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INSPIRED WORD AND SPIRITUAL WORSHIP: HOW BYZANTINE HYMNOGRAPHY INTERPRETS SACRED SCRIPTURE

Liturgical poetry, along with psalmody, is the defining feature of the liturgy of the hours in the Byzantine rite. That Byzantine troparia,¹ kontakia² and canons³ draw heavily on Sacred Scripture is obvious not only to those who have studied the texts but even to those who experience them regularly in worship.⁴ Oddly, philologists, liturgists and theologians alike have largely ignored this rich corpus of poetry and, until recently, modern biblical scholarship took scant interest in patristic prose, much less in poetry. Nevertheless, it may be safely asserted that Byzantine liturgical hymns are as much products of biblical interpretation as they are of poetic inspiration and therefore stand as important documents of Greek patristic exegesis. Moreover, their poetic form and liturgical function have kept them alive in the consciousness of the faithful across the centuries.

(1) Singular “troparion.” The term is used in several distinct senses in Byzantine liturgy. Simply put, the troparion is the oldest and most basic genre of Byzantine hymnography, consisting of a single stanza. The term is also used to refer to the particular stanza sung as the dismissal hymn of Vespers, at the start of Matins, and during the Divine Liturgy.

(2) Singular “kontakion.” The term originally referred to a genre of long verse homily, dialogic and dramatic in form, identified with its most famous practitioner, Romanus the Melodist (6th century). The single-stanza kontakion now sung at Matins and at the Divine Liturgy is a fossil of this longer form. For older feasts, what is now called the kontakion is often the prooimion of the original verse homily by Romanus.

(3) The canon is a poetic composition in nine “odes” reflecting nine biblical hymns. Each “ode” is introduced by an “eimos” followed by two or more troparia. The particular characteristics of the canon will be explained below.

(4) The most accessible English translation of this whole hymnographic corpus is the work of Archimandrite Ephrem LASH at

<http://www.anastasis.org.uk>.

If, in the modern era, biblical exegesis has generally understood itself as an academic exercise, performed in studies and classrooms and circulated among a restricted scholarly audience, this was not the case in the period between the 5th and 9th centuries when Byzantine hymnography flourished. Frances Young reminds us that biblical interpretation⁵ effectively created Christian culture.⁶ All the activities of the patristic Church — liturgy, preaching, catechesis of the faithful, polemics against heretics, organizing monastic life and critiquing secular culture — all were firmly rooted in an ongoing, living and pastoral engagement with the sacred text carried out according to exegetical methods inherited from Greek and Jewish antecedents.

Festal Homilies and Festal Canons

The biblical roots of Byzantine hymnography can be traced in several ways. The most obvious is their often clear dependence on older homilies. The homily was the ordinary form in which many of the Greek Fathers performed and disseminated biblical interpretation. The aim might be catechetical, didactic, paraenetic, mystagogic, polemic, monitory or panegyric; the style might be more or less elevated. The exercise was never purely academic, however, for the homilist was always aware of the real needs of a real community of believers. The great preachers of the 4th and 5th centuries cast a long shadow and, by the 6th century, few homilists could imagine measuring up to their predecessors. The Council in Trullo (691–692)⁷ encouraged bishops to imitate or even to borrow from the writings of the Fathers, and anthologies of patristic homilies for the liturgical year were circulating by the 9th century.⁸ Effectively, particular patristic homilies became traditional components of the liturgical offices for

(5) This paper will use the terms “exegesis” and “interpretation” more or less interchangeably. The Byzantine authors and homilists under consideration would not have seen the point of the modern tendency to distinguish exegesis (what the text meant to its original author and audience) from interpretation (one of a number of things the text might mean to any other particular audience).

(6) F. M. YOUNG, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Peabody MA, 2002).

(7) Canon 19; J. D. MANSI, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (Paris, 1901–1927) Vol. 11, 952D.

(8) R. F. TAFT, Sermon, in: A. KAZHDAN et al. (eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (New York—Oxford, 1991) Vol. 3, 1880.

various feasts.⁹ These familiar homilies, in turn, provided inspiration for the newest genre of liturgical poem, the canon, which flourished particularly in the 8th and 9th centuries and remains a major component in the office of Matins.

The dependence of canons on homilies is most obvious in the offices of Christmas, Pascha and Pentecost. It was noted with mock apology in the 18th century by St Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, who argued that those who need bread go to the baker and that those who needed festive words should go to the “panegyrist and encomiast, Gregory who is great in theology.”¹⁰ In fact, the exordium of Gregory the Theologian’s Theophany homily (Oration 38):

Χριστὸς γεννᾶται, δοξάσατε· χριστὸς ἐξ οὐρανῶν, ἀπαντήσατε·
χριστὸς ἐπὶ γῆς, ὑψώθητε. Ἄισατε τῷ κυρίῳ πᾶσα ἡ γῆ· καὶ ἴν’
ἀμφότερα συνελών εἶπω, εὐφραινέσθωσαν οἱ οὐρανοί, καὶ
ἀγαλλιάσθω ἡ γῆ, διὰ τὸν ἐπουράνιον, εἴτα ἐπίγειον...¹¹

is reprised almost verbatim as the eirmos of the first ode of Cosmas of Maiouma’s Canon for the Nativity:

Χριστὸς γεννᾶται, δοξάσατε· χριστὸς ἐξ οὐρανῶν, ἀπαντήσατε·
χριστὸς ἐπὶ γῆς, ὑψώθητε. Ἄισατε τῷ κυρίῳ πᾶσα ἡ γῆ· καὶ ἐν
εὐφροσύνῃ ἀνθμνήσατε λαοί, ὅτι δεδόξασται.

The next seven odes of the canon do not show obvious dependence on Gregory’s sermon. The ninth and final ode, however, draws on another patristic homily, traditionally (and spuriously) credited to John Chrysostom: Μυστήριον ξένον καὶ παράδοξον βλέπω (“I contemplate a strange and marvelous mystery”).¹²

A similar borrowing, again from Gregory the Theologian (Oration 1), is evident in the eirmos of the first ode of John Damascene’s well-

(9) This practice survives in the traditional reading of (Ps) John Chrysostom, *Sermo catecheticum in pascha*, PG 59, 721–724 at the Liturgy of Pascha. All non-liturgical texts are cited from Thesaurus Linguae Graecae unless otherwise indicated.

(10) Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου, *Εορτοδρόμιον*, τ. Α’ (Θεσσαλονίκη, 1987) 149–150.

(11) Gregory the Theologian, *In Theophania*, PG 36, 312.

