), Theodore and his monks inherited the hymnographic tradition of St. Sabbas’ monastery, after the invasion of the Persians, in 614, and the conquest of Jerusalem by the Arabs in 638.

(7) The “tale of two cities” is, of course, much more complex. The influence of Jerusalem over Constantinople was due not only to the natural pre-eminence of the Mother Church, but also to an influx of Palestinian monks on Mt. Olympus in Bythina, following the Arab conquest of Jerusalem in 638, and the subsequent move of Theodore with his monks from Mt. Olympus to the Stoudion monastery in Constantinople in 799. The final “monasticization” of the Constantinopolitan cathedral rite and the complete capitulation to

Palestinian monastic influence in Southern Italy and Rome," dated to end of the seventh or early eighth century.<sup>8</sup>

If, as Robert Taft notes, "in Jerusalem lies the key to much of the present-day Byzantine rite,"<sup>9</sup> the same holds true for hymnography. Indeed, "it was Jerusalem that produced the earliest annual cycle of chants, the earliest known true chantbook, and the first repertories organized in eight modes."<sup>10</sup> Some of the Byzantine festal hymns — more than two hundred, according to Peter Jeffery<sup>11</sup> — are found in the eighth-to-tenth century manuscript of the Georgian *Iadgari* (roughly "chantbook"), which contains a translation of hymns used at Jerusalem; some also occur in the Georgian lectionary.<sup>12</sup> The Greek hymno-

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Sabbaitic liturgical usage was also facilitated by the disastrous loss of the city to the crusaders in 1204, and the rising importance of monastics after the recapture of Constantinople in 1261. For a more detailed presentation, see POTT, *Réforme liturgique...*, 99–167; R. TAFT, Mount Athos: A Late Chapter in the History of the Byzantine Rite, 182–183; A Tale of Two Cities, 22–23, 31; In the Bridegroom's Absence, 72–73; all three articles are collected, with their original pagination, in R. TAFT, *Liturgy in Byzantium and Beyond* (Brookfield, Vt.: Ashgate Variorum, 1995). On the other hand, "around the turn of the millennium our Holy Week documentation reveals a fascinating symbiosis: as the rite of Constantinople is being monasticized via Palestine, the rite of Palestine is being further byzantinized" (TAFT, In the Bridegroom's Absence..., 73).

(8) A. ROSE, Les fêtes de Noël à Rome et l'hymnographie orientale, in: A. M. TRIACCA, A. PISTOIA (eds.), *L'Hymnographie: Conférences Saint-Serge XLVI<sup>e</sup> semaine d'études liturgiques, Paris, 29 Juin – 2 Juillet 1999* (Rome: Edizioni Liturgiche, 2000) 248; POTT, *Réforme Liturgique...*, 111. The hymns have been edited and published in thirteen volumes in: I. SCHIRÓ (ed.), *Analecta hymnica graeca e codicibus eruta Italiae inferioris* (Rome: Istituto di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici, Università di Roma, 1966–1983). See also, specifically for the import of the *Impropria* from Syria to the West around the eighth century, A. BAUMSTARK, Der Orient und die Gesänge der Adoratio Crucis, *Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft* 2 (1922) 1–17, at 16.

(9) TAFT, In the Bridegroom's Absence: The Paschal Triduum in the Byzantine Church, in: I. SCICOLONE (ed.), *La celebrazione del Triduo Pasquale: Anamnesis e mimesis. Atti del III Congresso Internazionale di Liturgia, Roma, Pontificio Istituto Liturgico, 9–13 May 1988* (Rome: Abbazia di S. Paolo, 1990) 71–97 at 72.

(10) P. JEFFERY, The Earliest Christian Chant Repertory Recovered: The Georgian Witnesses to Jerusalem Chant, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 47 (1994) 1–38, at 34. See Egeria's *Itinerarium*, 25.5.

(11) JEFFERY, *The Earliest Christian Chant...*, 17 n. 36.

(12) E. METREVELI et al., *Udzvelesi Iadgari* (Tbilisi: Mecniereba, 1980); M. TARCHNIŠVILI, *Le grand lectionnaire de l'Église de Jérusalem, V<sup>e</sup>–VIII<sup>e</sup> siècles*

graphic material preserved in these sources is now dated to late fourth or early fifth century.<sup>13</sup> In fact, it is generally the case that “classics” of Byzantine hymnography such as Romanos the Melodist, John Damascene, and Cosmas of Maiuma are deeply indebted to fourth-century writers like Ephrem Syrus and Gregory Nazianzen.<sup>14</sup>

If one considers the *Improperia* hymnography — that is, the various earlier forms of the tradition that also found expression in the *Improperia* of the Roman Holy Friday liturgy<sup>15</sup> — and other compositions that are intimately connected with the *Reproaches*<sup>16</sup> or modeled after them,<sup>17</sup> the roots of Christian hymnography lie even further in the past.

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(Louvain; Secretariat du CSCO, 1959–1960) 188–189, 204–205. I rely on the following translations and studies: H.-M. SCHNEIDER, *Lobpreis im rechten Glauben: Die Theologie der Hymnen an den Festen der Menschwerdung der alten Jerusalemer Liturgie im Georgischen Udzvelesi Iadgari* (Bonn: Borengässer, 2004); H. LEEB, *Die Gesänge im Gemeindegottesdienst von Jerusalem vom 5. bis 8. Jahrhundert* (Vienna: Herder, 1980); P. JEFFERY, *The Sunday Office of Seventh-Century Jerusalem in the Georgian Chantbook (Iadgari): A Preliminary Report*, *Studia Liturgica* 21 (1991) 52–75; IDEM, *The Earliest Christian Chant...*

(13) LEEB, *Gemeindegottesdienst von Jerusalem...*, 30; BAUMSTARK, *Comparative Liturgy* (revised by B. Botte; London: Mowbrey & Co, 1958) 95; JEFFERY, *The Earliest Christian Chant...*, 8 n. 18; Ch. RENOUX, *Une hymnographie ancienne en géorgien*, in: CLAIR, TRIACCA, PISTOIA, *L'Hymnographie: Conférences Saint-Serge...*, 138, 148.

(14) P. KARAVITES, *Gregory Nazianzos and Byzantine Hymnography*, *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 113 (1993) 81–98; W. L. PETERSEN, *The Dependence of Romanos the Melodist upon the Syriac Ephrem: Its Importance for the Origin of the Kontakion*, *VC* 39 (1985) 171–187; IDEM, *The Diatessaron and Ephrem Syrus as Sources of Romanos the Melodist* (Louvain: Peeters, 1985); S. P. BROCK, *From Ephrem to Romanos*, *SP* 20 (1989) 139–151.

(15) H. AUF DER MAUR, *Die Osterhomilien des Asterius Sophistes als Quelle für die Geschichte der Osterfeier* (Trier: Paulinus, 1967) (Trierer Theologische Studien, 19) 134 n. 380.

(16) Here I have in mind those hymns that connect the lofty status of Christ with his extreme humiliation at the Passion. See, for instance, Antiphon 15 of Holy Friday, quoted below.

(17) E.g., the *Glory Sticheron* at the Ninth Hour of the Eve of Nativity, quoted below. A thorough clarification of the liturgical terms that will be used in this article would be impractical for reasons of space. Suffice it to say that *sticheron*, *kontakion* (as found in today's liturgical books), and *troparion* simply designate various hymns consisting of one stanza, differentiated by their position and function in various services. By contrast, the “canon” is a lengthy composition, comprising nine odes or Odes, each of which is in turn made up

Scholars have pointed out the extraordinary diffusion of the *Improperia* compositions in Syriac, Greek, and Latin liturgical usage; in patristic writers such as Aphrahat, Ephrem of Nisibis, Jacob of Serug, Melito of Sardis, Cyril of Jerusalem, Asterius Sophistes, Romanos the Melodist, Pseudo-Cyprian (the author of *Adversus Iudaeos*); in the sermon “On the Soul and the Body” ascribed to Alexander of Alexandria and preserved only in Coptic; in New Testament Apocrypha such as the *Acts of Pilate*, the *Acts of Thomas*, and the *Gospel of Bartholomew*.<sup>18</sup> The oldest example of *Improperia* is generally thought to be Melito’s paschal homily, dated to the third quarter of the second century.<sup>19</sup> Consider the following passages, taken from Melito’s “On Pascha,” and Byzantine hymns of the Passion and the Nativity:

He who hung the earth is hanging  
 He who fixed the heavens in place has been fixed in place  
 He who laid the foundations of the universe has been laid on a tree  
 The Master has been profaned, God has been murdered  
 The King of Israel has been destroyed ...<sup>20</sup>

Today, He who hung the earth upon the waters is hung  
upon the Cross.

He who is King of the angels is arrayed in a crown of thorns.  
 He who wraps the heaven in clouds is wrapped  
in the purple of mockery.

He who in the Jordan set Adam free receives blows upon His face.  
 The Bridegroom of the Church is transfixed with nails.  
 The Son of the Virgin is pierced with a spear ...<sup>21</sup>

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of several stanzas. The theme song and first hymn of each Ode of a canon is called “heirmos” (usually transcribed “irmos,” in accord with the Byzantine Greek pronunciation common in the Eastern Orthodox Church).

(18) For a detailed presentation, see W. SCHÜTZ, *Was habe ich dir getan, mein Volk?*, *Jahrbuch für Liturgik und Hymnologie* 13 (1968) 1–39; AUF DER MAUR, *Die Osterhomilien des Asterius Sophistes...*; S. JANERAS, *Le Vendredi-Saint dans la tradition liturgique byzantine: Structure et histoire de ses offices* (Rome: Benedictina, 1988) (*Studia Anselmiana*, 99) 264–270.

(19) E. WELLESZ, *Melito’s Homily on the Passion: An Investigation into the Sources of Byzantine Hymnography*, *JTS* 44 (1943) 41–48; E. WERNER, *Melito of Sardis, the First Poet of Deicide*, *Hebrew Union College Annual* 37 (1966) 191–210; AUF DER MAUR, *Osterhomilien des Asterius Sophistes...*, 142; SCHÜTZ, *Was habe ich dir getan...*, 1, 2, 38; JANERAS, *Vendredi-Saint...*, 264–270.

(20) Melito of Sardis, *On Pascha*, 96.

(21) Holy Friday: Antiphon 15 (*Triodion*, 587).

Today, He who holds the whole creation in the hollow of His hand  
 is born of the Virgin.  
 He whom in essence none can touch  
 is wrapped in swaddling clothes as a mortal.  
 God who in the beginning founded the heavens  
 lies in a manger.  
 He who rained manna down on the people in the wilderness  
 is fed on milk from His Mother's breast.  
 He who is the Bridegroom of the Church calls unto Himself  
 the Magi.

The Son of the Virgin accepts their gifts ...<sup>22</sup>

The christological proclamation follows an evidently similar pattern in Melito's rhythmic prose and in the later Byzantine hymns. Christ's lofty identity, suggested by recourse to biblical statements about the Old Testament divinity, is united in a paradoxical way with the humility of the New Testament events. As the quotations suggest, festal hymns (Baptism, Palm Sunday, Nativity, Presentation, etc) are patterned creatively after the Paschal hymnography, which in turn seems indebted to archaic material.<sup>23</sup>

### **Sinai: "The Lord of Glory whom Moses Saw of Old"**

As announced in the title, I propose to take a closer look at the way in which Byzantine hymnography interprets Old Testament theophanies. The obvious starting point are the theophanies associated with Sinai — the call of Moses, the exodus from Egypt, and the giving of the Law. The centrality of Sinai in the life of biblical Israel cannot be overstated: "whatever the experience of the people Israel on Mount

(22) Ninth Royal Hour at the Eve of Nativity: *Glory Sticheron (Menaion, 245–246)*.

(23) The application of the pattern of paschal hymns to other festal hymns (see JANERAS, *Vendredi-Saint...*, 254–256) is evident in the writings of the celebrated sixth-century hymnographer Romanos the Melodist. Romanos, however, is indebted to the fourth-century Ephrem Syrus (see the references to studies by Petersen and Brock above). And Ephrem's paschal hymns "almost immediately recall the most ancient paschal homily that we know, that of the Quartodeciman Melito of Sardis" (G. A. M. ROUWHORST, *Les hymnes pascales d'Ephrem de Nisibe*, 2 vols. (New York: Brill, 1989) Vol. 1, 128), although one can also point to Aphrahat's *Demonstration* 6.9. Indeed, Melito's homily appears to have engendered a homiletic tradition that eventually produced the Byzantine hymnography of Holy Friday (SCHÜTZ, *Was habe ich dir getan...*, 37).

