

## EXEGESIS OF BIBLICAL THEOPHANIES IN BYZANTINE HYMNOGRAPHY: REWRITTEN BIBLE?

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*The article discusses the interpretation of biblical theophanies in Byzantine hymns associated with the so-called Improperia tradition. After presenting the exegesis of specific theophanies as exemplified in hymns, the author argues that this type of exegesis is difficult to frame within the categories commonly used to describe patristic exegesis. He suggests that patristic scholars should instead consider the category "Rewritten Bible" current among scholars of the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha.*

THE INTERPRETATION OF BIBLICAL THEOPHANIES holds an important place in the polemical and catechetical articulation of early Christianity's religious claims. While considerable attention has been given to the exegesis of theophanies in the New Testament and other early Christian (especially pre-Nicene) writings, the use of theophanies in Christian hymns has received far less attention. This is unfortunate, because by the very nature of its performative character, hymnographic material has enjoyed a wider circulation and reception than most patristic writings. The following pages will take into consideration Byzantine hymns of a distinct type, whose roots stretch back to the early patristic era, and that are still in use in Eastern Orthodox worship. I will first discuss the hymnographic exegesis of specific biblical theophanies (e.g., God's manifestation to Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel) and then attempt to "categorize" this type of exegesis. As will become apparent, the biblical exegesis present in these hymns is difficult to frame within the categories commonly used to describe patristic exegesis. Perhaps surprisingly, it appears that the closest parallels can be drawn to the category "Rewritten Bible," current among scholars who investigate the biblical interpretation of the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha.

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### BYZANTINE HYMNOGRAPHY: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

It is often said that Byzantine hymnography is “dogmatic,” because the hymns function as a vehicle for dogmatic statements.<sup>1</sup> The hymns that I shall discuss in this article, however, are not of the dogmatic type.<sup>2</sup> They are compositions connected with the so-called *Improperia* tradition. I have in mind, first, hymns of the “*Improperia* tradition,” a term by which, following Hansjörg Auf der Maur, I understand the various earlier forms of the tradition that also found expression in the *Improperia* of the Roman Good Friday liturgy.<sup>3</sup> A second category comprises hymns of Holy Week that do not evince the “*Tadel- und Vorwurfs-Schema*” but are nevertheless intimately connected with the *Reproaches*.<sup>4</sup> Finally, I consider other festal hymns that are obviously modeled after the hymns of the second category.<sup>5</sup>

“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 Stoudios monastery in Constantinople, and the monastic community of Mount Athos—over a period ranging from the end of the iconoclastic crisis (8th–9th century) to the wake of the Hesychastic debate (14th century). However, the hymnographic material itself existed prior to its codification, scattered in loose collections of hymns.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> One may think, for instance, of the hymns to the Theotokos aptly termed “Dogmatika”: “The Son is one: two natures, yet one Person. Proclaiming Him as perfect God and perfect Man, we confess Christ our God!” (Dogmatikon of tone 8; see Dogmatikon of tone 6). These quotations are taken from the *Oktoechos* (“Book of the Eight Tones”).

<sup>2</sup> For the hymns discussed in this article, I have used *The Festal Menaion* (trans. Mother Mary, Kallistos Ware; London: Faber, 1969) and *The Lenten Triodion* (trans. Mother Mary, Kallistos Ware; London: Faber, 1969), slightly modified, so as to conform verbal and pronominal forms to current English usage.

<sup>3</sup> Hansjörg Auf der Maur, *Die Osterhomilien des Asterius Sophistes als Quelle für die Geschichte der Osterfeier*, Trierer Theologische Studien 19 (Trier: Paulinus, 1967) 134 n. 380.

<sup>4</sup> 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 Good Friday, quoted below.

<sup>5</sup> E.g., see the *Glory Sticheron* at the Ninth Hour of the Eve of Nativity, quoted below. A thorough clarification of the liturgical terms 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 canticles, each of which is in turn made up of several stanzas. The theme song and first hymn of each canticle of a canon is called *heirmos* (usually transcribed *irmos*, in accord with the Byzantine Greek pronunciation common in the Eastern Orthodox Church).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Pott, *La réforme liturgique byzantine* (Rome: Edizioni Liturgiche, 2000) 107.

“In Jerusalem lies the key,” asserts Robert Taft, “to much of the present-day Byzantine Rite, and to its Holy Week Triduum ceremonies.”<sup>7</sup> The same holds true for pascal hymnography and, in fact, for hymnography in general. Indeed, as Peter Jeffery has shown, “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>8</sup> Some of the Byzantine festal hymns—more than 200, according to Jeffery<sup>9</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>10</sup> The Greek hymnographic material preserved in these sources is now dated to late fourth or early fifth century.<sup>11</sup>

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 Nineveh, Jacob of Serugh, 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>12</sup> Melito’s paschal hom-

<sup>7</sup> Robert F. Taft, “In the Bridegroom’s Absence: The Paschal Triduum in the Byzantine Church,” in *La celebrazione del Triduo Pasquale: Anamnesis e mimesis*, Atti del III Congresso Internazionale di Liturgia, Roma, Pontificio Istituto Liturgico, 9–13 May 1988, ed. Ildebrando Scicolone (Rome: Abbazia di S. Paolo, 1990) 71–97, at 72.