(12) (Ps) John Chrysostom, *In natalem Christi diem*, PG 56, 385. Very similar incipits occur in (Ps) ATHANASIUS, *Sermo in nativitate Christi*, PG 28, 960 and (Ps) Epiphanius, *Homilia in laudes Mariae deiparae*, PG 43, 501.

known Paschal Canon.¹³ This time, however, there are also several borrowings from another of the Theologian's paschal orations (Oration 45) *πάσχα κυρίου πάσχα* ("Pascha, the Lord's Pascha," ode 1 eirmos);¹⁴ *συνεγείρεσθε* ("raised with [viz. Christ]," ode 3, tropar 2);¹⁵ *σήμερον σωτηρία τῷ κόσμῳ* ("Today salvation for the world," ode 4 eirmos);¹⁶ *ἄρρεν*¹⁷ and *ἄμωμον* ("male" and "spotless," ode 4, troparion 1); *σκίων* ("shadows," ode 4, troparion 3);¹⁸ *δικαιοσύνης ἥλιον* ("Sun of Righteousness," ode 5, eirmos)¹⁹ and *Αὕτη ἐορτῶν ἡμῖν ἐορτή, καὶ πανήγυρις πανηγύρεων* ("This is for us the feast of feasts and festival of festivals," ode 8, eirmos).²⁰ The opening motif of the 9th ode eirmos, *φωτίζου φωτίζου* ("Shine, shine") derives from Isaiah 60,1 and also appears in paschal contexts in the works of Cyril of Alexandria although never with reference to the Virgin and never with the Damascene's distinctive "**new** Jerusalem."²¹ The Christological titles, "Wisdom, Power, and Word of God" (ode 9, troparion 2; cf. 1 Corinthians 1,24) draw again from Gregory's Oration 45.²²

In all these examples, it might be objected that the hymnographer has simply lifted sonorous phrases from well-known sermons. In the case of Cosmas of Maiouma's Canon for Pentecost, however, the borrowings are more substantial and reflect real exegetical engagement with the details of Acts 2.²³ In the second troparion of the fourth ode, Cosmas quotes, not from Gregory's Pentecost homily, but rather from his 3rd dogmatic poem on the Holy Spirit, naming the tongues of fire that fell on disciples a "sign of divinity:" *οἷς ῥᾶ καὶ ἐν γλώσσησι*

(13) Gregory the Theologian, *In sanctum Pascha et in tarditatem*, PG 35, 396–401.

(14) Gregory the Theologian, *In sanctum Pascha*, PG 36, 624.

(15) Ibid.

(16) Ibid. Gregory's homily begins by evoking Habakkuk's watch.

(17) Ibid., 640–641, with reference to the liturgical laws regarding the Passover lamb, Exodus 12,5.

(18) Gregory the Theologian, *In sanctum Pascha*, PG 36, 637, with reference to the typological quality of the Old Testament Passover sacrifice.

(19) Gregory the Theologian, *In sanctum Pascha*, PG 36, 645.

(20) Ibid., 624.

(21) Cyril of Alexandria, *litterae paschales seu homiliae*, PG 77, 405 and 476.

(22) Gregory the Theologian, *In sanctum Pascha*, PG 36, 664.

(23) Cosmas signals his dependence on Gregory from the outset. The acrostic upon which the whole piece is built is Πεντηκοστήν ἐορτάζομεν, taken verbatim from Gregory the Theologian, *In Pentecosten*, PG 36, 436.

πυρὸς μετέπειτ' ἐμερίσθη, σῆμα φέρον θεότητος.²⁴ The point made by Gregory and reaffirmed by Cosmas is, of course, the personal divinity of the Holy Spirit, the symbolic equation of God with fire being presumed on the basis of such texts as Deuteronomy 4,24 (quoted by Hebrews 12,29): "The Lord your God is a consuming fire." The same troparion borrows from Gregory's hymn a second time, again asserting the personal divinity of the Spirit, who "comes from the Father, remaining God, self-commanding" (πατρὸθεν ἐρχόμενον, θεῖον μένος αὐτοκέλευστον).²⁵

Cosmas has recourse to Gregory's Pentecost homily twice in the ninth ode. In the first troparion, he repeats Gregory's claim that the same Spirit who descended upon the disciples in the form of fire was the force behind Elijah's ascent in a fiery chariot.²⁶ The common denominator of fire is obvious and the antithesis of ascent and descent invites further contemplation. The pairing of Elijah and Pentecost resonates with the article of the Nicene Creed that names the Holy Spirit as the divine person who "spoke through the prophets." The transport of Elijah likewise reminds us that the Spirit's mission is not limited to empowering charisms on earth but is fully realized only when humanity is created anew (Ezekiel 36,26; 37,14; 2 Corinthians 5,17; Galatians 6,15), adopted into the divine family (Romans 8,23; Galatians 4,5), made citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem (Galatians 4,26; Ephesians 2,19) and divinized (Hebrews 6,4; 2 Peter 1,4). The descent of the Spirit to earth enables the ascent of humanity to heaven.

In the next troparion, the hymnographer demonstrates his awareness of the Theologian's meticulous reading of Acts 2,6:²⁷

γενομένης δὲ τῆς φωνῆς ταύτης συνήλθεν τὸ πλῆθος καὶ συνεχύθη ὅτι ἤκουον εἰς ἕκαστος τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ λαλούντων αὐτῶν.

And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. (RSV)

Gregory claims that the sense of the text depends upon the punctuation. If the pause is placed after ἤκουον the miracle consists in the

(24) Gregory the Theologian, *Carmina Dogmatica* 3, PG 37, 410.

(25) Ibid., 408.

(26) Gregory the Theologian, *In Pentecosten*, PG 36, 445.

(27) Ibid., 449.

Apostles speaking together in a single language but being heard by the audience in a variety of tongues. Gregory himself insists that this is not the case and argues that the pause belongs after the phrase ἤκουον εἰς ἕκαστος so that τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ λαλούντων αὐτῶν becomes a discrete phrase describing the apostles speaking different languages. Gregory's exegesis is certainly reflected in Cosmas' description of the event:

Νόμου τῶν φύσεων δίχα ξένον ἠκούετο, τῶν μαθητῶν τῆς μιᾶς γὰρ φωνῆς ἀπηχομένης, πνεύματος χάριτι, ποικίλως ἐνηχοῦντο, λαοί, φυλαὶ καὶ γλώσσαι²⁸ τὰ μεγαλεῖα²⁹ τῆς τριάδος γινώσιν μουόμενοι. (Canon of Pentecost, ode 9, troparion 2)

A strange thing is heard, contrary to laws of nature; for the disciples sounding with a single voice, resounded with the mighty deeds of God in a variety (of tongues) by the grace of the Spirit; peoples, tribes and tongues are initiated into the knowledge of the Trinity.

The poet's syntax is unusual, deriving probably from his desire to play contrasting compound forms of ἐχέω (to make a sound) — ἐνηχέω (to resound) and the rare ἀπηχέω (here perhaps 'to sound from' or 'to sound out') — against ἠκούετο (from ἀκούω, to hear). In the process, however, Cosmas revives the alternative reading that Gregory had raised only to reject: the marvel lies not in the disciples' speaking but in the crowd's hearing. It is noteworthy that this is clearly a minority opinion. Most interpreters, guided by Acts 2,11, understand that the apostles actually spoke in different languages.³⁰ The phrase "people, tribes and tongues," which reproduces a phrase found four times in Theodotion's version of Daniel (3,4.7; 5,19; 7,14), subtly suggests a reversal of the exile dramatized in that book and still a reality for the polyglot Jews who made Israel a place of Pentecost pilgrimage but not of permanent residence. The gathering of the scattered people is cited elsewhere in the liturgy of Pentecost but in

(28) The triple evocation of the nations is found verbatim in Daniel (Theodotion) 3,4.7; 5,19; 7,14

(29) Acts 2,11: τὰ μεγαλεῖα τοῦ Θεοῦ.