Sinai was, it was so overwhelming that the texts about it seem to be groping for an adequate metaphor through which to convey the awesomeness of the event.<sup>24</sup> If, however, “we know nothing about Sinai, but an immense amount about the traditions concerning Sinai,” scholarly analysis of the manifold ways in which Sinai was remembered, interpreted and appropriated by generations of Jewish, Christian, and Moslem exegetes should also include a discussion of the Byzantine hymnography associated with Sinai. I begin with some controversial passages selected from hymns of the *Improperia* type:

O My people, what have I done to you, and how have you repaid Me? Instead of manna, you have given me gall, instead of water, vinegar ...<sup>25</sup>

Today the Jews nailed to the Cross the Lord who divided the sea with a rod and led them through the wilderness. Today they pierced with a lance the side of Him who for their sake smote Egypt with plagues. They gave Him gall to drink, who rained down manna on them for food.<sup>26</sup>

With Moses' rod You have led them on dry ground through the Red Sea, yet they nailed You to the Cross; You have suckled them with honey from the rock, yet they gave You gall.<sup>27</sup>

Be not be deceived, Jews: for this is He who saved you in the sea and fed you in the wilderness.<sup>28</sup>

Read in isolation, the heavy anti-Jewish polemic in these verses is deeply disturbing, especially since hymns of this kind have at times been part of the explosive mix that led to violence against Jews.<sup>29</sup> It seems more than legitimate, therefore, to eliminate or rewrite such

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(24) LEVENSON, *Sinai and Zion...*, 16, 17.

(25) Holy Friday: Antiphon 12 (*Triodion*, 583). The similarity with the Western *Reproaches* is evident. See Baumstark's detailed analysis of the text in his “Der Orient und die Gesänge der Adoratio Crucis.”

(26) Holy Friday: Antiphon 6 (*Triodion*, 577).

(27) Royal Hours of Holy Friday: Troparion of the Third Hour (*Triodion*, 603).

(28) Holy Friday: Antiphon 12 (*Triodion*, 584).

(29) According to P. KENEZ, Pogroms and White Ideology of the Russian Civil War, in: J. D. KLIER, Sh. LAMBROZA (eds.), *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History* (Cambridge 1992) 306, “[a]lthough Thursday and Friday of Holy Week were not so often days of violence in pre-revolutionary Russia, there is no doubt that traditionally the worst time for pogroms was Easter.”

hymns, as has been done or proposed in all Christian denominations where the *Reproaches* are part of Holy Week services.<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, such an approach, although well-intentioned and serving a worthy cause, is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the hymns. The problem is one of theological contextualization. The *Improperia* continue and reinterpret a venerable Jewish tradition, with roots in the prophetic literature.<sup>31</sup> If, however, “the Lord’s reproaches to Israel” are placed on the lips of Jesus, it is clear that the *Improperia* are, first and foremost, christological affirmations, not polemical injunctions. Their central message is that it is Christ who rained manna in the desert, it is Christ who divided the Red Sea — in short, that Christ is the “Lord” of the Exodus account. Rather than excise these christological statements by way of liturgical reform, it would be more necessary to educate Christians about the fact that the hymns do not warrant any sort of anti-Semitism, since their intention is primarily christological.

These observations can be verified by recourse to other festal hymns, in which the anti-Jewish polemic is absent, yet in which one encounters the very same reading of biblical theophanies, and, by way of consequence, the same type of “YHWH Christology.” For instance, a hymn in preparation of Nativity reads: “Make ready, O Bethlehem; throw open your gate, O Eden! For He-Who-Is [Exod 3:14] comes to be that which He was not, and He who formed all creation takes form.”<sup>32</sup> Similarly, in the celebration of the Transfiguration, as the hymns bring together Christ’s manifestation on Thabor with his earlier apparition before Moses on Sinai:

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(30) In Roman-Catholic, Lutheran, and Methodist parishes, the *Reproaches* are often replaced with other texts (e.g., Ps 22) to exclude references to Exodus, or replaced with new compositions reproaching Christians for their anti-Semitism and the ensuing Holocaust. S. HACKEL, *The Relevance of Western Post-Holocaust Theology to the Thought and Practice of the Russian Orthodox Church*, *Sobornost* 20 (1998) 7–25, has called for similar reforms in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

(31) J. HARVEY, *Le “Rib-Pattern”, requisitoire prophétique sur la rupture de l’alliance*, *Biblica* 43 (1962) 172–196; IDEM, *Le Plaidoyer prophétique contre Israël après la rupture de l’alliance* (Bruges—Paris—Montreal, 1967); R. MURRAY, *Some Rhetorical Patterns in Early Syriac Literature*, in: R. H. FISCHER (ed.), *A Tribute to Arthur Vööbus* (Chicago, Ill.: The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1977) 129; M. D. BROCKE, *On the Jewish Origin of the Improperia*, *Immanuel* 7 (1977) 44–51.

(32) Forefeast of Nativity Vespers, *Apostichon (Menaion)*, 202).

In the past, Christ led Israel in the wilderness with the pillar of fire and the cloud [Exod 14:19]; and today ineffably He has shone forth in light upon Mount Thabor.<sup>33</sup>

What Moses once saw in darkness, he now sees in the blazing light of Transfiguration: the same glory, the same “most pure feet,” the same mountain (at least in some hymns!), the same Lord:

The mountain that was once gloomy and veiled in smoke has now become venerable and holy, since Your feet, O Lord, have stood upon it.<sup>34</sup>

You have appeared to Moses both on the Mountain of the Law and on Thabor: of old in darkness, but now in the unapproachable light of the Godhead.<sup>35</sup>

He who once spoke through symbols to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying, “I am He who is” [Exod 3:14] was transfigured today upon Mount Thabor before the disciples ...<sup>36</sup>

You, O Christ our God, have delivered the written Law upon Mount Sinai, and have appeared there riding upon the cloud, in the midst of fire and darkness and tempest [Exod 19:16–19; 31:18; Deut 4:11] to deliver the Law to Moses.<sup>37</sup>

The hymns of the Presentation are replete with the same christological reading of Sinai theophany.

Receive, O Simeon, Him whom Moses once beheld in darkness, granting the Law on Sinai, and who has now become a babe subject to the Law, yet this is the One who spoke through the law! ...<sup>38</sup>

The Ancient of Days, who in times past gave Moses the Law on Sinai, appears this day as a babe. As Maker of the Law, He fulfills the Law, and according to the Law He is brought into the temple ...<sup>39</sup>

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(33) First Canon of Transfiguration: Ode 3 Sticheron (*Menaion*, 484).

(34) Great Vespers of Transfiguration, Sticheron at *Lord I have cried* (*Menaion*, 471).

(35) Second Canon of Transfiguration, Ode 1 Sticheron (*Menaion*, 483).

(36) Great Vespers of Transfiguration, Apostichon (*Menaion*, 476).

(37) First Canon of Transfiguration: Ode 4 Sticheron (*Menaion*, 485).

(38) Great Vespers of the Presentation: Sticheron at *Lord I have cried* (*Menaion*, 408).

(39) Great Vespers of the Presentation: Sticheron at the Lity (*Menaion*, 412). See also: “Today He who once gave the Law to Moses on Sinai submits Himself to the ordinances of the Law, in His compassion becoming for our sakes as we are ...” (Great Vespers of the Presentation: Sticheron at the Lity (*Menaion*, 412)); “Today the holy Mother, who is higher than any temple, has come into

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Today Simeon takes in his arms the Lord of Glory whom Moses saw of old in the darkness, when on Mount Sinai he received the tables of the Law ...<sup>40</sup>

This paradoxical fusion of exaltation and kenosis, supported by a christological interpretation of the theophanies, is a pattern that occurs in the hymns for the Presentation of both Romanos and Jacob of Serug.<sup>41</sup>

The same exegesis of Exodus narratives is frequent in the hymns of "Theophany" (the common Eastern designation of Epiphany). The Baptist is shaken with awe, knowing that he is to baptize the Creator of Adam,<sup>42</sup> the God of Jacob,<sup>43</sup> the God of Mos-

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the temple, disclosing to the world the Maker of the world and Giver of the Law" (Small Vespers of the Presentation: *Glory Sticheron (Menaion, 407)*).

(40) Presentation of the Lord: Sticheron at the Lity (*Menaion, 413*).

(41) See for instance Romanos' *Hymns on the Presentation*, Proemium I (174), Hymns 1 (176), 7 (182), 15 (192). Simeon holds in his arms the one before whom the heavenly powers tremble; the creator of Adam is born as a baby; Christ, who formerly received the oblation of Abel and of all the righteous, offers his own sacrifice, as keeper of the Law; He is the God who took up into heaven Enoch and Elijah. Cf. Jacob of Serug's homily on the Presentation (Joseph Kollampampil, *Jacob of Serug: Select Festal Homilies* [Rome: CIIS, 1997], 141–158): "The Ancient of Days whom Mary wrapped in swaddling clothes / and the aged Simeon held in his arms without being weakened" (17–18); "He gave the law to Moses on the Mount together with His Father / and He came to fulfill in His own person the order that He himself taught (23–24)"; "He carries Him in his hands and believes in Him that He is upon the chariot / He is held in the hands as a child and Simeon seeks release from Him" (135–136); "Simeon had become a Cherub of flesh on account of Jesus / and instead of wheels he carried Him solemnly in his hands" (187–188).

(42) "The Maker saw the man whom He had formed with His own hand, held in the obscurity of sin, in bonds that knew no escape. Raising him up, He laid him on His shoulders (Luke 15:5), and now in abundant floods He washes him clean from the ancient shame of Adam's sinfulness" (Second Canon of Theophany: Ode 5 Sticheron [*Menaion, 372–373*]); "Thus spoke the Lord to John: 'O Prophet, come and baptize Me who created you, for I enlightened all by grace and cleanse them. Touch my divine head and do not doubt'" (Eve of Theophany: Sticheron at the Sixth Royal Hour [*Menaion, 327*]).

(43) "Today the prophecy of the psalms swiftly approaches its fulfillment: the sea looked and fled, Jordan was driven back before the face of the Lord, before the face of the God of Jacob [Ps 113/114:3–7], when He came to receive baptism from His servant" (Eve of Theophany: Sticheron at the Sixth Royal Hour [*Menaion, 327*]).

es,<sup>44</sup> the Lord who drowned the Egyptian army in the Red Sea.<sup>45</sup> The dramatic dialogue between the two protagonists, which highlights



Christ giving the Law to Moses, 12th century  
(Winchester Bible, fol 5r, detail).

Photo by Dr. John Crook, Winchester Cathedral

(44) [John the Baptist speaking to Jesus]: “Moses, when he came upon You, displayed the holy reverence that he felt: perceiving that it was Your voice that spoke from the bush, he forthwith turned away his gaze [Exod 3:6]. How then shall I behold You openly? How shall I lay my hand upon You?” (First Canon of Theophany: Ode 4 Sticheron (*Menaion*, 370)); “If I baptize You, I shall have as my accusers the mountain that smoked with fire [Exod 19:8], the sea which fled on either side, and this same Jordan which turned back (Ps 113/114:5)” (First Canon of Theophany: Ode 4 Sticheron (*Menaion*, 370)).

(45) “He who in ancient times hid the pursuing tyrant beneath the waves of the sea, now is cloaked and hidden in the stream of Jordan” (Forefeast of Theophany Canon: Ode 1 Irmos (*Menaion*, 297)). Compare: “He who in ancient times hid the pursuing tyrant beneath the waves of the sea, is hidden in a manger and Herod seeks to kill Him” (Forefeast of the Nativity: Compline Canon, Ode 1 Irmos (*Menaion*, 204)).

the paradoxical union of an exalted Christology with the humility of the Jordan baptism, is a common theme of the Theophany hymns. It occurs in John of Damascus (the presumed author of the Theophany Canon), Sophronius of Jerusalem, Romanos, Jacob of Serug, and Ephrem of Nisibis, who all use the same imagery — the lamp is to enlighten the Light; the servant is to place his hand on the Master; John must baptize the one upon whom the seraphim dare not look upon; he must baptize the one who created him with his own hand; mortal flesh is to touch the divine Fire without being consumed.

### **Zion: The Throne and Footstool of the Lord**

If “Sinai is the mountain of Israel’s infancy, of the days of Moses, when the nation, as the story has it, was but a few generations old,” later on “the traditions of YHWH’s theophany, his earth-shattering apparition ... [were] transferred from Sinai to Zion.”<sup>46</sup> “The One of Sinai” (Ps 67:9, 18) comes to be known as “he who dwells on Mount Zion” (Isa 8:18), because “the Lord chose Zion and desired it as a dwelling place for himself” (Ps 131:13), so that his presence no longer makes Sinai quake and tremble, but instead shines forth from Zion (Ps 49:2).