<sup>8</sup> Peter 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.

<sup>9</sup> Jeffery, “Earliest Christian Chant” 17 n. 36.

<sup>10</sup> Elene Metreveli et al., *Udzvelesi Iadgari* (Tbilisi: Mecniereba, 1980); Michel Tarchnišvili, *Le grand lectionnaire de l’Église de Jérusalem, Ve–VIIIe siècles* (Louvain: Secretariat du CorpusSCO, 1959–1960) 188–89, 204–5; I rely on the following translations and studies: Hans-Michael 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); Helmut Leeb, *Die Gesänge im Gemeindegottesdienst von Jerusalem vom 5. bis 8. Jahrhundert* (Vienna; Herder, 1980); Peter Jeffery, “The Sunday Office of Seventh-Century Jerusalem in the Georgian Chantbook (*Iadgari*): A Preliminary Report,” *Studia liturgica* 21 (1991) 52–75; Jeffery, “Earliest Christian Chant.”

<sup>11</sup> Jeffery, “Earliest Christian Chant” 8 n. 18; Charles Renoux, “Une hymnographie ancienne en géorgien,” in *L’Hymnographie: Conférences Saint-Serge XLVIe Semaine d’Études Liturgiques, Paris, 29 Juin–2 Juillet 1999*, ed. Jean Clair, Achille M. Triacca, and Alessandro Pistoia (Rome: Edizioni Liturgiche, 2000) 138; see also 148.

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed presentation, see Werner 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*; Sebastia Janeras, *Le Vendredi-Saint dans la*

ily, dated to the third quarter of the second century, is generally considered the oldest example of *Improperia*.<sup>13</sup>

Yet, even for hymns that can be described as “associated with the *Improperia* tradition,” Melito remains a significant predecessor. Consider the following passages, 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>14</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>15</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 . . .<sup>16</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

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*tradition liturgique byzantine: Structure et histoire de ses offices*, Studia Anselmiana 99 (Rome: Benedictina, 1988) 264–70.

<sup>13</sup> Egon Wellesz, “Melito’s Homily on the Passion: An Investigation into the Sources of Byzantine Hymnography,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 44 (1943) 41–48; Eric 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* 264–70. It must be noted, however, that the Christian *Improperia* tradition continues and reinterprets a venerable Jewish tradition, with roots in the prophetic literature (e.g., Amos 2:9–12; Micah 6:1–5). See Robert Murray, “Some Rhetorical Patterns in Early Syriac Literature,” in *A Tribute to Arthur Vööbus*, ed. R. H. Fischer (Chicago, Ill.: Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1977) 129; Julien Harvey, “Le ‘Rib-Pattern’, requiescitur prophétique sur la rupture de l’alliance,” *Biblica* 43 (1962) 172–96; idem, *Le plaidoyer prophétique contre Israël après la rupture de l’alliance* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1967).

<sup>14</sup> Melito of Sardis, “On Pascha” 96.

<sup>15</sup> Good Friday: Antiphon 15.

<sup>16</sup> Ninth Hour of the Eve of Nativity: *Glory Sticheron*.

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 to be indebted to archaic material.<sup>17</sup>

This article, however, is not concerned with the antiquity of Christian hymns *qua* hymns, but rather with an element of content in Byzantine hymnography, specifically its exegesis of Old Testament theophanies. This type of exegesis—whose particularities I will discuss presently—does indeed carry on and popularize a venerable Christian tradition.

Some hymns commonly used in Byzantine worship were composed by famous hymnographers, such as Romanos the Melodist (first half of the sixth century), Andrew of Crete (660–740), and John Damascene (676–749). In many cases, significant comparison can be made with the Syriac hymns of Ephrem (303–373) and Jacob of Serugh (451–521). I will not dwell on this aspect, however. By analogy with the approach of canonical criticism in biblical studies, I am interested in the hymnographic material as it has been received and continues to be “performed” in communities of the Byzantine tradition to this day.<sup>18</sup>

### CHRISTOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THEOPHANIES IN BYZANTINE HYMNOGRAPHY<sup>19</sup>

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam claim to be rooted in the historical experience of the interaction between God and “his people.” It is this recourse to theophanies, rather than a more or less reasonable metaphysical speculation on the unique divinity, that defines the faith of the “three great monotheistic religions.” For all three religions, the fundamental nar-

<sup>17</sup> The application of the pattern of paschal hymns to other festal hymns (see Janeras, *Vendredi-Saint*, 254–56) 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 Sebastian Brock, “From Ephrem to Romanos,” *Studia Patristica* 20 [1989] 139–51). 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] 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 Good Friday (Schütz, “Was habe ich dir getan” 37).