(30) Thus, for example, Chrysostom, *In Acta apostolorum* 4, PG 60, 45; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses ad illuminandos* 17,16; Didymus the Blind, *Fragmenta in Psalmos*, 883; Basil of Seleucia, *Homilia in pentecosten*, 100; Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentarius in xii prophetas minores*, 228; Severian of Gabala in *Catena in Acta*, 27; Severus of Antioch, *Ibid.*, 30.

terms of reversing the dispersion of the nations at the tower of Babel (Genesis 11).³¹

Intertextual Dynamics in the Canon

As a literary form, the canon always stands in a rather complex relationship to Scripture. Each of the nine odes of a canon corresponds to one of nine biblical odes originally sung in the morning office. Thus each ode of the canon must make some allusion to its biblical antecedent while also expounding the particular theme of the day in language that is likewise scriptural. It is not difficult to sound the appropriate Marian theme in the 9th ode (corresponding to the Magnificat; Luke 1,46–55) but it can be challenging to link Christian feasts and themes with the Odes of Moses (Exodus 15; Deuteronomy 32), Hannah (1 Kingdoms=1 Samuel 2), Habakkuk (chapter 3), Isaiah (chapter 26), Jonah (chapter 2), and the three youths (Daniel 3). Often the relationship is superficially verbal, such as a mechanical insertion of γὰρ δεδόξασται ("for he has been glorified;" Exodus 15,1) in troparia of a canon's first ode. The three youths in the furnace (Daniel 3; Odes 7 and 8), on the other hand, lend themselves to various typological and allegorical treatments.

In the best of cases, the canon effects an impressive interplay of static ode text and changeable liturgical context. Several examples on a single theme can be found in Cosmas of Maiouma's canon for Holy Thursday. In all cases, Cosmas identifies Christ with the female personification of Wisdom (Proverbs 9), who has built a house, prepared a banquet, and her invited guests to eat and drink.³² The connection with the institution of the Eucharist, a major theme of the Holy Thursday liturgy, is immediately apparent. The wisdom banquet theme is all the more appropriate to the Johannine account of Last Supper, where there is only the barest hint of actual food (John 13,26–30) and no institution of the Eucharist, but instead a symposium-like exchange

(31) Thus, for example, the Pentecost kontakion of Romanus the Melodist: J. GROSDIDIER DE MATONS, *Romanos le Mélode. Hymnes*, vols. 1–5 (SC, 99, 110, 114, 128, 283) (Paris, 1964–1981) # 49; or P. MAAS, C. A. TRYPANIS (eds.), *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica Genuina* (Oxford, 1963) # 33.

(32) The grammatical gender of the Greek Sofia (Wisdom) requires feminine pronouns whose antecedent is ultimately Christ. In English, gender is natural, not grammatical, and the precedent of ecclesiastically received translations has guided our decision to translate such pronouns as masculine in italics.

with the disciples followed by a series of discourses by Jesus (John 13,31–16,33).

The limitless (ἄπειρος)³³ wisdom of God, the origin of all (παντατίς)³⁴ and the producer of life (παρεκτική ζωής),³⁵ has built *his* house in the holy Mother who knew not man (ἄπειράνδρου), having been clothed in the temple of our flesh. Christ our God is gloriously glorified. (Ode 1, troparion 2)

The poet's debt to the biblical ode is satisfied by the final words, ἐνδόξως δεδόξασται, which reprise Exodus 15,1. The Christological temple image pairs with the identification of Mary as the "house" that Wisdom (Christ) has built (Proverbs 9,1–5).³⁶ The paronomasia in the Christological and Marian attributes ἄπειρος and ἄπειράνδρου is audible, but we might miss two more subtle references to Christ's passion. Περιθήμενος (clothed) reflects περιτιθέασιν, the verb used to report how Jesus was clothed in mock royal purple by his captors (Mark 15,17). The "temple of our flesh" meanwhile recalls both the identification of incarnation and sacrifice in the Epistle to the Hebrews (especially 10,5 and 10,20) and Jesus' first passion prediction about the "temple of his body" (John 2,21). It is on the Cross that the Wisdom of God is most clearly revealed (1 Corinthians 1,18–25).

The most striking feature of this next stanza is the complex use of quotation:

Let us the faithful all listen the voice of the uncreated and wisdom inviting us with an exalted announcement. For *he* cries out: Taste and seeing how good (χρηστός) I am, cry out Christ (Χριστός) our God is gloriously glorified. (Ode 1, doxastichon)

The hymn makes Christ/Wisdom the speaker of LXX Psalm 33,9; then subtly turns the biblical citation into Christ's proposal of how

(33) In the patristic period the expression is unique to John Chrysostom, *In genesim homiliae*, PG 53,35; in *Matthaeum*, PG 57, 364; in *epistulam ad Romanos*, PG 60, 557.

(34) Applied to Wisdom by Procopius of Gaza, *Fragmentum in Canticum*, PG 87,1756; (Ps) Procopius of Gaza, *Commentarii in Proverbia*, PG 87, 1528.

(35) Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 5.3.3.

(36) The identification of Mary as Wisdom's house goes back at least as far as the 3rd century: Hippolytus, *Fragmenta in Proverbia* (e Pseudo-Anastasio Sinaïta), fragment 37. See also Gregory of Nyssa, *De tridui inter mortem et resurrectionem domini nostri Jesu Christi spatio*, in E. GEBHARDT, *Gregorii Nysseni opera*, 9,1 (Leiden, 1967) 291 (= *In Christi resurrectionem oratio i*, PG 46, 616).

the believer should respond. The effect is to suggest that participants in Christ's banquet are so perfectly united with Him that their words coalesce with His. The play on the homonyms *χρηστός* and *Χριστός* uses paronomasia to reveal the presence of Christ in the psalm while *ἀκουτισῶμεν*³⁷ reinforces *ἀκτίστου* (uncreated), a corrective against the Arian misreading of Proverbs 9 which reduced the Son of God to creaturely status. There is an undeniably erotic dimension to the evocations of the personified female Wisdom in Proverbs and the hymnographer seems to intend something similar in this stanza. Where Psalm 33,9 has "taste and see" (*ἴδετε*), the hymn links 'tasting' with 'knowing' (*γινώντες*), appropriate enough in the Wisdom context but also bearing a sexual connotation in Genesis 4,1 and frequently thereafter. It was, moreover, after tasting the forbidden fruit, that Adam and Eve first 'knew' good and evil (Genesis 3,5.7.22). The Wisdom banquet is thus subtly assumed into the broader typological antithesis between the Tree of Eden and the Tree of the Cross.

The Father begot (*γεννᾶ*) me, the Creator (*δημιουργόν*), the beginning of his ways (*ἀρχὴν ὁδῶν*), the Wisdom before the ages who created (*ἔκτισε*) the works now mystically completed (*ἔργα τελούμενα*). For being (*ὦν*) the Word, uncreated (*ἄκτιστος*) by nature, I take to myself the voices (*φωνάς*) of what I have now assumed. (Ode 9, troparion 2)

The troparion follows Proverbs 8,22–23 closely: *κύριος ἐκτίσέν με ἀρχὴν ὁδῶν αὐτοῦ εἰς ἔργα αὐτοῦ πρὸ αἰῶνος ἐθεμελίωσέν με ἐν ἀρχῇ* and picks up the important verb *γεννᾶ με* from Proverbs 8,25. While never applied to Wisdom in the Old Testament, *δημιουργός* is a divine title in Hebrews 11,10. It would also be possible to hear a divine title (LXX Exodus 3,14) in the participle *ὦν*. The poet intentionally departs from the syntax of Proverbs with regard to the problematic verb *ἔκτισε*. It is no longer the Lord who "created" wisdom, but rather "begot" wisdom so that wisdom might "create" everything else. Any potential Arian misinterpretation of *ἔκτισε* is further opposed by the attribution of *ἄκτιστος* ("uncreated") to Wisdom. The equation of Wisdom and Word reflects St John's description of the creation of all things though the Logos in the beginning (John 1,1–3). The vague expression *ἔργα τελούμενα* is likewise Johannine (John 4,34; 17,4; 19,30)

(37) It is perhaps not coincidental that two of this verb's relatively rare biblical occurrences are Song of Songs 2,14 and 8,13.

and here refers to the rebirth of human nature through water and the Holy Spirit (John 1,11–12; 3,1–8).