Long before the advent of Christianity, Jewish exegetical and liturgical traditions associated with the celebration of Shavuot were connecting the Sinai theophany with Ezekiel 1 (“Zion”), and the depictions of the bridegroom in the Song of Songs.<sup>47</sup> The fundamental element of this exegetical constellation is that on both Sinai and Zion Israel meets the enthroned Lord: if the Sinai theophany depicts the giving of the Law, and hints only briefly at the Lawgiver’s feet resting on a crystal-line structure (Exod 24:10), throne-visions such as those of Isaiah or Ezekiel, in which “art became the reality to which it pointed” and “the Temple mythos came alive,”<sup>48</sup> fill out the picture of God’s humanlike

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(46) LEVENSON, *Sinai and Zion...*, 89, 91.

(47) The most recent and extensive treatment of this topic is that of S. PARK, *Pentecost and Sinai: The Festival of Weeks as a Celebration of the Sinai Event* (New York—London: T&T Clark, 2008). See also M. WEINFELD, *Pentecost as Festival of the Giving of the Law*, *Immanuel* 8 (1978) 7–18; R. ELIOR, *The Three Temples: On the Emergence of Jewish Mysticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford—Portland: Litman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2005) 135–164; D. J. HALPERIN, *Origen, Ezekiel’s Merkabah, and the Ascension of Moses*, *Church History*, 50 (1981) 261–275; R. KIMELMAN, *Rabbi Yohanan and Origen on the Song of Songs: A Third-Century Jewish-Christian Disputation*, *HTR* 73 (1980) 567–595.

(48) LEVENSON, *Sinai and Zion...*, 123.

manifestation of the likeness of a throne, of which the Song of Songs offers an even more detailed portrayal.

The depiction of Israel's God seated on a fiery throne of cherubim in the innermost sanctum of a heavenly temple, attended by thousands upon thousands of angels that perform their celestial liturgies according to precisely appointed times and rules, is at the heart of apocalyptic literature during the Second Temple era.<sup>49</sup> As expected, throne-imagery looms large in both Jewish merkabah mysticism ("mysticism of the chariot-throne"),<sup>50</sup> and in its Christian counterpart, the New Testament and patristic literature. Throne imagery remains crucially important for Christian visionary literature, for iconography and hymnography, for christological and trinitarian doctrine (cf. *synthronos* as a description of Christ in relation to the Father), and by extension, for mariology and ascetic theory (Mary and the saints depicted as living thrones). Finally, throne imagery (and its apocalyptic background of the angelic worship before the heavenly temple) is used to highlight the importance of the Eucharist, sometimes in polemics against heretical claims to vision, or against Jewish throne-speculation.<sup>51</sup>

Moreover, the theme of the heavenly throne is, for Christian writers, not only an element of sacred tradition, but also the basis on which

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(49) M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972) 191–209; T. D. N. METTINGER, *The Dethronement of Sabaoth: Studies in the Shem and Kabod Theologies* (Lund: Wallin & Darholm, 1982); ELIOR, *Three Temples...*, 40–62, 82–87; M. DE JONGE, *Throne*, in: K. VAN DER TOORN, B. BECKING, P. W. VAN DER HORST (eds.), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden—Boston: Brill; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999) 1628–1631.

(50) For the texts, see P. SCHÄFER, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981) (TSAJ, 2); IDEM, *Übersetzung der Hekhalot-Literatur*, 4 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987–1995) (TSAJ, 17, 22, 29, 46). See the studies of G. SCHOLEM, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1967); SCHÄFER, *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1992); ELIOR, *Three Temples...*, 36–38, 194–200, 232–265.

(51) For the abundance and theological relevance of throne-imagery in the New Testament, see R. BAUCKHAM, *The Throne of God and the Worship of Jesus*, in: *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Pages from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus* (Leiden—Boston—Cologne: Brill, 1999) 43–69. For patristic literature, see Golitzin, *The Image and Glory of God in Jacob of Serug's Homily, On that Chariot that Ezekiel the Prophet Saw*, *Scr 3* (2007) 180–212; IDEM, *The Demons Suggest an Illusion of God's Glory in a Form: Controversy over the Divine Body and Vision of Glory in Some Late Fourth, Early Fifth Century Monastic Literature*, *ibid.*, 49–82.

to make claims about the divine status of Jesus. It is this christological message that resonates in the hymns, which proclaim Jesus as the very rider of the *merkabah*:

Before Your birth, O Lord, the angelic hosts looked with trembling on this mystery and were struck with wonder: for You who have adorned the vault of heaven with stars have been well pleased to be born as a babe; and You who hold all the ends of the earth in the hollow of Your hand are laid in a manger of dumb beasts;<sup>52</sup>

O You who ride on the cherubim and are praised by the seraphim, You have sat, O gracious Lord, like David on a foal, and the children honored You with praise fitting for God.<sup>53</sup>

Be glad, O Bethlehem! ... for from you comes forth, before the sight of all, the Shepherd who tends Israel, He that is seated upon the cherubim, even Christ;<sup>54</sup>

All have taken palms into their hands and spread their garments before Him, knowing that He is our God, to whom the cherubim sing without ceasing: Hosanna in the highest!<sup>55</sup>

Seated in heaven upon Your throne and on earth upon a foal, O Christ our God, You have accepted the praise of angels and the songs of children who cry out to You: Blessed are You who come to call back Adam!<sup>56</sup>

In these hymns, “throne” functions as an indicator of divinity, and thereby as a legitimation of worship. It is also, however, a code for bearer of divinity. If the manger holds no less than the Lord, who in heaven is enthroned on the living cherubic throne, what of the Virgin? “A strange and most wonderful mystery do I see: the cave is heaven; the Virgin — the throne of the cherubim.”<sup>57</sup> The Virgin, the manger of Bethlehem, the elder Simeon, the foal on which Christ enters Jerusalem, are all described as “thrones” inasmuch as they are bearing Christ:

The captain of heaven was sent to the living Pavilion of the Glory, to make ready an everlasting Dwelling for the Maker. And coming before her he cried: ‘Hail, fiery throne, more glorious by far than the

(52) Eve of Nativity: Sticheron at the Third Royal Hour (*Menaion*, 231).

(53) Palm Sunday Vespers: Apostichon (*Triodion*, 492).

(54) Second Canon of the Nativity: Ode 3 Sticheron (*Menaion*, 271).

(55) Palm Sunday Vespers: Apostichon (*Triodion*, 492).

(56) Palm Sunday Kontakion (*Triodion*, 499).

(57) First Canon of the Nativity: Ode 9 Irmos (*Menaion*, 282).

living creatures with four faces [Ezek 1:5–6]! Hail, seat of the King of heaven! ...<sup>58</sup>

Simeon was amazed when he beheld incarnate the Word that is without beginning, carried by the Virgin as on the throne of the cherubim, the Cause of all being Himself become a Babe ...<sup>59</sup>

O happy manger! Receiving the Creator as the babe, it is made the throne of cherubim, for our salvation who sing O God our Deliverer, blessed are You!<sup>60</sup>

He who is borne on high by the cherubim and praised in hymns by the seraphim, is brought today according to the Law into the holy temple and rests in the arms of the Elder as on a throne.<sup>61</sup>

When You were about to enter the Holy City, O Lord ... they saw You riding on a foal, as though upon the cherubim ...<sup>62</sup>

... how shall He whose throne is heaven and whose footstool is the earth [Isa 66:1], be held in the womb of a woman? He upon whom the six-winged seraphim and the many-eyed cherubim cannot gaze has been pleased at a single word to be made flesh of this His creature! ...<sup>63</sup>

... He who in glory makes the clouds His chariot [Ps 103/104:3], comes borne upon a cloud, that is the Virgin ...<sup>64</sup>

... You who have heaven as Your throne are laid in a manger. You whom the host of angels attend on every side have come down among shepherds...<sup>65</sup>

The “payoff,” as it were, for the high and asymmetric christology defended by the councils of Nicaea I, Ephesus, and Chalcedon is the “high anthropology” typically expressed by the term “deification.” But this inextricable connection between ὁμοούσιος and θεώσις is simply a technical formulation of what is abundantly clear in biblical

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(58) Great Vespers of the Annunciation: Sticheron at the Lity (*Menaion*, 443).

(59) Canon of the Presentation: Ode 4 Sticheron (*Menaion*, 421).

(60) Compline Canon of the Forefeast of the Nativity: Ode 7 Sticheron (*Menaion*, 208).

(61) Great Vespers of Presentation: *Glory* Apostichon (*Menaion*, 416).

(62) Palm Sunday Canon: Sticheron at Praises (*Triodion*, 501).

(63) Great Vespers of the Annunciation: *Glory* Sticheron at *Lord I have cried* (*Menaion*, 440).

(64) Matins Canon of the Forefeast of the Nativity: Ode 7 Sticheron (*Menaion*, 214).

(65) Vespers of the Synaxis of the Theotokos (26 December): Apostichon (*Menaion*, 291).

(and parabiblical) theophanies, where God condescends to the perceptive capability of the visionary, while the latter is transfigured, transformed, and sent out to bear witness to the encounter. Hence, Moses's shining face as he descends from Sinai or returns from the tent of meeting (Exod 34:29–30; 34–35); Enoch's progressive transfiguration before the throne of God (*1 En.* 71; *2 En.* 22); Stephen's luminous appearance, "like the face of an angel" (Acts 6:15) before he will bear witness to the Son of Man at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56).

The same considerations hold true for the hymnographic exegesis of theophanies: if the biblical "Lord of the (angelic) powers" (κύριος τῶν δυνάμεων, κύριος σαβᾶωθ),<sup>66</sup> enthroned upon the cherubim, is identified with Jesus, the elder Simeon is by implication likened to the cherubim. Such "angelomorphism" — quite clearly, Simeon is not *identified* with a cherub — is simply the poetic and liturgical expression of the doctrine of deification.<sup>67</sup> Believers even enjoy a certain preeminence over the angels, since by his Incarnation, "God who is enthroned on high upon the cherubim and yet cares for the lowly, is Himself come in power and glory,"<sup>68</sup> unveiling the innermost mystery formerly inaccessible to angels. A certain reversal of the apocalyptic framework, in which the interest for τὰ ἐπουράνια, "heavenly things" (John 3:12) — namely, ascending to heaven (John 3:13), entering the kingdom of God (John 3:4), and seeing the kingdom of God (John 3:3) — is redirected towards, and made dependent on, an incarnational, sacramental, and communitarian context, is part of the earliest Christian kerygma.<sup>69</sup> Byzantine hymnography is very insistent on the

(66) For details, see T. N. D. METTINGER, YHWH Zebaoth, in VAN DER TOORN, BECKING, VAN DER HORST, *DICTIONARY OF DEITIES AND DEMONS*, 920–924, esp. 920; S. OLOFSSON, *God is My Rock: A Study of Translation Technique and Theological Exegesis in the Septuagint* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1990) (ConBOT, 30) 121–126.

(67) I am using "angelomorphism" in the sense defined by Crispin FLETCHER-LOUIS, *Luke-Acts: Angels, christology and Soteriology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997) (WUNT, 2/94) 14–15: "we propose its use wherever there are signs that an individual or community possesses specifically angelic characteristics or status, though for whom identity cannot be reduced to that of an angel."

(68) Palm Sunday Canon: Sticheron at Ode 5 (*Triodion*, 498).

(69) W. GRESE, Unless One is Born Again: The Use of a Heavenly Journey in John 3, *JBL* 107 (1988) 677–693. According to J. DANIÉLOU, Les traditions secrètes des apôtres, *Eranos Jahrbuch* 31 (1962) 199–215, at 214, some of the traditions ascribed to the apostles and circulating among early Christian

privileged vantage-point that humans have in beholding the theophany of the incarnate Lord:

From fear the cherubim dare not gaze upon Him; yet the children honor Him with palms and branches.<sup>70</sup>

Before Your birth, O Lord, the angelic hosts looked with trembling on this mystery and were struck with wonder: for You who have adorned the vault of heaven with stars have been well-pleased to be born as a babe; and You who hold all the ends of the earth in the hollow of Your hand are laid in a manger of dumb beasts.<sup>71</sup>

The seraphim, O Savior, beheld You on high, united inseparably with the Father, yet they saw You below lying dead in the tomb; and they trembled with fear.<sup>72</sup>

All things above and all beneath the earth quaked with fear at Your death, as they beheld You, O Savior, upon Your throne on high and in the tomb below. For beyond our understanding You lie before our eyes, a corpse yet the very Source of Life.<sup>73</sup>

**“Exalt Christ, the God Most Good,  
and Venerate His Divine Footstool!”**

Oft-recurring in Byzantine hymnography, yet understudied in biblical and patristic scholarship, is the reference to the footstool of the divine throne.