<sup>18</sup> All biblical references in Byzantine hymnography are to the LXX. Throughout this article, in cases of divergence between the numbering of chapters or verses in the LXX and the MT, the first number refers to the LXX, the second to the MT. Thus, “Ps. 103/ 104:2” refers to verse 2 of Ps 103 (LXX), which corresponds to verse 2 of Ps 104 (MT).

<sup>19</sup> For a more detailed treatment of this topic, see Bogdan G. Bucur, “*The Feet that Eve Heard in Paradise and Was Afraid*: Observations on the Christology of Byzantine Festal Hymns,” *Philosophy and Theology* (forthcoming, 2007).

rative is that of the exodus from Egypt. But the “story of God” also encompasses God’s dealings with Adam and Eve in Paradise, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (or, in the Qu’ran, Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac).

On the basis of this narrative Judaism recognizes the true God—“the God who works wonders” (Ps 77:14), who delivered from bondage, led through the Red Sea, gave the Law, showed himself to the prophets, and continued to love and chastise his people. The same can be affirmed of Islam, with the qualification that the history of salvation is extended to encompass Jesus and culminate with the final revelation to Mohammad.<sup>20</sup>

The Christian *kerygma* is also rooted in the concrete experience of Old Testament theophanies. The New Testament often alludes to the divine Name (Exod 3:14: *egō eimi ho ōn*), and proclaims Jesus Christ as “Lord” (*kurios*), obviously in reference to the Old Testament “Lord” (*kurios* in the LXX) seen by the prophets. This sort of “Yahweh 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>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> 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 lighting 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. . . .”

<sup>21</sup> Anthony Tyrell Hanson, *Jesus Christ in the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 1965); Jarl Fossum, “Kyrios Jesus as the Angel of the Lord in Jude 5–7,” *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987) 226–43; E. Earle Ellis, “Deity-Christology in Mark 14:58,” in *Jesus of Nazareth Lord and Christ: Essays in the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*, ed. Joel B. Greene and Max M. Turner (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994) 192–203; David Capes, *Old Testament Yahweh Texts in Paul’s Christology*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 47/2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992); Walther Binni and Bernardo Gianluigi Boschi, *Cristologia primitiva: Dalla teofania del Sinai all’Io sono giovanneo* (Bologna: Dehoniane, 2004); Charles Gieschen, “The Real Presence of the Son before Christ: Revisiting an Old Approach to Old Testament Christology,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 68 (2004) 105–26 (with abundant references). For the christological use of the divine Name in early Christianity, see Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1964) 147–63; John Behr,

As will become clear in the following pages, Byzantine hymnography explicitly identifies Jesus Christ as the author of the revelational and saving acts recorded in the Old Testament. He is the Lord of Paradise, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the one who led Israel out of captivity, who gave the Law to Moses, and spoke to the prophets.

Two observations are necessary here. First, such a reading 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. Second, Christian exegetes are reading the Scriptures in the light of Christ as much as they are reading Christ in the light of the Scriptures. The hymns practice a constant reading of the Cross (as well as Nativity, Presentation, Transfiguration, Palm Sunday) in light of the Old Testament theophanies. The logic underlying many of the hymns is that only recourse to what is known and remembered—the God who did great deeds, to whom we are committed in faith—enables one to recognize in the crucified Jesus Christ the “King of the Jews” and Lord of Glory.<sup>22</sup> Patristic reflection remains, however, focused on the crucified and risen Jesus Christ, and interprets the Old Testament theophanies in light of the ultimate theophany, the Incarnation. The vantage point of the exegete is not somewhere outside sacred history, in an “objective” history from where one would offer a mythological biography of the Logos before and after the Incarnation. Rather, the vantage point is the Cross, and the subject of theophanies is always identified by the characteristics of the Passion.<sup>23</sup> It is in this theo-logic that theophanies can be understood as prefiguring the Incarnation.

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*The Way to Nicaea* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 2001) 62–66; Gieschen, “The Divine Name in Ante-Nicene Christology,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 57 (2003) 115–58.

<sup>22</sup> The hymnography of Good Friday is quite explicit in this sense. The hymns ask 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).

<sup>23</sup> Behr, *Way to Nicaea*; see also his *The Nicene Faith* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 2001) 173–74, 178, 450. For a brilliant theological defense of this point, see also Randal Rauser, “Logos and Logoi Ensarkos: Christology and a Problem of Perception,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5 (2003) 133–46.