In his canon for Midpentecost, Andrew of Crete chooses to reflect the Ode of Moses by alluding, not to the crossing of the Red Sea, but rather to the first of the ten plagues that turned the Nile into blood (Exodus 7,17–21).

You exhibited a wonder, making water pass over³⁸ into wine, O Master, who in Egypt had turned the rivers into blood; and by raising the dead you perfected this second sign. Glory to your ineffable will, O Savior, glory to your condescension, through which you have made us new. (Ode 1, troparion 2)

On the literal level, the transformation of water is what the Exodus plague shares with the sign at Cana. The visual similarity of blood and wine and their common metaphorical identification reinforce this unexpected pairing of biblical events as does the fact that blood and water flowed from the crucified body of Christ (John 19,34). In Cosmas' hymn "condescension" clearly refers to incarnation for the express purpose of the Passion (Philippians 2,5–8).

The connection between the plague of the waters and the resurrection of the dead, however, is left tantalizingly unexplained. The deadly blood of the first plague may suggest its opposite, the life-saving blood of the paschal lamb, which marked the houses of the Israelites against the angel of death at the tenth plague (Exodus 12,12–13). This identification, in a hymn addressed to Christ, naturally points forward to the life-giving atonement for sin effected by His blood sacrifice on the Cross (1 Corinthians 5,7; Hebrews 9–10). A paschal theme unites all these elements: Christ suffered the Passion at the third Passover of his public ministry; His first sign at Cana occurred near the first Passover (John 2,13).³⁹

The whole Exodus event was broadly read as a type of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ as early as the 2nd century paschal homily of Melito of Sardis and the Christian Pascha became the preferred

(38) The translation attempts to capture something of the odd transitive use of μετέρχομαι whose meaning ranges from go over, pursue, undergo, go through, to discuss; see G. W. H. LAMPE, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1961) 864.

(39) The Byzantine lectionary clearly hears a paschal theme in the Cana pericope; it is appointed (out of sequence) for the second Monday after Pascha.

time for the baptism of catechumens. The hymn's water imagery suggests baptism, which is sacramentally identified with Christ's death (Romans 6,3) and described as "rebirth" (John 3,4; 1 Peter 1,23). The waters turned to blood brought death but the resurrection of the dead to life is made possible by baptism.

One or more of these typologies must be what Cosmas had in mind. The beauty of the hymn lies both in the variety of interpretations possible and in the fact that the worshipper is challenged to actually make the connections which the hymnographer merely implies. By juxtaposing two biblical events, the hymn invites its performers and hearers to engage in biblical interpretation.

Exegetical Strategies in Liturgical Hymns

Thusfar we have seen how Byzantine hymnographers repackaged exegetical insights from patristic homilies in a new poetic form. We have also shown how the interweaving of various strands of biblical revelation around new Christian themes amounts to an exegetical approach broadly comparable to midrash.⁴⁰ The hymnographers also regularly employed the standard exegetical tools of their day including etymology, allegory, typology and the juxtaposition of texts based on verbal or formal similarities. Whether original to the hymns or derived from patristic sources, the use of such tools constitutes in every case an act of biblical interpretation. For convenience, we can organize the most common examples under three headings: verbal devices, visual devices, and dramatic devices.

Verbal Devices

To the contemporary American ear, wordplay sounds dry and forced, barely tolerable as humor and surely incapable of any high-

(40) There is little consensus among contemporary scholars not only about Christian appropriation of midrash but also about the formal characteristics of the genre in Judaism. There is, however, no denying its fundamentally intertextual nature and the element of creativity in bringing together the most disparate texts. See, for example, Jacob NEUSNER, *What is Midrash?* (Philadelphia, 1987) xi, who distinguishes prophetic styles, systematic paraphrase and "the parable, inclusive of allegorizing tendencies" but also summarizes the process broadly as the search for "deeper meanings" (2). Similarly broad is the definition of F. KERMODE, *The Genesis of Secrecy* (Cambridge MA, 1979) xi: "narrative interpretation of a narrative, a way of finding in the existing narrative the potential of more narrative."

er purpose. In contrast, **etymological play on names** was esteemed as a token of real wit in Semitic and Hellenic cultures.⁴¹ In liturgical hymns, etymology often amounts to no more than a trite repetition of a single conceit based on a saint's name (e.g., Anna and "grace" from the Hebrew; George and "farmer" from the Greek). Occasionally, however, the appeal to etymology provides real and surprising theological insights.

Inspired by Justin, Eusebius, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom⁴², the office for the Ascension repeatedly presents the dialogue of LXX Psalm 23,7–10 as the words of the angels as they witness Christ ascending in glory into heaven. We will explore this exegetical strategy, called *prosopopoeia*, below. For the moment our attention must be directed to the second apostichon at Vespers for the Ascension. Following the usual first question, "who is this?" the hymnographer reproduces the psalmist's response rather closely: "He is the mighty conqueror; he is the mighty one in battle; he is indeed the King of Glory." Another question follows, "and why are his garments crimson?" to which the response is "because he comes from Bosor, which is the flesh." This second round of questioning comes from Isaiah 63,1–6 and resembles the rabbinic strategy called *gezerah shavah*, the bringing together of two texts which share a common verbal element, in this case, "who is this?" Origen was the first to unite these two texts in the context of the Ascension although Cyril of Alexandria's Ascension homily is probably the more immediate inspiration for this hymn.⁴³ The striking fidelity of the hymn to its biblical sources is clearly evident:

(41) See, for example, Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2, 23,29; and Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria* 5,30–31. Etymology is clearly at work in the exegesis of Genesis 14 in Hebrews 7,1–2.

(42) Justin, *Apologia* 51,7; and *Dialogus cum Tryphone*, 36,4; Eusebius, *Demonstratio evangelica* 6.2.6 and 7.1.13; Gregory of Nyssa, in *ascensionem Christi*, in E. GEBHARDT (ed.), *Gregorii Nysseni opera*, vol. 9.1 (Leiden, 1967) 326; John Chrysostom, *De sancta pentecoste*, PG 50, 460.

(43) Origen, *Commentarius in Ioannem*, 6,56; Origen, *Commentarius in Matthaum* 16,19; Cyril of Alexandria (= Ps. Athanasius), *Oratio in ascensionem Domini*, in C. DATEMA, *Une homélie inédite sur l'ascension, Byzantion* 44 (1974) 136.