With the psalmist, O Master, do we now behold the footstool on which Your undefiled feet rested, Your precious Cross, exalted this day with love ...;<sup>74</sup>

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teachers during the first three centuries of the common era represent “the continuation within Christianity of a Jewish esotericism that existed at the time of the Apostles,” which concerned in large measure the mysteries of the heavenly worlds; more precisely, starting as early as the apostles themselves, the concern was to relate the mysteries of the heavenly world — angelic ranks, etc — to the central and commanding mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection.”

(70) Palm Sunday Vespers: Sticheron at the Lity (*Triodion*, 490).

(71) Eve of Nativity: Sticheron at the Third Hour (*Menaion*, 231).

(72) Holy Saturday Matins: Sticheron at the Second Stasis of the Lamentations (*Triodion*, 632).

(73) Holy Saturday Canon: Ode 1 Sticheron (*Triodion*, 647).

(74) Small Vespers of the Exaltation of the Cross (14 September): Sticheron at *Lord I have cried* (*Menaion*, 131).

Today, the holy words of David have truly received their fulfillment: for lo! in the sight of all the world, we venerate the footstool of Your undefiled feet! ...;<sup>75</sup>

Today, O Christ our God, we sinners venerate with unworthy lips Your precious Cross... which David the psalmist commanded to be venerated as Your footstool ...;<sup>76</sup>

Today the words of the Prophet are fulfilled: for see, we worship at the place on which Your feet have stood [Ps 98/ 99:5], O Lord;<sup>77</sup>

The words of the Psalmist are fulfilled: for see, we worship at the footstool of Your most pure feet, O Lord all powerful, at Your precious Cross, the thrice-blessed Wood.<sup>78</sup>

The biblical references of the hymns just quotes are Ps 98/99:5 (“Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at His footstool, for He is holy!”) and Ps 131/132:7 (“Let us worship at His footstool”). But how and why could the Cross be understood as the footstool of God’s throne? The key lies in the archaic origin of the hymns. In early Christianity, following a conception that was current in Second Temple Judaism, and ultimately rooted in ancient Mesopotamia, the exalted status of heavenly entities was often expressed by descriptions of physical greatness. The greatness of the God of Israel finds expression in the depictions of an enormous body filling the heavens, whose feet rested on the earth as on a footstool. Early Christians described the *kenosis* in terms of a “shrinking” of this enormous body to human dimensions.<sup>79</sup>

In biblical Israel, the ark in the holy of holies was understood precisely as the footstool of God’s throne.<sup>80</sup> There is some debate over the cherubim throne. The traditional view is that “the official cult was early aniconic: over the cherubim throne and ark, the God of Israel was

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(75) Great Vespers of the Exaltation of the Cross (14 September): Sticheron at the Lity (*Menaion*, 136).

(76) Great Vespers of the Exaltation of the Cross (14 September): *Glory/ Now and ever* Apostichon (*Menaion*, 140–141).

(77) Third Sunday of Lent: Canon, Sessional Hymn of the Cross (*Triodion*, 339).

(78) Third Sunday of Lent: Canon, Ode 6, Sticheron 4 (*Triodion*, 342).

(79) GOLITZIN, *The Image and Glory of God...*, 350, notes that the representation of the Incarnation as “downsizing” of sorts “is both ancient and frequent, particularly among Syriac-speaking Christians” and “might well comprise the original force of the *kenosis* passage of Phil 2:6–7 itself.”

(80) M. HARAN, *Temple and Temple Service in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, In.: Eisenbrauns, 1985) 254–255.

enthroned in unseen majesty. The place usually occupied by the deity is empty.<sup>81</sup> Other scholars, however, argue that, even though it is difficult to decide whether the enthronement was invisible or in the form of a statue, the existence of a cultic statue of the YHWH seated on the throne is very likely.<sup>82</sup>

In this light, identifying the Cross with the footstool is an affirmation of Christ's divine identity and kingly majesty, in line with the Johannine understanding of the Cross as glorification: *Regnavit a ligno Dominus*, the God of Israel rules from the Cross.<sup>83</sup> This understanding of the Cross seems to be rooted in the New Testament, since Rom 3:25 and the Gospel of Mark, for instance, seem to interpret the Cross as the mercy-seat, the locus of sacrifice and supreme theophany.<sup>84</sup> In any case, the hymns view the Cross, as well as the ark, as the place where God's presence and voice are made manifest. This can be understood

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(81) T. METTINGER, *The Veto on Images and the Aniconic God in Israel*, in: H. BIEZAIS (ed.), *Religious Symbols and Their Functions* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1979) 15–29, at 22, 27. See also IDEM, *No Graven Image? Israelite Aniconism in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1995); IDEM, *Israelite Aniconism: Developments and Origins*, in: K. VAN DER TOORN (ed.), *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Leuven: Peeters, 1997) 173–204.

(82) C. M. McCORMICK, *Palace and Temple: A Study of Architectural and Verbal Icons* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002) 171, 184n. 74, 188; H. NIEHR, *In Search of Yahveh's Cult Statue in the First Temple*, in: VAN DER TOORN, *The Image and the Book...*, 73–99; S. BUNTA, *YHWH's Cultic Statue After 597/586 B. C. E: A Linguistic and Theological Reinterpretation of Ezekiel 28: 12, CBQ 69* (2007) 222–241.

(83) Cf. the following stanza from the Latin hymn "Vexilla Regis," written by Venantius Fortunatus (530–609): "The things are fulfilled which David foretold in faithful song, saying to the nations, "God ruled from the Tree!" "Vexilla Regis" and two other hymns were composed for the festive reception of fragments from the Holy Cross, sent from Constantinople to the Frankish ruler Clothaire. See J. SZÖVÉRFY, *Venantius Fortunatus and the Earliest Hymns to the Holy Cross, Classical Folia 20* (1966) 107–122; IDEM, *Hymns of the Holy Cross: An Annotated Edition with Introduction* (Leiden: Brill, 1976). According to Ephrem of Nisibis, Christ is "enthroned" on the Cross as on his heavenly chariot throne: *Hymns on Paradise 6.5; Hymns on Faith 17.8*.

(84) N. S. L. FRYER, *The Meaning and Translation of Hilastērion in Romans 3:25, Evangelical Quarterly 59* (1987) 99–116; D. P. BAILEY, *Jesus As the Mercy Seat: The Semantics and Theology of Paul's Use of Hilastērion in Romans 3:25* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1999); H. L. CHRONIS, *The Torn Veil: Cultus and Christology in Mark 15:37–39, JBL 101* (1982) 97–114, at 110–111.

both as a “definition“ of Jesus Christ in light of Old Testament imagery (“*It is the God of Israel who rules from the Cross*“), and as a specifically Christian qualification of the traditional YHWH cult (“the true face of the God of Israel can only be grasped in his Cross“).



Christ in the vision of Isaiah, 11th century

(Athos Cod. Vatop. 760, fol 280 v ).

Photo courtesy of the Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies,  
Thessaloniki, Greece

### **Eden: The Feet that Eve Heard at Dusk and Hid Herself for Fear**

Scholars have noted the numerous correspondences between the creation account in Genesis and the accounts of the building of the tent and of the Temple.<sup>85</sup> “Obviously, these correspondences mean,” notes

(85) J. BLENKINSOPP, *Structure of P*, *CBQ* 38 (1976) 275–292; P. J. KEARNEY, *Creation and Liturgy: The P Redaction of Ex 25–40*, *ZAW* 89 (1977) 375–387; M. WEINFELD, *Sabbath, Temple and the Enthronement of the Lord: The Problem of the Sitz im Leben of Genesis 1:1–2:3*, in: A. CAQUOT, M. DELCOR (eds.), *Mélanges bibliques et orientaux en l’honneur de M. Henri Cazelles* (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1981) 501–512; LEVENSON, *Sinai and Zion...*, 142–145; C. FLETCHER-

Crispin Fletcher-Louis, “that creation has its home in the liturgy of the cult, and that the tabernacle is a mini cosmos.”<sup>86</sup> More specifically, according to Weinfeld, “the Sitz im Leben of Gen 1:1–2:3 is cultic-liturgic”: the text accompanied temple sacrifices in the Second Temple era, and, after the destruction of the temple, it was incorporated into the Amidah prayer of the Sabbath Eve.<sup>87</sup> That the temple’s physical appearance and cult should be conceived as the architectural and liturgical reiteration of the cosmogonic myth, aiming at reintegrating time, space, and the cultic protagonists into the paradisiac *illud tempus*, is, of course, not peculiar to biblical religion. The same point was made as early as 1947 by Mircea Eliade in his famous *Myth of the Eternal Return*.<sup>88</sup>

If the Jerusalem temple, as well as the restored temple of Ezekiel 47, are, symbolically, the garden of Eden, it is no less true that the vantage point of the Eden narrative is God’s theophanic presence on Sinai, indelible in the memory of Israel and replicated cultically in the tent of meeting and in the Temple.<sup>89</sup> In other words, Eden is also conceived as sacred temple and sacred mountain of theophany, symbolically overlapping with Sinai and Zion. This view is affirmed by canonical and extracanonical witnesses alike.<sup>90</sup> For instance, “in Ezekiel (or his school) ... the same language describes life in Eden, the Garden of De-

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LOUIS, *All the Glory of Adam: Liturgical Anthropology in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Leiden: Brill, 2002) (STDJ, 42) 63–64.

(86) FLETCHER-LOUIS, *All the Glory of Adam...*, 63:

(87) WEINFELD, *Sabbath, Temple and the Enthronement...*, 510–511.

(88) M. ELIADE, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History* (New York: Pantheon, 1954). The French original was published as *Le mythe de l'éternel retour: Archétypes et répétition* (Paris: Galimard, 1947).

(89) FLETCHER-LOUIS, *All the Glory of Adam...*, 19: “The close association of temple and paradise is widespread in post-biblical texts including those cherished at Qumran ... It is already enshrined in the narrative of Genesis 2–3 which draws heavily on the symbolism and traditions of the Temple, including something like Ezekiel 28:12–19.”

(90) See M. HIMMELFARB, *The Temple and the Garden of Eden in Ezekiel, the Book of the Watchers, and the Wisdom of ben Sira*, in: J. SCOTT, P. SIMPSON-HOUSLEY (eds.), *Sacred Places and Profane Spaces: Essays in the Geographics of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York: Greenwood, 1991) 63–78; J. T. A. G. M. VAN RUITEN, *Eden and the Temple: The Rewriting of Genesis 2:4–3:24 in the Book of Jubilees*, in: G. P. LUTTIKHUIZEN (ed.), *Paradise Interpreted: Representations of Biblical Paradise in Judaism and Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 1999) 63–81, esp. 75–79; IDEM, *Primaeval History Interpreted: The Rewriting of Genesis 1–11 in the Book of Jubilees* (Leiden: Brill, 2000) 85–89.

light, and Zion, the Temple mount, in which the primal perfection of Eden is wonderfully preserved."<sup>91</sup>

The topography of Eden, as given in Gen 2:10–14, suggests that Eden is an elevated place. Like Ezekiel 28:13–14, therefore, the writer most likely equates “the garden of God” and “the mountain of God.” Like Ezekiel 28:13–14, therefore, the writer most likely equates “the garden of God” and “the mountain of God.” In this sacred space of Eden God moves about (Gen 3:8, מִתְהַלֵּךְ בָּנֶן; περιπατοῦντος ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ) just as he is said to move about in a tent and a tabernacle (2 Rgns / 2 Sam 7:6, וּבְמִשְׁכָּן וּבְאֹהֶל מִתְהַלֵּךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ; ἐμπεριπατῶν ἐν καταλύματι καὶ ἐν σκηνῇ), in the camp of Israel (Deut 23:15 (14), מִתְהַלֵּךְ בְּקֶרֶב מַחֲנֶיךָ; ὁ θεός σου ἐμπεριπατεῖ ἐν τῇ παρεμβολῇ σου), or, more generally, in the midst of his chosen people (Lev 26:12, וְהִתְהַלַּכְתִּי בְּתוֹכְכֶם; ἐμπεριπατήσω ἐν ὑμῖν). If Eden is a sanctuary, it makes perfect sense that Adam and Eve are assigned the levitical duties of performing their work and keeping guard over the holy place (Gen 2:15–16; cf. Num 3:7–8; 8:26). The *Book of Jubilees* is quite explicit about the Eden-Zion when it states: “the Garden of Eden was the holy of holies and the dwelling of the LORD” (*Jub.* 8:19). Access to this place is correspondingly governed by Levitical laws concerning sexuality, pregnancy, and birth (*Jub.* 3:8–14; cf. Leviticus 12). *Jubilees* further confirms the sacral status of Eden by its reference to the morning and evening offering up of incense, one of the priestly duties and privileges (Exod 30:7–8, 34–38; Num 17:4–5; 2 Chron 26:16–20): on the morning of his first day of exile, Adam offers up incense outside of the garden Eden (*Jub.* 3.27) — corresponding to the incense burned in the holy place of the temple, outside of the holy of holies — and Enoch will offer up incense in the evening (*Jub.* 4.25).