### Christ in the Old Testament

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>24</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>25</sup>

. . . with Moses' rod You have led them on dry ground through the Red Sea, yet they nailed You to the Cross; You have fed them with honey from the rock, yet they gave You gall . . .<sup>26</sup>

Be not be deceived, O Jews: for this is He who saved you in the sea and fed you in the wilderness . . .<sup>27</sup>

The heavy anti-Jewish polemic in these verses creates serious theological and pastoral problems, which many Christian denominations have sought to address by way of liturgical reform.<sup>28</sup> Less attention has been paid to the fact that the primary interest of these hymns is christological. It is Christ who rained manna in the desert, it is Christ who divided the Red Sea—in short, Christ is the “Lord” of the Exodus account. This observation can be verified by recourse to other festal hymns, where the anti-Jewish polemic is absent, yet one encounters the very same reading of biblical theophanies, and, by way of consequence, the same type of “Yahweh Christology.”

In Byzantine hymnography, Christ is regularly proclaimed as 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, Christ is said to have separated the waters and suspended the earth upon the void;<sup>29</sup> it is Christ who holds creation in the hollow of his hand (see Isa 40:12), and covered the heavens with glory

<sup>24</sup> Good Friday: Antiphon 12. The similarity to the Western *Reproaches* is evident. See Anton Baumstark’s detailed analysis of the text in his “Der Orient und die Gesänge der Adoratio Crucis,” *Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft* 2 (1922) 1–17.

<sup>25</sup> Good Friday: Antiphon 6.

<sup>26</sup> Royal Hours of Good Friday: Troparion of the Third Hour.

<sup>27</sup> Good Friday: Antiphon 12.

<sup>28</sup> In 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. Sergei 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.

<sup>29</sup> “When the creation beheld You in the flesh covered by the streams, who have 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!’” (Canon of the Forefeast of Theophany: Ode 3, Irmos). “When the creation beheld You hanging on Golgotha, who have hung the whole earth freely upon the waters, it was seized



(see Hab 3:3);<sup>30</sup> who fashioned Adam with his own hands after his own image,<sup>31</sup> who fashioned Eve from Adam's side; it is Christ who blessed the Sabbath as the day of rest.<sup>32</sup> He is both the hidden God, wrapped in light as in a garment (Ps 103/104:2),<sup>33</sup> and the Wisdom pervading all creation.<sup>34</sup>

When affirming that "Adam was afraid when God walked in paradise, but now he rejoices when God descends to hell,"<sup>35</sup> the reference is not to "God" in a generic sense, but specifically to Christ. For Romanos, it was Christ who called out for Adam in Paradise.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, the hymn penned by the ninth-century nun Cassiane speaks of "the woman who had fallen

with amazement and it cried: 'There is none holy save You, O Lord!'" (Holy Saturday Canon: Ode 3, Irmos).

<sup>30</sup> "Today a tomb holds Him who holds the creation in the hollow of His hand; a stone covers Him who covered the heavens with glory. . ." (Holy Saturday Matins: Praises, Sticheron 1).

<sup>31</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 . . ." (Second Canon of Transfiguration: Ode 5, Sticheron 3); "O You who fashioned Eve from Adam's side, Your side was pierced and from it flowed streams of cleansing . . . O You who have fashioned Adam with Your own hand, You have gone down beneath the earth, to raise up fallen mankind by Your almighty power" (Holy Saturday Matins: First Section of the Lamentations).

<sup>32</sup> "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!" (Holy Saturday Matins: Praises, Sticheron 2); "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" (Holy Saturday Matins: Praises, Glory Sticheron).

<sup>33</sup> "O Savior, who clothe Yourself with light as with a garment (Ps 103/104:2), 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" (Matins of Theophany: Praises, Glory Hymn); "He who clothes Himself in light as in a garment stood naked at the judgment; on His cheek He received blows from the hands which He had formed. The lawless people nailed to the Cross the Lord of Glory. Then the veil of the Temple was rent in two and the sun was darkened, for it could not bear to see such an outrage done to God, before whom all things tremble. Let us worship Him" (Good Friday: Antiphon 10).

<sup>34</sup> "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 back the seas, now pours water into a basin; and the Master washes the feet of His servants" (Holy Thursday Matins: Ode 5, Sticheron 2).

<sup>35</sup> Holy Saturday Lamentations, Sticheron in the Second Section.

<sup>36</sup> Romanos, *Hymns of Theophany* 2. The incarnate Christ addresses Adam as he did formerly in 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" (*Romanos le Mélode, Hymnes: Tome II: Nouveau Testament (IX-XX)*, trans. and notes by José Grosdidier de Matons, Sources chrétiennes 110 [Paris: Cerf, 1965] 238).

into many sins” (see Lk 7:36–50) falling before Jesus and saying, “I shall kiss Your most pure feet and wipe them with the hairs of my head, those feet whose sound Eve heard at dusk in Paradise, and hid herself for fear.” By embracing the feet of Jesus, the woman is therefore prostrated at the feet of Him who walked through Eden in the cool of the day (Gen 3:8), the feet of Yahweh.