<i>Biblical Sources</i>	<i>Apostichon for the Ascension</i>
LXX Psalm 23:7–10 ἄρατε πύλας οἱ ἄρχοντες ὑμῶν καὶ ἐπάρθητε πύλαι αἰώνιοι καὶ εἰσελεύσεται ὁ βασιλεὺς τῆς δόξης τίς ἐστιν ὁ βασιλεὺς τῆς δόξης κύριος κραταιὸς καὶ δυνατός, κύριος δυνατός ἐν πολέμῳ ... κύριος τῶν δυνάμεων αὐτός ἐστιν ὁ βασιλεὺς τῆς δόξης	Ἀναλαμβάνομένου σου Χριστέ ἐκ τοῦ ὅρους τῶν Ἐλαιῶν, αἱ δυνάμεις ὀρώσαι, ἑτέρα τῇ ἑτέρᾳ ἐβόων· τίς ἐστιν οὗτος; καὶ φησι πρὸς αὐτάς· οὗτος ἐστιν ὁ κραταιὸς καὶ δυνάστης οὗτος ἐστιν ὁ δυνατός ἐν πολέμῳ, οὗτος ἐστιν ἀληθῶς ὁ βασιλεὺς τῆς δόξης. ...
Isaiah 63:1–3 τίς οὗτος ὁ παραγινόμενος ἐξ Ἑδωμ ἐρύθημα ἱματίων ἐκ Βοσορ οὕτως ὡραίος ἐν στολῇ βία μετὰ ἰσχύος ἐγὼ διαλέγομαι δικαιοσύνην καὶ κρίσιν σωτηρίου διὰ τί σου ἐρυθρὰ τὰ ἱμάτια καὶ τὰ ἐνδύματά σου ὡς ἀπὸ πατητοῦ ληνοῦ	... καὶ ἵνα τί αὐτοῦ ἐρυθρὰ τὰ ἱμάτια; Ἐκ Βοσορ ἤκει ὅπερ ἐστὶ τῆς σαρκός. Αὐτὸς δὲ ὡς Θεός, ἐν δεξιᾷ καθίσας τῆς μεγαλωσύνης, ἀπέστειλας ἡμῖν τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, ἵνα ὁδηγήσῃ, καὶ σῶσῃ τὰς ψυχὰς ἡμῶν.

Less immediately apparent is the etymology that fuels the hymn's exegesis. The Hebrew "Bozrah" was transliterated by the LXX as "Bosor," the virtual homonym of *basar*, the Hebrew for "flesh;" and so, the place name comes to foretell the incarnation of Christ as early as Eusebius.⁴⁴ Cyril of Alexandria⁴⁵ may have suspected this interpretation as artificial but it responds to a fundamental patristic principle upon which so much typological and allegorical exegesis is based: if Scripture takes the trouble to specify details, these details must be meaningful. Here, the etymology actually leads to more substantial considerations.

(44) Eusebius, *Commentarii in Isaiam* 2,7, in: J. ZIEGLER, *Eusebius Werke*, Band 9: *Der Jesajakommentar* (Berlin, 1975) (Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller). Likewise Didymus the Blind, *Commentarii in Zacchariam* 1, 24 and Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses ad illuminandos* 13,27; Procopius of Gaza, *Commentarii in Isaiam*, PG 87, 2669; Theodoret, *Commentaria in Isaiam* 19, and Theodoret, *Explanatio in Canticum canticorum*, PG 81, 117.

(45) In his correspondence with John of Antioch, *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum* 1,1,4, page 46, Cyril offers συνοχή and θλίψις as complimentary alternatives to interpreting Bosor as "flesh." Still, Cyril repeats the traditional etymology on a number of occasions, including *Commentarius in Isaiam prophetam*, PG 70, 744.

Structurally, Isaiah 63, LXX Psalm 23 and the Ascension narrative (Luke 24,50–53; Acts 1,6–11) share significant details. In all three cases a hero returns victorious from battle, in two cases still bearing gory evidence of the fight (Isaiah 63; Luke 24,39), and in two cases specifically entering into his kingdom (Psalm 23,9; Luke 24,51; Acts 1,11). Interpreting angels appear in the account in Acts (1,10–11) and can be inferred even from a rather literal reading of the psalm. “Powers” (LXX Psalm 23,10; κύριος τῶν δυνάμεων) is an angelic title (Romans 8,38; cf. Mark 13,25) and ἄρχοντες (LXX Psalm 23,9) approximates ἄρχαι, another Pauline term for angels (Romans 8,38; Ephesians 3,10; 6,12; Colossians 1,16; 2,15).⁴⁶ The hymnographer simply ascribes to these angels the words of Isaiah along with those of the psalmist. Meanwhile, even if the association of Bosor with flesh is a stretch, Edom actually does derive from a word meaning “red” and, in traditional Christian etymology, is identified with Adam (the Hebrew consonants are identical).⁴⁷ Two further details should be noticed. First, the poet’s addition of the word ἀληθῶς is the exegetical lynchpin of the whole hymn. Already in the Fourth Gospel, forms of “truth” or “true” regularly accompany the claim that something foreshadowed in the Old Testament finds its final and fullest meaning in Jesus Christ.⁴⁸ Secondly, the hymnographer’s description of Jesus’ arrival in heaven (ἐν δεξιᾷ καθίσας τῆς μεγαλωσύνης) paraphrases Jesus’ own revelation before the Sanhedrin as the heavenly Son of Man (Matthew 26,64 Mark 14,22; Luke 22,69; itself a conflation of Daniel 7,13 and LXX Psalm 109,1). This bold claim to divine authority is what sends Jesus to the Cross according to the Synoptic Gospels. Thus, this brief stanza masterfully balances the divinity and humanity of the ascend-

(46) The identification of LXX Psalm 23 with the angels in the context of the Ascension was first made by Justin, *Dialogus cum Tryphone*, 36,4.

(47) Eusebius, *Commentarius in Isaiam* 2,7 and *Generalis elementaria introductio* (= *Eclogae propheticae*), T. GAISFORD, *Eusebii Pamphili episcopi Caesariensis eclogae propheticae* (Oxford, 1842) 233, interprets Edom as γηινὸς (earthly) retaining both the notion of red clay and the etymology of “Adam” from Hebrew *adamah* (earth) implied by Genesis 2,7. The etymology recurs, inter alios, in Theodoret, *Commentaria in Isaiam* 19 who, in *Explanatio in Canticum canticorum*, PG 81,53, also knows the common Jewish identification of Edom with Rome.

(48) More than 50 times in John; most strikingly, for example in John 6,14,32,55.

ing Christ, recalls the Passion that precedes His exaltation and makes it the climax toward which the triumphs of the Old Testament point.

Paronomasia is the classical name for what contemporary English dismisses as a **pun**. It is freer than etymology, not limited to latent lexical meanings and not dependent upon a second language. Defined as the juxtaposition of similar-sounding words with different meanings,⁴⁹ its effect is much the same as etymological play.

The Lenten Triodion contains a number of hymns that allegorize the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10,30–37) in terms of Adam's fall (or subsequent human fallenness) and Christ's intervention.

Beset by spiritual thieves (λησταῖς λογισμοῖς) Adam was robbed of his mind (ἐκλάπη τὸν νοῦν), wounded in spirit (τραυματισθεὶς τὴν ψυχὴν) and lay stripped of help (γυμνὸς ἀντιλήψεως). The priest from before the Law did not help him, nor did the Levite from after the Law notice him, but rather you, O God, who come not from Samaria but from Mary (οὐκ ἐκ Σαμαρείας ἀλλ' ἐκ τῆς Μαρίας) the Theotokos. O Lord, glory to you. (Second apostichon, Vespers, Fourth Sunday of Lent)

There are several exegetical subtleties here. The fine distinction between the priest and the Levite reflects the fact that, while Levites were clearly instituted after Sinai, the OT knows at least one priest before the law — Melchizedek (Genesis 14). The actual wordplay — οὐκ ἐκ Σαμαρείας ἀλλ' ἐκ τῆς Μαρίας — is crucial in that it provides the only text-based connection between the anonymous Samaritan and Jesus. The fact that the name of the Mother of God lies 'hidden' in the evangelical detail that the good neighbor came from Samaria in a sense authorizes the rest of the allegory. Whether or not the hymnographer intended it, his wordplay also refutes the hostile crowd's attempt to insult Jesus by calling him a Samaritan (John 8,48).