The connection between Sinai, Zion, and Eden remains vital in Christian tradition. Ephrem of Nisibis' *Hymns of Paradise* are perhaps the best example in this respect:

The Paradise Hymns provide us with a number of topographical details which, taken together, can give us some idea of how St Ephrem conceptualized this Paradisiacal mountain. We learn that the mountain is circular (I.8) ... Halfway up is the Tree of Knowledge which provides an internal boundary beyond and higher than which Adam and Eve were forbidden to go (III.3); this Tree acts as a sanctuary curtain hiding the Holy of Holies, which is the Tree of Life higher up (III.2). On the summit of the mountain resides the Divine Presence, the Shekhinah

(91) LEVENSON, *Sinai and Zion...*, 128–129.

(Syriac *shkinta*). This Paradise mountain is also understood as consisting of three concentric circles which divide the mountain up into three separate levels, reserved for different categories of the blessed. These levels at the same time correspond to the various levels in the Ark and on Mount Sinai (II.10–13). The Tree of Knowledge and Tree of Life are ... described respectively as the “sanctuary curtain or veil” (III.5, 13, compare XV.8; Syriac *appay tar'a*) and the “inner sanctuary” or “Holy of Holies” (III.5, 14; Syriac *qdush qudshe*); in other words, Paradise also represents both the Temple and ... the Church.<sup>92</sup>

If anything, the Sinai-Zion-Eden connection gains in force and coherence in the Christian era, due to the application of the same christological reading lens to all three theophanies. The witness of Byzantine hymnography is illustrative in this respect. The famous ninth-century hymn of Cassiane, now chanted during Holy Week, reads as follows:

O Lord, the woman who has fallen into many sins, perceiving Your divinity and taking upon herself the duty of a myrrh-bearer, with lamentations brings sweet-smelling oil of myrrh to You before Your burial. Woe is me, she says, for night surrounds me: a dark and moonless frenzy of unrestraint, the lust for sin. Accept the wells of my tears, for it is You that draws down from the clouds the waters of the sea. Incline to the groanings of my heart, for it is You that have bowed down the heavens in Your ineffable self-emptying. I shall tenderly kiss Your most pure feet and also wipe them with the locks of my hair — those feet whose sound Eve heard at dusk in Paradise, and hid herself for fear. Who can search out the multitude of my sins and the abyss of Your judgments, O Savior of my soul? Despise me not, Your handmaiden, for You have mercy without measure.<sup>93</sup>

The hymn is structured on the antithetic parallelism between Eve and the sinful woman. Unlike Eve, who had sinned, but chose to *run away* and hide instead of repenting, “the sinful woman” *runs towards*

(92) S. BROCK, introductory study to St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise* (Scarsdale, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990) 52–53. See also the detailed analysis in N. SÉD, Les hymnes sur le Paradis de saint Éphrem et les traditions juives, *Le Muséon* 81 (1968) 455–501. Ephrem's theological vision is also operative in Ps.-Dionysius. See in this respect, A. GOLITZIN, “*Et introibo ad altare Dei*”: *The Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita with Special Reference to its Eastern Christian Predecessors* (Thessalonica: Patriarchal Institute of Patristic Studies, 1994) 368–370; IDEM, Dionysius Areopagita: A Christian Mysticism?, *Pro Ecclesia* 12 (2003) 161–212; 185–189.

(93) Holy Wednesday Matins: *Glory / Now and ever* Apostichon (Translation mine. Cf. *Triodion*, 540).

Christ, embraces his feet and washes them in her tears. These feet, however, are the same feet that walked through Eden in the cool of the day: the feet of YHWH. The christological implication is obvious: the Genesis narrative's *YHWH Elohim* or κύριος ὁ θεός is straightforwardly "recognized" as Jesus Christ.

This is not an oddity of Cassiane's. Her predecessor by three centuries, Romanos the Melodist, imagines the incarnate Christ addressing Adam as Lord of Paradise: "He came again to him, calling him with His holy voice: 'Where are you, Adam? Do not hide from Me henceforth; I will to see you, naked and poor though you are. Do not be ashamed, for I have made myself like you.'<sup>94</sup> In fact, this is the unanimous voice of Byzantine hymnography: Christ is the Maker, Creator, and Author of life, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of the patriarchs and prophets, "the God of our fathers." In a manner reminiscent of Melito's homily, a hymn celebrating the Jordan Baptism states that Jesus who is baptized is the one who suspended the earth upon the primordial void (Job 26:7; Ps 103/104:3):

When the creation beheld You in the flesh covered by the streams, who hast established the whole earth in the void above the waters, it was seized with great amazement and cried: "There is none holy save You, O Lord!"<sup>95</sup>

The last portion of this hymn is quoting a verse from the third biblical ode (Hannah's payer, 1 Sam 2:1–10), thus applying the Old Testament designation of "Lord" to Jesus. The very same exegesis of 1 Sam 2:2 occurs in hymns of Holy Week and Nativity.

When the creation beheld You hanging in Golgotha, who have hung the whole earth freely upon the waters, it was seized with amazement and it cried: "There is none holy save You, O Lord!"<sup>96</sup>

When creation beheld You born in a cave, who have hung the whole earth in a void above the waters, it was seized with amazement and cried: "There is none holy save You, O Lord."<sup>97</sup>

It is Christ who bowed the heavens (Ps 17:10/18:9), and holds the creation in the hollow of His hand (Isa 40:12):

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(94) Romanos le Mélode, *Hymnes. Tome II: Nouveau Testament (IX–XX)*. Trans. and notes by J. GROSSEIDIER DE MATONS (Paris: Cerf, 1965) (SC, 110) 238.

(95) Canon of the Forefeast of Theophany: Ode 3 Irmos (*Menaion*, 297).

(96) Canon of Holy Saturday: Ode 3 Irmos (*Triodion*, 647).

(97) Compline Canon of the Forefeast of the Nativity: Ode 3 Irmos (*Menaion*, 205).

He who bowed the heavens, bowed His head, and the clay cried aloud to Him that formed him: "Why do You command of me what lies beyond my power? For I have need to be baptized by You."<sup>98</sup>

Open to me the gates, and entering within, I shall see as a child wrapped in swaddling clothes Him who upholds the creation in the hollow of His hand, whose praises the angels sing with unceasing voice, the Lord and Giver of Life who saves mankind.<sup>99</sup>

It is Christ who fashioned Adam with his hands after his own image, and fashioned Eve from Adam's side.

Make ready, O Bethlehem; throw open your gates, O Eden. For He-Who-Is [Exod 3:14] becomes that which He was not, and He who formed all creation takes form.<sup>100</sup>

Behold, the time of our salvation is at hand. Make ready, O cave; the Virgin draws nigh to give birth... For Christ comes in His love for mankind, to save the man He fashioned.<sup>101</sup>

You, O Christ, with invisible hands have fashioned man in Your image; and You have now displayed the original beauty in this same human body formed by You;<sup>102</sup>

O You who have fashioned Eve from Adam's side, Your side was pierced and from it flowed streams of cleansing;<sup>103</sup>



Christ fashioning Eve from Adam's rib, 12th century  
(Winchester Bible, fol 5r, detail).

Photo by Dr. John Crook, Winchester Cathedral.

(98) Vespers of Theophany: Sticheron at *Lord I have cried* (*Menaion*, 338).

(99) Vespers of the Forefeast of the Nativity: *Glory* Apostichon (*Menaion*, 203).

(100) Forefeast of Nativity Vespers, Apostichon (*Menaion*, 202).

(101) Eve of the Nativity Vespers, *Glory/Now and ever* Sticheron at *Lord I have cried* (*Menaion*, 202).

(102) Second Canon of Transfiguration: Ode 5 Sticheron (*Menaion*, 487).

(103) Holy Saturday Matins: First Stasis of the Lamentations (*Triodion*, 627).

It is Christ who blessed the Sabbath as the day of rest.

What is this sight we behold? What is this present rest? The King of the ages ... keeps the Sabbath in the tomb, granting us a new Sabbath.<sup>104</sup>

Moses the great mystically prefigured this present day saying, "And God blessed the seventh day" [Gen 2:3]. For this is the blessed Sabbath, this is the day of rest on which the only-begotten Son of God rested from His works. Suffering death in accordance with the plan of salvation, He kept the Sabbath in the flesh.<sup>105</sup>

He is the Creator, "who covers the heavens with clouds" (Ps 146/147:8), the hidden God, "who wraps himself with light as with a garment" (Ps 103/104:2), and who condescends to be wrapped in swaddling-clothes at his nativity, clothed in the waters of Jordan at his baptism, and wrapped in a funeral shroud like a mortal:

"O sweetest child, how shall I feed You who give food to all? How shall I hold You, who hold all things in Your power? How shall I wrap You in swaddling clothes, who wrap the whole earth in clouds?" So cried the all-pure Lady whom in faith we magnify;<sup>106</sup>

O Savior, who clothe Yourself with light as with a garment, You have clothed Yourself in the waters of Jordan; and You who have measured heaven with a span (Isa 40:12), have bowed down Your head before the Forerunner ...;<sup>107</sup>

Joseph together with Nicodemus took You down from the Tree, who clothe Yourself with light as with a garment; and looking upon You dead, stripped, and without burial, in his grief and tender compassion he lamented, saying: ... How shall I bury You, my God? How shall I wrap You in a winding sheet?<sup>108</sup>

He is also the Wisdom pervading all creation, which "in the latter days" condescended to be incarnate:

The Wisdom of God that restrains the untamed fury of the waters that are above the firmament, that sets a bridle on the deep and keeps

(104) Holy Saturday Matins: Sticheron at Praises (*Triodion*, 652).

(105) Holy Saturday Matins: *Glory* Sticheron at Praises (*Triodion*, 652).

(106) Matins Canon of the Forefeast of the Nativity: Ode 9 Sticheron (*Menaion*, 216).

(107) Matins of Theophany, *Glory* Sticheron at Praises (*Menaion*, 383).

(108) Great Friday Vespers: *Glory / Now and Ever* Apostichon (*Triodion*, 615).

back the seas, now pours water into a basin; and the Master washes the feet of His servants.<sup>109</sup>

Exegetically, these are the results of a consistently christological reading of key-passages in Genesis, the Psalms, and the Wisdom literature. Theologically, there is nothing innovative or unusual in proclaiming Christ as creator or co-creator; patristic literature is replete with such affirmations. What is specific and different in the hymnographic treatment of this widespread theology is the extensive and masterful cultivation of antithesis, parallelism, and paradox. A hymn will typically connect a lofty image from the Old Testament with a New Testament passage illustrating the extreme *Kenōsis* of the Son of God.

A strange wonder it is to see the Maker of heaven and earth stand naked in the river, and as a servant receive baptism from a servant, for our salvation...;<sup>110</sup>

... How shall I stretch forth my hand and touch the head of Him that rules all things? ... You, whose praises the seraphim sing, walk upon the earth. And I who am but a servant know not how to baptize the Master...;<sup>111</sup>

Beholding You, the Fashioner and Creator of all, hanging naked on the Cross, the whole creation was transfixed with fear and it lamented ... O strange wonder!<sup>112</sup>

Today a tomb holds Him who holds the creation in the hollow of His hand; a stone covers Him who covers the heavens with glory!<sup>113</sup>

He who holds the earth in the hollow of His hand [Isa 40:12] is held fast by the earth.<sup>114</sup>

The hymns exploit the occurrence of similar words, images, or actions (for instance, “he hung,” “he was wrapped,” “he holds,” “hands,” “rest”): “The traitor takes Bread *in his hands*, but stretches them out secretly to receive the price of Him who fashioned man *with His own hands*.<sup>115</sup> The following hymns, one sung on Holy Friday, the other (ob-

(109) Holy Thursday Matins, Ode 5 Sticheron (*Menaion*, 383).

(110) Eve of Theophany, Sticheron at the Ninth Hour (*Menaion*, 332).

(111) Matins of Theophany, Sticheron after Gospel reading (*Menaion*, 366).

(112) Great Vespers on the Third Sunday of Great Lent, *Glory* Sticheron at the Lity (*Triodion*, 335).