This theme is also displayed in the celebration of the Transfiguration, as the hymns bring together Christ’s manifestation on Tabor with his earlier apparition before Moses on Sinai.<sup>37</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 Lord.

You have appeared to Moses both on the Mountain of the Law and on Tabor: of old in darkness, but now in the unapproachable light of the Godhead.<sup>38</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 Tabor before the disciples . . .<sup>39</sup>

The hymns of the Presentation are replete with the same christological reading of the divine manifestation on Sinai.

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>40</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>41</sup>

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>42</sup>

<sup>37</sup> “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” (Great Vespers of Transfiguration, Sticheron 4, at “Lord I have cried . . .”); “In the past, Christ led Israel in the wilderness with the pillar of fire and the cloud; and today ineffably He has shone forth in light upon Mount Tabor” (First Canon of Transfiguration: Ode 3, Sticheron 2).

<sup>38</sup> Second Canon of Transfiguration: Ode 1, Sticheron 3.

<sup>39</sup> Great Vespers of Transfiguration: Sticheron 1 at the Aposticha (the “Aposticha” are the stichera that appear together with selected Psalms at Vespers).

<sup>40</sup> Great Vespers of the Presentation: Sticheron at “Lord I have cried . . .”

<sup>41</sup> Great Vespers of the Presentation: Sticheron at Litya (The Litya is a part of the Great Vespers service, consisting of a procession to the narthex of the church, petitions, hymns, and the blessing of loaves). 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 Litya); “Today the holy Mother, who is higher than any temple, has come into the temple, disclosing to the world the Maker of the world and Giver of the Law” (Small Vespers of the Presentation: Glory Sticheron).

<sup>42</sup> Presentation of the Lord: Sticheron at Litya.

This pattern of paradoxical fusion of exaltation and kenosis, supported by a christological interpretation of the theophanies, is instantiated by both Romanos and Jacob of Serug in their hymns for the Presentation.<sup>43</sup>

The same exegesis of Exodus 19:18–19 and Deuteronomy 4:11, presenting Christ as “riding upon the cloud, in the midst of fire and darkness and tempest” (Exod 19:18–19; Deut 4:11; 1/3Kgs 19:12)” to deliver the Law to Moses,<sup>44</sup> 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>45</sup> the God of Jacob,<sup>46</sup> the God of Moses,<sup>47</sup> the Lord who drowned the Egyptian army in the Red Sea.<sup>48</sup> The

<sup>43</sup> See, for instance Romanos the Melodist’s *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 babe; 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. See Jacob of Serugh’s homily on the Presentation (Joseph Kollampampil, *Jacob of Serugh: Select Festal Homilies* [Rome: CIIS, 1997] 141–58): “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” (135–36); “Simeon had become a Cherub of flesh on account of Jesus / and instead of wheels he carried Him solemnly in his hands” (187–88).

<sup>44</sup> First Canon of Transfiguration: Ode 4, Sticheron 2.

<sup>45</sup> “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. He raised him up and laid him on His shoulders, and now in many waters He cleanses him from the old shame of Adam’s sinfulness” (Second Canon of Theophany: Ode 5, Sticheron 1); “The Lord spoke to John and said: Prophet, come and baptize Me, your Creator! . . . Touch my divine head and do not doubt” (Forefeast of Theophany: Sticheron at the Sixth Royal Hour).

<sup>46</sup> “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! He came to receive baptism from His servant” (Forefeast of Theophany: Sticheron at the Sixth Royal Hour).

<sup>47</sup> “Moses, when he came upon You, manifested the holy reverence he felt: for when he perceived Your voice to be speaking from the bush (Exod 3:6), at once he turned away his gaze. How then shall I behold You openly? How shall I lay my hand on You?” (First Canon of Theophany: Ode 4, Sticheron 2); “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 113:5)” (First Canon of Theophany: Ode 4, Sticheron 3).

<sup>48</sup> “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: Ode 1, Irmos). 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).

dramatic dialogue between the two protagonists, which highlights 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 (560–638), Romanos, Jacob of Serugh, and Ephrem, 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 him whom the seraphim dare not look upon, he must baptize the one who created him with his own hand, mortal flesh touches the divine Fire and is not consumed, etc.

The paradox of baptism anticipates the scandal of the cross: the Creator is now stripped bare to receive baptism, just as he will later lay “naked and unburied” before Joseph and Nicodemus. The Lord “who covers the heavens with clouds” (Ps 146/147:8), “who wraps himself with light as with a garment” (Ps 103/104:2), is in need of wrapping in swaddling-clothes at his nativity, is clothed in the waters of Jordan at his baptism, and will be wrapped in a funeral shroud like a mortal.