Rabbinic exegesis delights in gematria, the discovery of correspondences between words based on their numerical value.⁵⁰ There is only the occasional hint of such techniques in the NT and patristic literature;⁵¹ I know of none in Byzantine hymnography. Where the biblical

(49) The anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, 4,29–32.

(50) In both Hebrew and Greek the letters of the alphabet also stand for numbers.

(51) Few doubt that the specification of 153 fish in John 21,11 reflects gematria but there is little agreement on how to interpret the number, unlike the a broad consensus that the 666 of Revelation 13,18 represents the value of

text chooses to note specific **numbers**, however, patristic exegetes are prone to draw allegorical correspondences and in this they are followed by the hymnographers. The three youths in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3), who appear in the 7th and 8th odes of Matins, are frequently seen to stand for the Trinity. Beyond satisfying the formal constraints of the canon genre (especially in the doxastichon, which follows a Trinitarian doxology), this allegory plays into a variety of symbolic evocations of divinity and Trinity as fire and light in the Bible and in classic patristic texts.⁵²

The number four also lends itself to allegory in a hymn for Vespers on the evening of the First Sunday of the Great Fast. Nothing in 2 Kings 2 suggests that the fiery chariot that carried Elijah off had four wheels; that inference may reflect the influence of a particular reading of the four living creatures and the wheels of Ezekiel's chariot visions (Ezekiel 1 and 10). Only once this exegetical step is recognized can we make sense out of the exhortation to "make the four cardinal virtues a chariot of fire for ourselves like Elias the Tishbite."⁵³ This interpretation also provides a particularly striking example of inculturated exegesis. The only biblical mention of the four cardinal virtues is Wisdom 8,7 but these qualities would have been fundamental to any native Greek understanding of virtue. Hence, via a number-based correspondence with Ezekiel, the Byzantine hymnographer discovers them in Elijah and proposes them for the faithful.

Visual Devices

The narrowly philological, historical or dogmatic focus of so many students of religious literature has often prevented them from seeing the full range of expression at work in the Scriptures and in the Fathers. In its esteem for the literal, such a reading often misses the literary, specifically those interpretive strategies that exploit the visual

"Nero Caesar" in Hebrew letters. Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus*. 2.4.43,3 identifies the ten-stringed lyre (LXX Psalm 32,2) with the name of Jesus, whose Greek initial has the value of ten.

(52) Exodus 24,17; Leviticus 10; Numbers 11; Deuteronomy 4,24; 1 Kings 18; 2 Kings 1; LXX Psalm 17,9; 49,3; Daniel 7,9; Ezekiel 1 and 10; Luke 3,16; Acts 2,3; Hebrews 12,29. From the Fathers, suffice it to mention John Damascene, *Expositio fidei* 8,96 (=Book 1,8).

(53) Third sticheron at Psalm 140, Sunday evening of the First Sunday of Lent. The same idea is expressed even more cryptically in the fourth sticheron at Psalm 140, Wednesday of the first week of Lent.

rather than the strictly verbal or conceptual dimensions of language. Lexicons and concordances will not capture such exotic prey.

In the canon for Thursday of the fifth week of Lent, the eirimos of the eighth ode surprises us by pairing the formally required mention of the three youths in the fiery furnace with a reminiscence of Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18). The parallels are visual, not verbal: dew and flames in the furnace, water and divine fire on Mount Carmel. Still the conjunction of images is exegetically fertile. Both narratives recount contests between endangered devotees of the Lord and far more numerous proponents of false gods who enjoy royal support. In both, the faithful few are saved by a supernatural intervention and in both some of their opponents are destroyed (1 Kings 18,40; Daniel 3,22). In Daniel, God reveals Himself in refreshing dew despite fire; for Elijah, His intervention is characteristically fire despite water. In two elements that Hebrews considered polar opposites — fire and water (Psalm 66,12; Mark 9,22; Matthew 17,15) — the Lord is found to be present for His faithful.

It is also possible to accumulate related images. Here the exegetical equivalent is the catena, the linking of texts out of context according to some new organizing principle. Such an approach is already evident in 1 Peter 2,4–8 with its repetition of λίθος (stone) and, of course, the accrual of all these images to Christ:

Come to him, to that living stone (λίθον ζῶντα), rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious; and like living stones (λίθοι ζῶντες) be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone (λίθον ἀκρογωνναῖον) chosen and precious (Isaiah 28,16), and he who believes in him will not be put to shame." To you therefore who believe, he is precious, but for those who do not believe, "The very stone (λίθος) which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner" (Psalm 118,22), and "A stone (λίθος) that will make men stumble, a rock (πέτρα) that will make them fall" (Isaiah 8,14); for they stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. (RSV)

The related architectural imagery in the katavasia⁵⁴ of the ninth ode of the canon for the first Sunday of Lent is much less obvious:

(54) An additional troparion at the end of each ode in festal canons.

Christ, the stone (λίθος) not cut by human hand (ἀχειροτόμητος) was cut from you, O unhewn (ἀλαξεύτου)⁵⁵ Virgin as the cornerstone (ἀκρογωναῖος), fitting together the separated natures. . .

The hymn, unlike the epistle passage, operates entirely on the visual level with no verbal repetition at all. Christ had applied to Himself the image of the rejected stone becoming the head of the corner from LXX Psalm 117,22 (Matthew 21,42; Mark 12,10; Luke 20,17; likewise Acts 4:11 and 1 Peter 2:7). To this obvious opening allusion, the hymnographer adds a reference to Daniel 2,34–35. The stone cut from the mountain “with no human hand” was already a common type of the virgin birth by the 8th century. The identification of the Mother of God with the mountain in Daniel in its turn recalls another traditional typology which saw her in the “overshadowed shady mountain” of Habakkuk 3,3 (LXX: ἐξ ὄρους κατασκίου δασέος) from which “God comes.”⁵⁶

The final allusion is to Ephesians 2,14–22. Whereas Paul⁵⁷ here refers to Christ’s reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles into one Church, the common Greek patristic reading sees here the reconciliation of humanity with divinity through the Incarnation. The only verbal correspondence between our hymn and the complex architectural image in Ephesians is the single word “cornerstone” (ἀκρογωναῖος; Ephesians 2,20). Paul’s μεσότοιχον τοῦ φραγμοῦ (“the middle wall of partition”) refers to the actual structure in Herod’s Temple beyond which Gentiles dared not venture under threat of death.⁵⁸ The very next phrase,

(55) The only New Testament occurrence of this verbal root is at Luke 23,53, where it describes Christ’s tomb having been hewn out of rock. The connection between the intact seals of Christ’s tomb (Matthew 27,66) and the intact virginity of his Mother was seen at least as early as Ephrem the Syrian († 373), *Hymns on the Nativity* 10.

(56) This typology, of course, is based in the verbal correspondence with Luke 1,35: “the power of the Most High will overshadow (ἐπισκιάσει) you.” As is often the case the LXX have translated the Hebrew placename Paran etymologically; the distinctive LXX reading will not be found in modern translations from the Masoretic text.

(57) Thus for convenience. Much of modern scholarship denies actual Pauline authorship of Ephesians and if, in fact, it was written after 70AD the image of the broken “middle wall of partition” would be all the more compelling.