(113) Holy Saturday Matins: Sticheron at Praises (*Triodion*, 652).

(114) Holy Saturday Matins: First Stasis of the Lamentations (*Triodion*, 624).

(115) Holy Thursday Kontakion (*Triodion*, 551–552).

vously patterned after the first) on the Eve of Nativity, are perfectly illustrative:

Today He who hung the earth upon the waters is hung upon the Cross. He who is King of the angels is arrayed in a crown of thorns. He who wraps the heaven in clouds is wrapped in the purple of mockery. He who in the Jordan set Adam free receives blows upon His face. The Bridegroom of the Church is transfixed with nails. The Son of the Virgin is pierced with a spear. We venerate Your Passion, O Christ. Show us also Your glorious Resurrection.<sup>116</sup>

Today, He who holds the whole creation in the hollow of His hand is born of the Virgin. He whom in essence none can touch is wrapped in swaddling clothes as a mortal. God who in the beginning founded the heavens lies in a manger. He who rained manna down on the people in the wilderness is fed on milk from His Mother's breast. He who is the Bridegroom of the Church calls unto Himself the Magi. The Son of the Virgin accepts their gifts. We worship Your birth, O Christ. Show us also Your divine Theophany!<sup>117</sup>

The emotional impact of these majestic hymns, which enshrine the birth and death of Jesus within the framework of a cosmic drama, and actualize it liturgically, can hardly be overstated. It is no surprise that the Christian East is particularly attached to these compositions. The poetic force of their christological proclamation, however, depends on an implicit exegesis that become obvious at closer examination: *the Creator of heaven and earth* speaks to the disciples, *the Master of creation* stands before Pilate, *the Maker of all things* is given up to the Cross. Similarly, in the hymns of Nativity, born in Bethlehem is *He who fashioned all creation, yet reveals Himself in the womb of her that He formed*;<sup>118</sup> *He who formed all creation* takes form.<sup>119</sup>

### The Exegesis of Biblical Theophanies in Early Christianity

In according central importance to the christological interpretation of the Old Testament theophanies, Byzantine hymnography inherits and carries on a venerable Christian tradition. To quote again

(116) Holy Friday: Antiphon 15 (*Triodion*, 587).

(117) Eve of Nativity: *Glory/Now and ever* Sticheron at the Ninth Royal Hour (*Menaion*, 245–246).

(118) Eve of the Nativity, Sticheron at the Sixth Royal Hour (*Menaion*, 238).

(119) Forefeast of Nativity Vespers, Apostichon (*Menaion*, 202).

from the manifesto with which I began this article, “this is the consistent witness of the ante-Nicene Fathers, and remains foundational throughout the fourth century Trinitarian controversies and the later christological disputes.” Indeed, second-century apologists such as Justin Martyr and Theophilus of Antioch use Old Testament theophanies as a means of affirming that Christ is the One who appeared to Adam in the Garden of Eden, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and, especially, to Moses on Sinai. A second context in which theophanies play an important role is the antidualistic polemic of authors such as Irenaeus and Tertullian. Their argument that Christ is not a “new” God, rests upon the thesis that Christ has already manifested himself in the old dispensation. Theophanies were also invoked against modalism, the argument being that since Christ has appeared in Old Testament theophanies, whereas the Father has not, he must be distinct from the Father.<sup>120</sup>

In the second half of the fourth century, the interpretation of theophanies became an area of fierce contention between three parties: Modalists (who denied the hypostatic existence of the Word, claiming that the three hypostases are merely three “modes” of divine manifestation), the Homoians (for whom the Son was only “similar,” *homoios*, to the Father), and the supporters of Nicea.<sup>121</sup> The Homoians sought to refute the modalist denial of Christ’s preexistence by appealing to theophanies. However, they also extracted a subordinationist doctrine from theophanies: since the Son was manifested in theophanies, he

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(120) For a voluminous dossier of passages illustrating the christological understanding of theophanies in the first five centuries, see G. LEGEAY, *L’Ange et les théophanies dans l’Ecriture Sainte d’après la doctrine des Pères*, *Revue Thomiste* 10 (1902) 138–158, 405–424; 11 (1903) 46–69, 125–154; J. LEBRETON, *Saint Augustin, théologien de la Trinité: Son exégèse des théophanies*, *Miscellanea Agostiniana* 2 (1931) 821–836; L. J. VAN DER LOF, *L’exégèse exacte et objective des théophanies de l’Ancien Testament dans le “De Trinitate,”* *Augustiniana* 14 (1964) 485–499. See also the “Epistle of the Six Bishops” against Paul of Samosata (G. BARDY, *Paul de Samosate: Étude historique* (Paris: E. Champion, 1929) 16–18); Eusebius of Caesarea against Marcellus (*De eccl. theol.* 2.2.1).

(121) B. STUDER, *Zur Theophanie-Exegese Augustins: Untersuchung zu einem Ambrosius-Zitat in der Schrift ‘De Videndo Deo’* (Rome: Herder, 1971) (*Studia Anselmiana*, 59); M. R. BARNES, *Exegesis and Polemic in Augustine’s De Trinitate I*, *Augustinian Studies* 30 (1999) 43–60; *idem*, *The Visible Christ and the Invisible Trinity: Mt. 5:8 in Augustine’s Trinitarian Theology of 400*, *Modern Theology* 19 (2003) 329–356.

must be visible in a way that the Father is not, and therefore must be of a different nature than the Father.<sup>122</sup>

This is the context in which a new understanding of the theophanies was born, which was to remain normative in the Christian West. This turning-point is due to Augustine of Hippo. Unsatisfied with the anti-Homoian arguments of his Orthodox predecessors (essentially, that the theophanies are acts of divine condescension toward human weakness, acts of the divine will, rather than acts of divine nature, from which nothing can be inferred about Christ's nature), Augustine proposed a new solution. He considered the theophanic apparitions — the light, the glory, the visions — as created phenomena, produced by angelic manipulation of matter.<sup>123</sup> For the mature Augustine, theophanies were not Christophanies — revelation of Christ's own divine glory — but created manifestations of the divine nature: "created matter being used as an instrument of communication by the Trinity."<sup>124</sup> And while "an encounter with such an instrument ... was an occasion for faith in God," it is obvious that theophanies no longer have transformative, transfigurative power.<sup>125</sup> Theophanies are thus relegated from the center to the periphery of Christian theology; or, in a vertical perspective, they now represent the bottom of a ladder leading to vision of God.<sup>126</sup>

This solution gradually imposed itself in Western Christianity as Augustine's theology came to dwarf all other patristic authors and to

(122) STUDER, *Zur Theophanie-Exegese Augustins...*, 8; BARNES, *Visible Christ...*, 341.

(123) In *De Trinitate* 3.10.19, Augustine distinguishes several subtypes: theophanies are (1) either apparitions of angels, or (2) the result of angelic manipulation of preexistent bodies, or (3) evanescent creatures and phenomena brought about by God for the purpose of signifying something at the moment of theophany, and thereupon returned to nothingness.

(124) For a careful historical study of Augustine's treatment of theophanies from the *Commentary on Galatians* (384) to *Against Maximinus* (428), see J.-L. MAIER, *Les missions divines selon saint Augustin* (Fribourg: University of Fribourg, 1960) 101–121.

(125) BARNES, *Visible Christ...*, 346; LEBRETON, *Saint Augustin, théologien de la Trinité...*, 835.

(126) In *De Genesi ad litteram* 12, Augustine presents a hierarchy of three levels of vision of God: corporeal, spiritual, and intellectual. According to this classification, theophanies offer instances either of corporeal vision (Isa 6:1–7, Rev 1:13–20) or spiritual vision (Exodus 19 and 33). Theophanies can certainly not grant the higher, "intellectual" vision.

mute alternative voices. Whether Augustine's solution to the problems raised by the subordinationist use of theophanies was a theological breakthrough or a break with tradition, in which more was sacrificed than gained, remains a matter of confessional debate.<sup>127</sup> Whatever the case, virtually everyone East of the Adriatic continued to interpret the divine manifestations recorded in the Old Testament as apparitions of Christ. In the aftermath of the Hesychast debate, the alternative view (theophanies as created manifestations), professed by Palamas's adversaries, was ruled out as contrary to the spiritual tradition of the saints.<sup>128</sup> This is not surprising. As I noted earlier, biblical and parabolic accounts of theophanies emphasize not only the divine communication to the visionary, but also the visionary's transformation. Quite understandably, therefore, the (preeminently monastic) representatives of a Christianity devoted to ascetical, liturgical, and mystical practices centered around the transfiguration of the human being were adamant in their affirmation and reaffirmation of theophanies as the fiery heart of all theology.<sup>129</sup> It is noteworthy that the pre-Augustin-

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(127) Basil Studer sees Augustine's exegesis of the theophanies as a breakthrough. Eastern Orthodox writers, by contrast, lament Augustine's solution as a break with tradition: J. S. ROMANIDES, *Notes on the Palamite Controversy and Related Topics*, *GOTR* 6 (1960/61) 186–205; 9 (1963/64) 225–270; D. BRADSHAW, *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 228–229; 222 and 275; BUCUR, *Theophanies and Vision of God in Augustine's De Trinitate: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective*, *SVTQ* 52 (2008) 67–93.

(128) Gregory Palamas borrowed extensively from the later books of *De Trinitate* (which he read in Maximus Planudes' Greek translation). On the question of theophanies, however, his view is the exact opposite of Augustine's. See R. FLOGAUS, *Palamas and Barlaam Revisited: A Reassessment of East And West in the Hesychast Controversy of 14th Century Byzantium*, *SVTQ* 42 (1998) 1–32; A. GOLITZIN, *Dionysius Areopagites in the Works of Saint Gregory Palamas: On the Question of a "Christological Corrective" and Related Matters*, *SVTQ* 46 (2002) 163–190; ROMANIDES, *Notes on the Palamite Controversy*...

(129) In this respect, the ascetical and mystical theology of the Christian East has significant points of continuity with the Second Temple apocalyptic tradition, and significant parallels with later Jewish merkabah mysticism. See in this respect A. GOLITZIN, *Earthly Angels and Heavenly Men: The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Nicetas Stethatos, and the Tradition of Interiorized Apocalyptic in Eastern Christian Ascetical and Mystical Literature*, *DOP* 55 (2001) 125–153; *IDEM*, *Theophaneia: Forum on the Jewish Roots...*; BUCUR, *From Jewish Apocalypticism to Orthodox Mysticism*, in: A. CASIDAY (ed.), *The Orthodox Christian World* (London: Routledge), forthcoming.

ian view of theophanies as christophanies is assumed not only in the compositions of Romanos the Melodist and his Syriac predecessors Jacob of Serug and Ephrem Syrus, but also in Western hymnody of Eastern origin.<sup>130</sup> The Latin *Improperia* chanted during the veneration of the cross on Holy Friday, the Advent hymn *Veni Immanuel*, and the so-called “O” Antiphons still describe Christ as the one who appeared to Moses and led Israel out of captivity.

Theologically, the identification of Christ with the Glory, Name, Angel, or Son of Man manifested to the patriarchs and prophets was neither the fruit of second-century polemics, nor simply a pious exegetical tradition among many. This identification is rather, as a number of authors have shown, a constitutive element of early christology.<sup>131</sup> The New Testament often alludes to the divine Name (Exod 3:14: ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν), and proclaims Jesus Christ as “Lord” (κύριος), obviously in reference to the Old Testament “Lord” (κύριος in the LXX) seen by the prophets. This sort of “YHWH Christology” has been traced back to the Gospel of Mark, the Gospel of John, the Pauline corpus, and the Catholic Epistle of Jude. It remained quite prominent for at least two centuries.<sup>132</sup>

(130) AUF DER MAUR (*Osterhomilien...*, 150) believes that a Latin translation of Melito constituted the earliest stratum of the Western *Improperia* tradition. There is evidence of a later Palestinian monastic influence in Southern Italy and Rome, dated to end of the seventh or early eighth century (see my remarks above).

(131) See *Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism*; L. HURTADO, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003).

(132) HANSON, *Jesus Christ in the Old Testament...*; J. FOSSUM, Kyrios Jesus as the Angel of the Lord in Jude 5–7, *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987) 226–243; E. EARLE ELLIS, Deity-Christology in Mark 14:58, in: J. B. GREENE, M. M. TURNER (eds.), *Jesus of Nazareth Lord and Christ: Essays in the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994) 192–203; D. CAPES, *Old Testament Yahweh Texts in Paul's christology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992) (WUNT, 47/2); W. BINNI, B. GIANLUIGI BOSCHI, *Cristologia primitiva: Dalla teofania del Sinai all'Io sono giovanneo* (Bologna: Dehoniane, 2004); Ch. GIESCHEN, The Real Presence of the Son Before Christ: Revisiting an Old Approach to Old Testament Christology, *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 68 (2004) 105–126 (with abundant references). For the christological use of the divine Name in early Christianity, see J. DANIÉLOU, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964) 147–163; J. BEHR, *The Way to Nicaea* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 2001) 62–66; Ch. A. GIESCHEN, The Divine Name in Ante-Nicene Christology, *VC* 57 (2003) 115–158.