. . . Savior, You clothe Yourself with light as with a garment, yet You have clothed Yourself in the waters of Jordan . . .<sup>49</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: ‘Woe is me, my sweetest Jesus. . . How shall I bury You, my God? How shall I wrap You in a winding sheet? How shall I touch Your most pure Body with my hands?’<sup>50</sup>

### HYMNOGRAPHIC EXEGESIS OF THEOPHANIES IN THE CONTEXT OF PATRISTIC LITERATURE

It is quite evident that Byzantine hymns display a particular interest in theophanies. The person and mission of Christ are understood in light of the manifestations of the Old Testament Lord. In a reciprocal move, Old Testament theophanies are integrated in the history of salvation and dwelt upon in retrospect, from the vantage point of the supreme theophany, Christ’s advent, death, and resurrection.

This approach is, of course, not unusual in the patristic era. The use of Old Testament theophanies as building-blocks for Christology is a prominent and characteristic feature of early Christian thought.<sup>51</sup> In the second

<sup>49</sup> Theophany, Glory . . . at the Praises.

<sup>50</sup> Good Friday Vespers, Glory, Now and Ever . . . at the Aposticha.

<sup>51</sup> For a voluminous dossier of passages illustrating the christological understanding of theophanies in the first five centuries, see Georges Legeay, “L’Ange et les théophanies dans l’Ecriture Sainte d’après la doctrine des Pères,” *Revue Thomiste* 10 (1902) 138–58, 405–24, and 11 (1903) 46–69, 125–54; Jules Lebreton, “Saint

century, apologists such as Justin Martyr and Theophilus of Antioch used 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>52</sup>

But 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 one pious exegetical tradition among many. This identification is rather, as a number of authors have shown, a constitutive element of early Christology.<sup>53</sup>

In the second half of the fourth century, the interpretation of theophanies became an area of fierce contention among 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>54</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 must be visible in a way

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Augustin, théologien de la Trinité: Son exégèse des théophanies,” *Miscellanea Agostiniana* 2 (1931) 821–36; Laurens Johan van der Lof, “L’exégèse exacte et objective des théophanies de l’Ancien Testament dans le ‘De Trinitate,’” *Augustiniana* 14 (1964) 485–99.

<sup>52</sup> See the “Epistle of The Six Bishops” against Paul of Samosata (Gustave Bardy, *Paul de Samosate: Étude historique*, Spicilegium sacrum Lovaniense: études et documents 4; [Paris: E. Champion, 1929] 16–18), and Eusebius of Caesarea against Marcellus (*De Eccl. Theol.* 2:2:1).

<sup>53</sup> See Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila, and Gladys S. Lewis, ed., *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003).

<sup>54</sup> Basil Studer, *Zur Theophanie-Exegese Augustins: Untersuchung zu einem Ambrosius-Zitat in der Schrift “De Videndo Deo,”* *Studia Anselmiana* 59 (Rome: Herder, 1971); Michel René Barnes, “Exegesis and Polemic in Augustine’s *De Trinitate* I,” *Augustinian Studies* 30 (1999) 43–60; Barnes, “The Visible Christ and the Invisible Trinity: Mt. 5:8 in Augustine’s Trinitarian Theology of 400,” *Modern Theology* 19 (2003) 329–56.

that the Father is not, and therefore must be of a different nature than the Father.<sup>55</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>56</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>57</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>58</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>59</sup>

This solution gradually imposed itself in Western Christianity as Augustine's theology came to dwarf all other patristic authors and to 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>60</sup> Whatever the case, virtually everyone East of the Adriatic continued to interpret the divine manifestations recorded in

<sup>55</sup> Studer, *Zur Theophanie-Exegese Augustins* 8; Barnes, “Visible Christ” 341.

<sup>56</sup> 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.

<sup>57</sup> For a careful historical study of Augustine's treatment of theophanies from the *Commentary on Galatians* (384) to *Against Maximinus* (428), see Jean-Louis Maier, *Les missions divines selon saint Augustin* (Fribourg: University of Fribourg, 1960) 101–21.

<sup>58</sup> Barnes, “Visible Christ” 346; Lebreton, “Saint Augustin, théologien de la Trinité” 835.

<sup>59</sup> 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 (Exod 19 and 33). Theophanies can certainly not grant the higher, “intellectual” vision.

<sup>60</sup> Studer sees Augustine's exegesis of the theophanies as a breakthrough. Eastern Orthodox writers, by contrast, lament Augustine's solution as a break *with*

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>61</sup>

Interestingly, the pre-Augustinian view of theophanies 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>62</sup> The Latin *Improperia* chanted during the veneration of the cross on Good 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.

### HYMNOGRAPHIC EXEGESIS BETWEEN ALLEGORY AND TYPOLOGY

So far, I have shown that Byzantine hymns, their precursors in Syriac literature, as well as some strands of Latin hymnography share a tradition of christological exegesis of theophanies. What place can the biblical exegesis found in the Byzantine hymns 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.