(58) The existence of such a partition in Herod’s Temple is confirmed by Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae*, 15.417.

however, “in his flesh,” (Ephesians 2,15) invites expanding the antithesis from Jew/Gentile to God/man, a shift further encouraged by what might politely be called a diminished urgency in Jewish evangelization in the patristic period. The incarnational interpretation is further supported later in verse 15 by the evocation of “one new man.” In the vision of Ephesians, a new temple rises out of the rubble of this broken middle wall:

For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2, 14–22; RSV)

Ephesians anticipates 1 Peter 2 in its evocation of the Church as a new temple built of living stones with Christ as the cornerstone. The concept has its roots in the visions of Ezekiel (40 ff), appears already developed in the Pauline letters (1 Corinthians 3,16–17; 6,19) and finds its most vivid expression in John’s vision of the new and heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 21). In the life of Israel, the Temple accomplished two important functions: there sins were expiated and God was encountered. The expiation now accomplished once and for all through sacrificial death of the Incarnate Christ has reconciled Jew and Gentile — the whole of humanity — to each other and to God. The union of divine and human natures in the Incarnation of Christ is necessary to the argument in Ephesians, and the union of other humans with God is likewise sketched in Paul’s list of consequences: peace, access to God and incorporation into His household. As befits an orthodox reader of the NT after Nicaea, Ephesus and Chalcedon, the hymnographer merely foregrounds the ontological dimension of what the apostle had described economically, noting as well the role of the Theotokos in the Incarnation. The hymn is a dogmatic interpretation of Ephesians 2,14.

The mere mention of the “cornerstone” — the poet does not even need to specify the building! — reminds us that the body of the incarnate Christ is itself the ultimate Temple (John 2,17–21; Hebrews 10, 5.10.20; Revelation 21,22), while the allusive, visual approach leaves open the possibility for association with still more images, such as the chosen stone with seven facets in the royal and priestly messianic prophecies of Zechariah (3,9; 4,10).

Dramatizing Devices

Apostrophe, the figure of turning aside from the audience to address an absent historical figure or imagined opponent, was well established in classical and later Greek rhetoric and remained a mainstay of the diatribe style which informs and enlivens so much patristic preaching.⁵⁹ Often enough apostrophe serves as a dramatic means for citing an Old Testament text as a prophecy fulfilled in a New Testament event. Especially at feasts of the Theotokos, for which the New Testament offers little in the way of direct narrative, recourse must be made to the Old Testament. A hymn for Matins of the Dormition of the Mother of God (August 15), asks,

“Cry out, David what is this present feast? He said, ‘The one I of which I sang in the book of Psalms. Since she is daughter, child of God and virgin, Christ, born of her without seed, transferred her . . .’”

While the use of the title “daughter” in this particular stanza might suggest LXX Psalm 44, the rest of the office of the Dormition returns again and again to LXX Psalm 131,8: “Go up Lord to the place of your rest, you and the Ark of your strength” (LXX Psalm 131,8).

Two interpretive steps are presumed in this little stanza: first, the broad identification of the Theotokos with the Temple and secondly, her specific identification with the Ark. Both emerge out of the model of “containment” which became prominent in the Theotokos controversy and both typologies are found in 5th century Marian homilies and in the Akathist Hymn.⁶⁰ By the 6th century, the description of the Tent of Meeting (Hebrews 9,1–7) had become the standard lection for

(59) R. DEAN ANDERSON JR., *Glossary of Greek Rhetorical Terms* (Leuven, 2000) (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology, 24) 25.

(60) See, for example *Akathistos* stanza 23; R. CARO, *La Homiletica Mariana Griega en el Siglo V* (Dayton OH, 1971–1973) (Marian Library Studies, new series, 3–5).

Marian feasts in Jerusalem.⁶¹ This Marian typology can be understood as a particular application of the repeated Pauline insistence that both the individual believer and the universal church become temples through incorporation into Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Romans 12,4–5; 1 Corinthians 6,19–20; 10,16–17; 12,13–27; Ephesians 2,16; 4,4–16; 5,23–30; Colossians 1,18–24).

The Bible itself provides a precedent for the device of **personification**. Describing the Israelites' passage across the Jordan under Joshua, the Psalmist ascribes human characteristics to the entire landscape: river, sea, mountains and hills and addresses each in a brief apostrophe (LXX Psalm 113,1–6). LXX Psalm 76,17 recounts another occasion when "the waters saw you and were afraid." Such personification of the Jordan recurs in a number of hymns for the Theophany, the revelation of the Trinity at Jesus' baptism in the Jordan: "The Jordan River turned back, not daring to serve you. How could the one who had stood in awe of Joshua, son of Nun, not have cause to fear his maker?"⁶² At the second kathisma⁶³ of Matins, personification is paired with apostrophe so that the river can narrate:

"Jordan River, why are you astounded at what you see? 'I saw the invisible one naked and I shuddered. For how would I not shudder and shrink at that? The angels shuddered at the sight of him, heaven was beside itself and the earth shook and the sea drew back along with every visible and invisible thing.' Christ is revealed in the Jordan to sanctify the waters."

The liturgical cycle includes distinct sets of hymns celebrating the resurrection of Christ in each of the eight tones of Byzantine chant. The biblical raw material for this extensive poetic corpus is drawn from the Gospel accounts of the empty tomb and the appearances of the risen Christ, the single New Testament reference to his descent into Hades (1 Peter 3,19) and a variety of Old Testament texts. "Hades," the Greek mythological name by which the LXX translated the Hebrew *Sheol*, is often personified by liturgical poets, most notably Romanus the Melodist.⁶⁴

(61) A. KNIAZEFF, *Mariologie biblique et liturgie byzantine, Irénikon* 28 (1955) 269–289.

(62) Fourth Sticheron at the Litija of Great Compline for Theophany.

(63) A poetic interlude between readings of the Psalter at Matins.

(64) See Romanus' kontakia on the raising of Lazarus (SC, # 26; MAAS, TRYPANIS, # 14), the victory of the Cross (SC, # 38; MAAS, TRYPANIS, # 22), on

Remaining (ὑπάρχων) King of heaven and earth,
 Incomprehensible One,
 you were willingly crucified out of love for mankind.
 Hades was embittered when it encountered you below,
 and the souls of the righteous held there rejoiced.
 Seeing you, the creator, in the underworld, Adam arose.
 O the wonder!
 How has the life of all tasted death?
 Only because you have willed to enlighten the world,
 which cries out and says,
 O Lord, risen from the dead, glory to you.
 (Alphabetic apostichon, Saturday Vespers, tone 1)

The entire stanza is structured in pairs of antitheses. While eternally remaining the incomprehensible King of heaven and earth (Daniel 4,34), the Lord accepts the limits of the incarnation and willingly submits to death. His descent embitters Hades but delights the righteous souls. Christ descends and Adam rises; the source of life tastes death. The whole is framed between the bitterness of the personified Hades and the exultation of the redeemed world. The whole trajectory of the hymn mirrors the parabola of condescension and glorification traced in Philippians 2,6–9.

Along with the title from Daniel, the hymnographer reproduces phrases from two other Old Testament texts. Hades was first personified as bitter by Isaiah (14,9) in a mocking dirge for the king of Babylon:

ὁ ἄδης κάτωθεν ἐπικράνθη⁶⁵ συναντήσας σοι συνηγέρθησαν
 σοι πάντες οἱ γίγαντες οἱ ἄρξαντες τῆς γῆς οἱ ἐγείραντες ἐκ τῶν
 θρόνων αὐτῶν πάντας βασιλεῖς ἐθνῶν.