What place can this type of biblical exegesis assume in the larger framework of patristic exegesis? Before answering this question, it is important to note some difficulties related to describing the various types of patristic exegesis.

### **The Exegetical Dimension of Byzantine Hymnography: Inadequacy of Scholarly Categories**

Patristic scholarship has attempted to grasp the hermeneutical principles underlying early Christian biblical interpretation, and the various exegetical techniques deployed by its representatives, by coining a number of concepts. Of these, the most important are, by far, “typology” and “allegory.”<sup>133</sup> I venture to say that neither of these — and, I dare say, none of the categories commonly used for patristic Scripture interpretation — offer an adequate description of hymnographic exegesis as exemplified in the pages above.

Jean Daniélou insisted on a clear distinction between “typology” and “allegory.” In his view, typological exegesis, with its two forms — christological and sacramental — is Christian *par excellence*. Rooted in the biblical view of history (time flows in a linear, continual, irreversible and progressive fashion and is punctuated “in the fullness of time” by the incarnation of Christ),<sup>134</sup> typology answers to the specifically Christian necessity of relating the Old Testament to the life of the Church. To give a few examples, Joshua is a “type” of Jesus, the flood and the passing through the Red Sea are a “type” of baptism, the manna is a “type” of the Eucharist, and so on.<sup>135</sup> By contrast, allegory

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(133) For a detailed survey of literature, see P. W. MARTENS, *Revisiting the Allegory/Typology Distinction: The Case of Origen*, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16 (2008) 283–317, esp. 283–296.

(134) Here Daniélou is obviously in line with, and perhaps directly indebted to, O. CULLMANN, *Christus und die Zeit: Die urchristliche Zeit- und Geschichtsauffassung* (Zürich: Zollikon, 1946), who draws a net distinction between the “Greek” and the “Hebrew” conceptions of time. An early critique of this approach, as overly simplistic and unfair to the patristic tradition, was articulated by Vladimir Lossky in the late forties. See the English translation in V. LOSSKY, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction* (Scarsdale, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1978) 60–63.

(135) J. DANIÉLOU, *Sacramentum futuri: Études sur les origines de la typologie biblique* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1950); *IDEM*, *Bible et liturgie: La théologie biblique des sacraments et des fêtes d’après les Pères de l’Eglise* (Paris: Cerf, 1951). In the English-speaking world, the typology-allegory distinction was discussed by G. W. H. LAMPE, K. J. WOOLLCOMBE, *Essays in Typology* (London: SCM, 1957).

has its origin in the exegesis of Homeric literature (and, later, of Plato's dialogues). The use of allegory in the interpretation of biblical texts, common in the Alexandrian diaspora, was eventually adopted among cultured Christians in Alexandria, who seem to have inherited it together with the Philonian corpus. Although Christianized, allegory retains the Greek idea of a cyclical time, and subordinated the biblical distinction between "this eon" and "the future eon" to the vertical relation between "down here" and "up there." This is why, according to Daniélou, allegory, despite its brilliant career, first in Alexandria and then in the entire Christian world, remained an element of Hellenistic culture that we can now discard without many regrets.

Daniélou's approach, however, is no longer tenable. One reason would be that the clear-cut distinction he proposed does not account for the much vaguer terminology perpetuated in Christian tradition. In the "classic" passage of Gal 4:25, for instance, Paul discusses the "typological" relation between Hagar and the Old Testament, and, respectively, between Sarah and the New Testament, but he refers to this relation as "allegory." If, however, Paul says "allegory" when he proposes an interpretation that Daniélou would call "typological," and if later patristic writings appear to perpetuate this "confusion," it may well be that the fault lies less with the ancients than with our modern perspective. "Typology" itself is, after all, a 19th-century coinage,<sup>136</sup> and the allegory-typology distinction reflects the agenda of modern patristics rather than the mind of patristic authors.<sup>137</sup> Guided by similar considerations, scholars such as Henri de Lubac, Henri Crouzel, and, more recently, Manlio Simonetti, David Dawson, and Frances Young, prefer to use the term "allegory" in a very broad sense, so as to cover any interpretation that proposes something other than the literal sense. Typological exegesis appears, then, as a species of allegory.<sup>138</sup>

(136) The Latin "typologia" dates to 1840, whereas "typology" appears in print in 1844; see D. DAWSON, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California, 1992) 254 n. 51.

(137) See F. YOUNG, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (New York: Cambridge University, 1997) 194–195.

(138) H. DE LUBAC, "Typologie" et "allégorisme", *Recherches de science religieuse* 34 (1947) 180–247; H. CROUZEL, La distinction de la "typologie" et de "l'allégorisme", *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 65 (1964) 161–174; M. SIMONETTI, *Lettera e/o allegoria: Un contributo alla storia dell'esegesi patristica* (Rome: Institutum Patristicum "Augustinianum," 1985) 24–25 n. 32; Allegoria, in: A. DE BERNARDINO (ed.), *Dizionario patristico e di antichità cristiane*, 3 vols. (Ca-

Given the complex history of Byzantine hymnography, and its harmonization of numerous sources and strata along the centuries, it is hardly surprising to find that the hymns feature more than one type of biblical exegesis. The central event — the Exodus — is sometimes “retold” by the hymns to highlight the fact that the pillar of fire was, in fact, Christ. At other times the hymns interpret the Exodus as an “exodus” of the soul from the slavery of sin. Simply terming both approaches “allegory,” because both see “something other” in the biblical narration, fails to account for their obvious differences.

A possible solution would be to take into consideration the criterion of purpose. Hymnographic exegesis can have a christological purpose, because it proclaims the Christ of the Church as God of Israel, implicitly defining the Church of Christ as “the Israel of God” (Gal 6:16), “the Jerusalem from above” (Gal 4:25), or “kingly priesthood, holy people” (1 Peter 2:9; cf. Exod 19:6, LXX). There are also numerous examples of exegesis whose purpose is mainly ethical. Suffice it to mention in this respect the “Great Canon” (composed by Andrew of Crete, ca. 660–740), which is prayed during Lent.<sup>139</sup> One could, therefore, distinguish between at least two types of allegory: christological and moral.

It must be noted, however, that the christological reading of Scripture documented above cannot be identified with typological allegory” (although it goes without saying that the latter is also present in Byzantine hymnography). In the case of a type–antitype relation, one would expect the hymns to acknowledge a non-allegorical, non-christological, level of the text (e.g., the historical event of the Exodus, or the giving of the Law), and then posit a second, christological, level as the fulfillment of the Old Testament types. Yet, the hymns discussed in this article do not contemplate the Exodus as a type or a foreshadowing of Christ or of the church. Christ is not signified typologically,

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sale Monferrato: Marietti, 1983–1988) Vol. 1, 140–141; Dawson, *Allegorical Readers...*, 15–17, 255–258; J. O’KEEFE, *Allegory*, and R. A. NORRIS Jr., *Typology*, in: J. A. MCGUCKIN (ed.), *The Westminster Handbook to Origen* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004) 49–50 and 209–211. Young prefers the term “figural allegory” (*Biblical Exegesis*, 198), and distinguishes between its several subtypes (192).

(139) See in this respect D. COSTACHE, *Reading the Scriptures with Byzantine Eyes: The Hermeneutical Significance of St Andrew of Crete’s Great Canon*, *Phronema* 23 (2008) 51–66.

but he is straightforwardly *identified* with the “Lord,” or “Angel of the Lord” in the biblical narratives.<sup>140</sup>

A significant point of comparison for the hymns may be the interpretation of the theophanies in the Qu’ran.<sup>141</sup> One may also refer to the category “rewritten Bible,” coined by Geza Vermes in 1961 and widely used since, to designate biblical interpretation ranging from Rabbinic *midrash*, back to the Palestinian Targum, Josephus’s *Jewish Antiquities*, Pseudo-Philo’s *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum*, Old Testament Pseudepigrapha such as the *Book of the Watchers* (in 1 Enoch), the *Book of Jubilees*, or the Qumran document known as the “Genesis Apocryphon.”<sup>142</sup> Even though Scripture itself contains “inner-biblical

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(140) As early as 1965, A. T. HANSON, *Jesus Christ in the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 1965) pointed out the distinction between what he called “real presence,” on the one hand, and “typology,” on the other, and argued that the former is typical of New Testament authors. Unfortunately this book did not receive the attention it deserved.

(141) The Qu’ran extends its history of Israel to encompass Jesus, and reinterprets theophanies in light of the final revelation to Mohammad. See, for instance, the following passages in the Qu’ran (2:40ff, trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali): “Children of Israel! Call to mind the (special) favor which I bestowed upon you, and that I preferred you to all other (for My Message). ... And remember, We delivered you from the people of Pharaoh: They set you hard tasks and punishments, slaughtered your sons and let your women-folk live; therein was a tremendous trial from your Lord. ... And remember We divided the sea for you and saved you and drowned Pharaoh’s people within your very sight. ... And remember We appointed forty nights for Moses, and in his absence ye took the calf (for worship), and ye did grievous wrong. ... And remember We gave Moses the Scripture and the Criterion (Between right and wrong): There was a chance for you to be guided aright. ... And remember ye said: ‘O Moses! We shall never believe in thee until we see Allah manifestly,’ but ye were dazed with thunder and lightning even as ye looked on. ... And We gave you the shade of clouds and sent down to you Manna and quails, saying: ‘Eat of the good things We have provided for you.’ (But they rebelled); to us they did no harm, but they harmed their own souls.”

(142) For a presentation and discussion of numerous examples, see G. VERMES, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 1961) (*Studia Postbiblica*, 4) 67–126; M. SEGAL, *Between Bible and Rewritten Bible*, in: M. HENZE (ed.), *Biblical Interpretation at Qumran* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2005) 10–28; A. LAATO, J. VAN RUITEN (eds.), *Rewritten Bible Reconsidered: Proceedings of the Conference in Karkku, Finland, August 24–26 2006* (Åbo: Åbo Academy University Press — Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008) (*Studies in Rewritten Bible*, 1).

interpretation,<sup>143</sup> the proliferation of “rewritten Bible” is undoubtedly a characteristic feature of the late Second Temple era.<sup>144</sup> It is during this time that elaborate alternatives to the Genesis flood story are popularized in the *Book of the Watchers*, the *Book of Giants*, and *Jubilees*. Similarly, various representatives of Second Temple and later Rabbinic Judaism “rewrite” the Sinai event, pointing out, for instance, that Moses received the Law in the course of an ascent to heaven,<sup>145</sup> or, in the case of *Jubilees*, that the content of the heavenly was dictated to Moses by the Angel of the Presence, as it had in fact been dictated earlier to some of the patriarchs. Consider the hymnographic exegesis presented above. The hymns invoke the Paradise story, the stories of the patriarchs and prophets, the narratives of Sinai and Exodus. But all these stories are rewritten in light of a fundamental innovation, the identification of the biblical “Lord” with Jesus Christ. It seems that the christological interpretation of biblical theophanies and the implicit re-presentation of various Old Testament figures as proto-Christians, in Byzantine hymnography, is quite similar, for instance, to the reinterpretation of Moses and the Sinai revelation in *Jubilees*.

Hindy Najman has rightly observed, however, that “like the classification of texts as pseudepigraphic, the characterization of Second Temple texts as ‘Rewritten Bible’ is problematic.”<sup>146</sup> Indeed, the very terminology suggests that these are forged versions of the “authentic” text, a “second telling” superimposed on the “original” biblical text. In fact, however, the re-presentation of certain biblical traditions (e.g., the giving of the Law, the Exodus) in “rewritten Bible” was intended to ensure the faithful interpretation and transmission of the respective

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(143) M. FISHBANE, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford—New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); IDEM, *Inner-Biblical Exegesis: Types and Strategies of Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, in: G. H. HARTMAN (ED.), *Midrash and Literature* (Sanford Budick; New Haven, Conn.: Yale University, 1986) 19–37; SEGAL, *Between Bible and Rewritten Bible...*

(144) In this respect, see the essays by J. H. CHARLESWORTH (In the Crucible: The Pseudepigrapha as Biblical Biblical Interpretation), J. VANDERKAM (Biblical Interpretation in 1 Enoch and Jubilees) and D. AUNE (Charismatic Exegesis), in: J. H. CHARLESWORTH (ed.), *The Pseudepigrapha and Early Biblical Interpretation* (Sheffield, U.K.: JSOT Press, 1996).