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tradition: John S. Romanides, "Notes on the Palamite Controversy and Related Topics," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 6 (1960/61) 186–205 and 9 (1963/64) 225–70; David Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2005) 228–29; 222; 275. See also Bogdan G. Bucur, "Theophanies and Vision of God in Augustine's *De Trinitate*: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective," *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 51 (2007, forthcoming).

<sup>61</sup> Gregory Palamas borrowed extensively from the later books of *De Trinitate* (in Maximus Planudes' Greek translation). On the question of theophanies, however, his view is the exact opposite of Augustine's. See Reinhard Flogaus, "Palamas and Barlaam Revisited: A Reassessment of East and West in the Hesychast Controversy of 14th Century Byzantium," *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 42 (1998) 1–32; Alexander Golitzin, "Dionysius Areopagites in the Works of Saint Gregory Palamas: On the Question of A 'Christological Corrective' and Related Matters," *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 46 (2002) 163–90; Romanides, "Notes on the Palamite Controversy."

<sup>62</sup> 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 Baumstark, "Der Orient und die Gesänge der Adoratio Crucis" 16; André Rose, "L'influence de l'hymnographie orientale sur la liturgie romaine des fêtes de Noël," in *L'Hymnographie* 248; Pott, *Réforme Liturgique* 111; Jeffery, "Earliest Christian Chant" 7 (with abundant references).

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—here Daniélou is obviously indebted to Oscar Cullmann), 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>63</sup> By contrast, allegory 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 is no longer tenable. One reason why is that the clear-cut distinction he proposed does not account for the much vaguer terminology perpetuated in Christian tradition. In the “classic” passage of Galatians 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 the 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>64</sup> and the allegory-typology distinction reflects the agenda of modern patristic scholars rather than the mind of patristic authors.<sup>65</sup> Guided by

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<sup>63</sup> See Jean Daniélou, *Sacramentum futuri: Études sur les origines de la typologie biblique* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1950) and *Bible et liturgie: La théologie biblique des sacrements et des fêtes d’après les Pères de l’Église* (Paris: Cerf, 1951). In the English-speaking world, the typology-allegory distinction was discussed by G. W. H. Lampe and K. J. Woollcombe, *Essays in Typology* (London: SCM, 1957).

<sup>64</sup> The Latin “typologia” dates to 1840, whereas “typology” appears in print in 1844; see David Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California, 1992) 254 n. 51.

<sup>65</sup> See Frances Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (New York: Cambridge University, 1997) 194–95.



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>66</sup>

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). 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. One could, therefore, distinguish between at least two types of allegory: christological and moral.

It must be noted, however, that the christological allegory 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 nonallegorical, nonchristological 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

<sup>66</sup> Henri de Lubac, “‘Typologie’ et ‘allégorisme,’” *Recherches de science religieuse* 34 (1947) 180–247; Henri Crouzel, “La distinction de la ‘typologie’ et de l’‘allégorisme,’” *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 65 (1964) 161–74; Manlio Simonetti, *Lettera e/o allegoria: Un contributo alla storia dell’esegesi patristica* (Rome: Institutum Patristicum “Augustinianum,” 1985) 24–25 n. 32; “Allegoria,” in *Dizionario patristico e di antichità cristiane*, ed. Angelo de Bernardino, 3 vols. (Casale Monferrato: Marietti, 1983–1988) 1:140–41; Dawson, *Allegorical Readers* 15–17, 255–58; John O’Keefe, “Allegory,” and Richard A. Norris Jr., “Typology,” in *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, ed. John Anthony McGuckin (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004) 49–50, 209–11. Young prefers the term “figural allegory” (*Biblical Exegesis* 198), and distinguishes between its several subtypes (*ibid.* 192).

a type or a foreshadowing of Christ or of the church. Christ is not signified typologically, but he is straightforwardly *identified* with the “Lord,” or “Angel of the Lord” in the Old Testament narratives.<sup>67</sup>

As noted above, a significant point of comparison for the hymns may be the interpretation of the theophanies in the Qu’ran. 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>68</sup> Even though it can be argued that Scripture itself contains “inner-biblical interpretation,”<sup>69</sup> the proliferation of the term “Rewritten Bible” is undoubtedly a characteristic feature of the late Second Temple era.<sup>70</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>71</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,

<sup>67</sup> As early as 1965, Hanson (*Christ in the Old Testament*) 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.

<sup>68</sup> For a presentation and discussion of numerous examples, see Geza Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies*, *Studia Postbiblica* 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1961) 67–126; Michael Segal, “Between Bible and Rewritten Bible,” in *Biblical Interpretation at Qumran*, ed. Matthias Henze (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2005) 10–28.

<sup>69</sup> Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (New York: Oxford University, 1985); also Fishbane, “Inner-Biblical Exegesis: Types and Strategies of Interpretation in Ancient Israel,” in *Midrash and Literature*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University, 1986) 19–37; Segal, “Rewritten Bible.”

<sup>70</sup> In this respect, see the essays by James H. Charlesworth (“In the Crucible: The Pseudepigrapha as Biblical Interpretation”), James VanderKam (“Biblical Interpretation in 1 Enoch and Jubilees”), and David Aune (“Charismatic Exegesis”) in *The Pseudepigrapha and Early Biblical Interpretation*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Sheffield, U.K.: JSOT, 1996).

<sup>71</sup> For such Moses-traditions in Philo and rabbinic Judaism, see Wayne Meeks, *The Prophet King: Moses-Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (Leiden: Brill, 1967) 122–25, 205–9.

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 in Byzantine hymnography of various Old Testament figures as proto-Christians is quite similar to, for instance, 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>72</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 representation of certain biblical traditions (e.g., the giving of the Law, the Exodus) in the “Rewritten Bible” was intended to ensure the faithful interpretation and transmission of the respective traditions, so that the resulting texts should be seen as “discourses tied to a founder” (e.g., Mosaic, Adamic, Enochic, Noachic Discourse).<sup>73</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) were continuously shaped by the intra-Jewish polemics, specifically by the exaltation of certain biblical characters (Adam, Moses, Enoch, Seth, Noah, Melchisedek) over against another.<sup>74</sup> This polemical factor, highlighted recently 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 Melchisedek, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Elijah, and 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

<sup>72</sup> Hindy Najman, *Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism* (Boston: Brill, 2003).

<sup>73</sup> Najman, *Seconding Sinai* 8, 12–13, 18.

<sup>74</sup> For the importance of polemics in the production of Pseudepigrapha by the various competing strands of Second Temple Judaism, see Andrei Orlov, *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition*, *Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum* 107 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005) 211–336.

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>75</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” (see John 8:58), and certainly “before Moses,” since 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-presented as standing in the authentic line of Enochic and Abrahamic inheritance,”<sup>76</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>77</sup> Thus, the “logic” of the Christian proclamation is precisely that of “Rewritten Bible” literature.

Fundamental to the “Rewritten Bible” 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>78</sup> This aspect of the “Rewritten Bible” is highly significant for our understanding of Christian hymnography, since the proclamation of Jesus Christ as “Lord” is, indeed, a matter of inspired exegesis, prompted by prophetic-charismatic experience in the course of liturgical action (1 Cor 12:3; Lk 24:30–31; Jn 14:26).

## CONCLUSION

In accord with central importance to the christological interpretation of the Old Testament theophanies, Byzantine hymnography inherits and car-

<sup>75</sup> Najman, *Seconding Sinai* 125.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* 57, 67.

<sup>77</sup> 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 Alexander Golitzin, “The Image and Glory of God in Jacob of Serug’s Homily, ‘On That Chariot That Ezekiel the Prophet Saw,’” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 47 (2003) 323–64.

<sup>78</sup> David Aune, “Charismatic Exegesis” 130.

ries on a venerable Christian tradition. The reading of theophanies in the Byzantine hymns discussed above is, however, difficult to frame within the categories commonly used to describe patristic exegesis. The reading is neither ethical allegory, nor typological allegory, but rather akin, to a certain degree, to the category of “Rewritten Bible” developed by scholars working with Jewish Pseudepigrapha. More precisely, the hymns furnish a straightforward christological reading of Scripture: the God of Paradise, the God of the patriarchs and prophets, the God of the Exodus, the Giver of the Law on Sinai, is Jesus Christ. This is the hermeneutic principle that underlies much of Byzantine hymnography, of which the fragments selected for this essay are a representative sampling.

This approach encourages the theologian to rediscover the hymns first and foremost as christological proclamation in the context of the charismatic-prophetic community’s liturgical self-actualization. If the hymns give expression to the church’s pneumatic recognition of Christ in the course of the liturgy, then it is essential to take into account their performative character. The vantage point of hymnographic exegesis is not outside the event to which it refers, but rather the event itself, actualized liturgically as a mystical “today” that encompasses worshippers past, present, and future. In hymnic words: “Today the Creator of heaven and earth said to His disciples: “The hour is at hand . . .”; “today the Master of creation stands before Pilate; today the Maker of all things is given up to the Cross!”

In light of my presentation, therefore, it is clear that what I call “hymnographic exegesis” can render important services to theology understood as a charismatic ministry. Hymnographic exegesis helps to anchor Christian dogmatics in the living experience of Israel’s walk with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Lawgiver and “God of our fathers,” and calls for serious reconsideration of what biblical exegesis is supposed to be. In the hymns, biblical exegesis has its face turned toward theophany, thus becoming a *mystagogy*—an account of and a guide into the experience of God.