(145) For such Moses-traditions in Philo and rabbinic Judaism, see W. MEEKS, *The Prophet King: Moses-Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (Leiden: Brill, 1967) 122–125, 205–209.

(146) H. NAJMAN, *Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism* (Boston: Brill, 2003) (SJSJ, 77).

traditions, so that the resulting texts should be seen as “discourses tied to a founder” (e.g., “Mosaic discourse,” “Adamic discourse,” “Enochic discourse,” “Noachic discourse”).<sup>147</sup> As far as the Byzantine hymns are concerned, the intention is, of course, the same one professed by Christianity in general: not to abolish the Law or the prophets (Matt 5:17), but to reinterpret them in light of the fundamental assumption that Christ is the *telos* of the Law (Rom 10:4).

The exegetical developments of the “Rewritten Bible” (the term remains convenient, especially if one rejects any negative connotations) was continuously shaped by the intra-Jewish polemics, specifically by the exaltation of certain biblical characters (Adam, Moses, Enoch, Seth, Noah, Melchisedech) over against another.<sup>148</sup> This polemical factor, given special prominence by Andrei Orlov, is certainly at work in *Jubilees*, where the Sinai event is relativized, in the sense of being presented as part of a larger tradition of heavenly revelations to earlier patriarchs. In other words, what Najman calls “Mosaic Discourse” can sometimes include what Orlov calls “anti-Mosaic polemics” — designed, for instance, to exalt the “rival” figure of Enoch. In early Christianity, Jesus is also exalted by being compared and contrasted with Melchisedech, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist. The hymns simply carry on and dramatize the encounter between Christ as “Lord” and the patriarchs and prophets who bear witness to his supremacy.

Najman asserts the following difference between the exegesis of Jewish Pseudepigrapha and that of New Testament and patristic texts: “In contrast to the familiar Christian claim to *supersede* the Sinaitic covenant with a *new* covenant ... *Jubilees* invoked an archaic, pre-Sinaitic covenant, whose pre-eminence depends on its claim to *precede* Sinai.”<sup>149</sup> This affirmation does not stand up to scrutiny, however. According to the hymns, the Christian revelation is superior, paradoxically, not because it is *newer*, an “upgrade” of sorts, but rather because it is *more ancient*, since Jesus Christ is said to be “before Abraham” (cf. John 8:58) and certainly “before Moses,” so long as he gave Moses the Law on Sinai. Just as for *Jubilees* “Sinai is but one of a series of revelations, a reaffirmation of earlier patriarchal revelations,” and “Moses is re-pre-

(147) NAJMAN, *Seconding Sinai...*, 8, 12–13, 18.

(148) For the importance of polemics in the production of Pseudepigrapha by the various competing strands of Second Temple Judaism, see A. ORLOV, *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005) (TSAJ, 107) 211–336.

(149) NAJMAN, *Seconding Sinai...*, 125.

sent as standing in the authentic line of Enochic and Abrahamic inheritance,<sup>150</sup> and just as in 3 Enoch Moses is said to have received the Law from Enoch-Metatron (3 *En.* 48D), so also does much of Christian tradition (including the hymns under discussion) affirm that Christ is superior to Abraham or Moses or Ezekiel because he is the very one the prophets saw, the very Lawgiver on Sinai, the very rider of Ezekiel's *merkabah*.<sup>151</sup> Thus, the "logic" of the Christian proclamation is precisely that of "rewritten Bible" literature.

Fundamental to documents in the "rewritten Bible" category is the claim of being divinely inspired, the result of "charismatic exegesis," which, according to Aune, was the prevalent form of prophecy in Second Temple Judaism. Charismatic exegesis is not identifiable as one or the other type of biblical interpretation, on the basis of its distinctive form, content, or function. For Aune, it is "essentially a *hermeneutical ideology* that provides divine legitimation for a particular understanding of a sacred text."<sup>152</sup> This aspect of the "Rewritten Bible" is highly significant for our understanding of Christian hymnography, since the proclamation of Jesus Christ as "Lord" can, indeed, be seen as a matter of "charismatic exegesis," prompted by prophetic experience in the course of liturgical action (1 Cor 12:3; Luke 24:30–31; John 14:26).

### "Alternative Christology"

The most ancient hymns appear to develop a sort of "alternative" Christology: instead of "defining" Christ in terms of *hypostasis*, *prosopon*, *ousia*, *thelema*, *energeia*, and so forth — "that extraordinary panoply of polysyllabic Greek abstractions which we meet in the Greek Fathers, and which modern Orthodox theologians — God bless them! — are so anxious to invoke"<sup>153</sup> — the hymns offer a christological exegesis of theophanies. The ensuing "YHWH Christology" is coupled with a clear affirmation of Jesus' humanity: the glorious Old Testament "Lord" is wrapped in swaddling cloths, suckled like a babe, humili-

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(150) NAJMAN, *Seconding Sinai...*, 57, 67.

(151) The insistence with which Byzantine liturgies and hymns depict Christ as seated on the cherubic throne is remarkable. This depiction offers a fascinating parallel to the Rabbinic *merkabah* lore. Sometimes, Christian hymnographers became explicitly critical of the competing interpretations in *merkabah* mysticism; see GOLITZIN, *The Image and Glory of God...*

(152) AUNE, *Charismatic Exegesis...*, 130.

(153) GOLITZIN, *The Image and Glory of God...*, 360.

ated, slandered, sentenced unjustly, scourged and beaten bloody; and he learns to die the death of fallen Adam.

This christology is just as ancient, universal, and well “received” in the Church as the “technical” christology of the councils. In fact, some of the hymns *precede* such towering theological authorities as Dionysius the Areopagite, Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus, or Gregory Palamas. Moreover, it is quite certain that no single writing of the Church Fathers has ever enjoyed such large acceptance as the hymns surveyed in this article, which have been and continue to be chanted, listened to, and called to mind by believers from almost all times and places. The classic criterion of Orthodoxy, articulated by Vincent of *f* Lérins (“*that* is to be regarded as true, which has been believed by all, in all places and at all times”) is more than satisfied. So much for “reception” and, implicitly, for the authority that these hymns should command.

As for the “technicality” of their theological language, it must be noted that the distinction between hymnographic and conciliar Christology corresponds to a distinction of their *Sitz im Leben*. The Councils articulated the faith of the Church in the face of heretical distortion. The formulae of faith are meant as *horoi* (“definitions”), precisely because they *delimitate* what, with a formula repeated by all councils, “seemed to the Holy Spirit and to us” (Acts 15:28) as authentic belief in (and experience of) God from false experience and belief. In doing so, the language of the Councils (and, similarly, Christian apologetic literature in general) seeks for the most apt instruments to formulate the definition, borrowing from disciplines such as Philosophy, Logic, Medicine, etc. With the hymns, however, the situation is quite different. Unlike the “dogmatic hymns,” the hymns discussed in this essay are not engaged in demonstration, clarification, or polemics, but in worship; they do not address the adversaries of faith, but give expression the spiritual intimacy between the Bride and the Bridegroom, constantly recalling their covenant recorded in the Scriptures. This is what scholarship calls “doxological language,”<sup>154</sup> and, in the absence of heresies, it may very well have been the only Christology.

The difference between hymnological and conciliar Christology may perhaps be understood by analogy with today’s concerns about

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(154) T. BERGER, *Theology in Hymns? A Study of the Relationship of Doxology and Theology According to 'A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists (1780)* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1995) 17.

Christian use of language. According to Geoffrey Wainwright, “it would be too simplistic to say that we must choose between ‘the language of Canaan’ and ‘the language of CNN.’ Christians may rightly use one ‘language’ for their internal discourse within the Church, and another for their external work in apologetics, evangelism, or dialogue.”<sup>155</sup> In early Christianity, the philosophical jargon of the councils — the era’s “language of CNN” — was adopted precisely for the purpose of apologetics, evangelism, or dialogue; at the same time, “the language of Canaan” continued to be used “ad intra.” These two types of language have always coexisted. One finds a perfect illustration of this state of affairs in the persons of Sophronius, patriarch of Jerusalem (560–638), who is deeply involved in the monothelite controversy, but also responsible for part of the Holy Friday hymnography, or John of Damascus, hailed both as the author of the *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* and as an inspired hymnographer.

To conclude, Byzantine hymnography provides a wealth of christological material, and has much to teach in terms of both theological method and exegetical practice. The hymns are bearers of an elaborate Christology, which essentially proclaims the same theandric mystery that is defended by the Councils, yet in a language very different from that of conciliar definitions. Retrieving the properly doctrinal elements present in hymnography remains, I think, a project worthy of serious consideration. of serious consideration.

### Conclusions

The Christian kerygma is insoluble from the exegesis of Old Testament theophanies. To paraphrase the opening quotation from Golitzin, theophany permeates early Christian tradition throughout, informing its dogmatic theology and its liturgy. With the notable exception of Augustine, the identification of Jesus with “the Lord of glory whom Moses saw of old” is the normative view in Greek, Syriac, and Latin (pre-Augustinian) Christianity. In the pages above I have shown that Byzantine hymnography, which offers the enduring distillate of patristic tradition, articulates the same theology.

Hymns can be read both as a christological “definition” of the biblical deity, and as an interpretation of the Cross and the Crucified One in light of the Old Testament theophanies. The hymns ask,

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(155) G. WAINWRIGHT, “Bible et Liturgie”: Daniélou’s Work Revisited, *Studia Liturgica* 22 (1992) 161.

for instance, whom Joseph and Nicodemus wrapped in linen cloths; their answer points to "Him who wraps himself in light as in a garment" (Ps 103/104:3). Similarly, whom does Judas deliver to death? Him who delivered Israel out of bondage. Who is given gall and vinegar? He who sent manna to his people in the wilderness. Who is judged? The Judge of Israel. Who is it that has his arms stretched out and is hanging on the Cross? He who stretched out the heavens, he who hung the earth upon the waters (Ps 136:6; Isa 42:5, 44:24; Job 26:7). In other words, the hymns are reading the Scriptures in light of Christ just as much as they are discerning Christ in light of the Scriptures.

This exegetical dimension of Byzantine hymnography, while obvious and undisputed, remains difficult to define using the categories commonly used by scholars of patristic exegesis. I have made the case that the interpretation of theophanies surveyed by this article is neither "allegory," nor "typology," nor "figural," nor "figurative"; it comes closest, rather, to the category of "rewritten Bible" developed by scholars working with Old Testament pseudepigrapha.

Yet, the theophanic exegesis of the hymns, outlined above, is not simply christological exegesis of the Old Testament, in the sense in which exegesis is generally understood today. What is at stake in the christological identification of the "Lord," the "angel of the Lord," the "Presence," the "Glory," etc., is the christological interpretation of the transformational *experience* shared by "our fathers," the patriarchs and prophets. It is crucial, in this respect, to take seriously the liturgical context and the performative character of hymnographic exegesis. In the hymns, theology comes alive in the sense in which Levenson (see above) speaks of Isaiah's vision: art becomes the reality to which it points, and the theophany on "God's holy mountain" is re-presented in the liturgical chronotope. The exegete's vantage point is no longer outside the event to which it refers, but rather the event itself — Eden, Sinai, Zion, and Thabor made present liturgically and encompassing worshippers past, present and future:

*"Today He who holds the whole creation in the hollow of His hand is born of the Virgin";*

*"Today a tomb holds Him who holds the creation in the hollow of His hand";*

*"Today the Master of creation stands before Pilate";*

*"Today the Maker of all things is given up to the Cross";*

*"This is the Day of Resurrection ... the Pascha of the Lord!"*

### SUMMARY

The exegesis of biblical theophanies was crucially important for early Christians: it underlay their appropriation of the Scriptures of Israel as “Old Testament,” it lent itself to polemical use against dualism and monarchianism, and, it was eventually absorbed into Byzantine festal hymnography, thereby gaining wide acceptance in Byzantine theology. Part of a larger project dealing with the exegesis of biblical theophanies in patristic literature, this essay discusses the interpretation of theophanies associated with Sinai, Zion, and Eden found in Byzantine hymnography. After presenting and commenting on the exegesis of specific Old Testament theophanies in Byzantine festal hymns, the author argues that this type of exegesis is difficult to frame within the categories commonly used to describe patristic exegesis, and that a more suitable category would be that of “rewritten Bible,” current among scholars of the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. He then examines relationship between the Christology emerging from the hymns under discussion and the normative conciliar Christology.