This evocation of embitterment became identified with Christ's descent into Hades primarily thanks to the famous Paschal homily of St John Chrysostom, which includes this anaphora:

Ἐπικράνεν αὐτὸν γευσάμενον τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ· καὶ τοῦτο
 προλαβὼν Ἡσαΐας ἐβόησεν· Ὁ ἄδης, φησὶν, ἐπικράνθη, συν-
 αντήσας σοι κάτω. Ἐπικράνθη, καὶ γὰρ κατηργήθη. Ἐπικράνθη,
 καὶ γὰρ ἐνεπαίχθη. Ἐπικράνθη, καὶ γὰρ ἐνεκρώθη. Ἐπικράνθη,
 καὶ γὰρ καθηρέθη. Ἐπικράνθη, καὶ γὰρ ἐδεσμεύθη.

the Resurrection (SC, # 42; MAAS, TRYPANIS, # 25), another on the Resurrection (MAAS, TRYPANIS, # 26; SC, # 44), etc.

(65) Most modern translations translate as “was astir,” or “was provoked” reflecting the Hebrew *rogzah*.

The hymnographer has clearly considered the prophetic text for himself because he applies the text to Christ's descent into Hades more completely than "Chrysostom" had. Where Isaiah envisions other dead gentile kings standing up in mock respect for the new arrival from Babylon, the hymnographer has Adam "arise," changing Isaiah's verb to one more directly evocative of resurrection (ἀνέστη).

The exultant welcome accorded Christ by the souls of the righteous (δικαίων ψυχαὶ ἡγαλλιάσαντο) paraphrases LXX Psalm 131,9: οἱ ὅσιοι σου ἀγαλλιάσονται.

The psalm celebrates David's recapture of the Ark of the Covenant from the Philistines and its festive transportation Jerusalem. The hymnographer surely intends us to recall the verse just prior to the one he quotes: "arise (ἀνάστηθι) O Lord to your rest (ἀνάπαυσιν)." Here (as in the frequent citation of this verse in the office of the Dormition of the Theotokos), "arise" comes to mean "resurrect" and "rest" is identified with death. This is most appropriate in the case of the Lord's "Sabbath rest" in the tomb for Saturday is the only full day he spent there. Isaiah's nameless Babylonian king is still dead, and the Ark of the Covenant irretrievably lost. The hymnographer's interpretation of these two texts continues to have immediate and profound meaning for the faithful who celebrate Christ's resurrection and anticipate their own Sunday after Sunday throughout the Church year.

Short of actual personification, it may be unnamed "rulers" of Hades who are confronted by Christ:

The one who granted resurrection to the human race
 was led like a sheep to the slaughter.
 Then the rulers of Hades trembled
 And the doleful gates were uplifted
 For Christ the King of Glory has entered
 Saying those in chains, "Go out"
 And to those in darkness, "Show yourselves."
 (Second Sticheron at Psalm 140, Great Vespers, tone 5)

Here the hymnographer has succeeded in taking whole clauses from three Old Testament texts and weaving them together seamlessly. The fundamental exegetical insight that holds this pastiche of disparate texts together is that Jesus Christ is the true protagonist in each of them. The citation of the classic image of suffering servant as sacrificial victim (Isaiah 53,7) is justified here by the subsequent mention of the servant's grave (Isaiah 53,9). The arrival of Christ in the realm of the dead is transformed into the triumphant entry of the King

of Glory (LXX Psalm 23,7) but the “gates” which must be “uplifted” are not heavenly (as in citations of this psalm in Ascension hymnography) but infernal (Job 38,17; Isaiah 45,1; LXX Psalm 106,16). The last two lines of the hymn are a nearly literal quote of Isaiah 49,9.⁶⁶ In Isaiah, this imagery of imprisonment refers to the Babylonian exile and the prophet’s message is that Israel has been set free. But the end of the captivity proved to be anti-climactic and inconclusive for Israel and it happened, at any rate, a long time ago. The hymnographer takes one further interpretive step that we should not overlook: “we,” the singers of the hymn, assume the role of the liberated. Deutero-Isaiah described the return from Babylon as a new Exodus; the hymnographer carries this metaphorical trajectory forward to the ultimate Passover, Christ’s Passion and Resurrection.

Similar in its approach is:

The gates of death, O Lord, opened before you in fear,
and, at the sight of you, the gatekeepers of Hades cowered.
For you smashed the gates of bronze and crushed the bars of iron,
then you led us out of the darkness, away from the shadow of death,
bursting our chains asunder.

(Third anatholikon, Saturday Vespers, tone 2)

Nearly every word in this sticheron is a direct quotation of two texts: Job 38,17 and Psalm 106,14 and 16:

Job 38:17: ἀνοίγονται δὲ σοὶ φόβῳ πύλαι θανάτου, πυλωροὶ δὲ ᾄδου ἰδόντες σε ἔπτηξαν·	Ἡνοίγησάν σοι κύριε φόβῳ πύλαι θανάτου, πυλωροὶ δὲ ᾄδου ἰδόντες σε ἔπτηξαν·
Psalm 106,16: συνέτριψεν πύλας χαλκᾶς καὶ μοχλοὺς σιδηροὺς συνέκλασεν Psalm 106,14: καὶ ἐξήγαγεν αὐτοὺς ἐκ σκότους, καὶ σκιᾶς θανάτου καὶ τοὺς δεσμοὺς αὐτῶν διέρρηξεν	πύλας γὰρ χαλκᾶς συνέτριψας, καὶ μοχλοὺς σιδηροὺς συνέθλησας καὶ ἐξήγαγες ἡμᾶς ἐκ σκότους, καὶ σκιᾶς θανάτου, καὶ τοὺς δεσμοὺς ἡμῶν διέρρηξας.

On the literal level, each of these texts is somewhat problematic. In Job 38,17, the Lord challenges Job: “Do the gates of death open before you in fear, or do the gatekeepers of death see you and cower?”⁶⁷ The

(66) 2 Peter 2,4 also imagines chains in “Tartarus.”

(67) LXX includes the word φόβῳ (in fear), found neither in the Masoretic Hebrew nor in modern versions.

question poses a situation contrary to fact: the infernal gates do not respond to mere mortals in this manner. The implication is that they would respond this way to the Lord. In the original context of Job, the question remains rhetorical; whether or not God might confront death is not really considered. The application to Christ does more than merely appropriate Old Testament imagery to flesh out a critical Gospel moment about which the New Testament has precious little to say. Rather, it reclaims on the level of fact two sets of inspired words which, in their original context, could be overlooked as hypothetical or rhetorical but in any case less than real.

LXX Psalm 106 is unique among communal thanksgiving hymns in the way it calls upon a series of representative groups, each of which cried to the Lord in some specific need and each of which must now render thanks. One such group

... sat in darkness and the shadow of death, fettered in poverty and iron, for the words of God had caused bitterness⁶⁸ and they spurned the counsel of the Most High. Their hearts were humbled with hard labor; they grew weak, and there was no one to help. (Psalm 107 (106), 10–12; RSV)

The psalmist probably intended to describe the plight of exiles to Babylon, rightly punished for spurning repeated prophetic warnings and continuing in their rebellion against the Lord. Still, the literary form of the psalm itself suggests a typical pattern that invites ongoing application to specific circumstances. The images of 'darkness' and 'the shadow of death' look back to pre-exilic prophecy about an ideal king (Isaiah 9,1–7) and point forward to Zachary's prediction that such darkness would be dispelled by Christ (Luke 1,79; cf. LXX Psalm 87,6 and Job 28,3).

It is likely that "death" is metaphorical in the prophecy and the psalm but the consequences of rebellion against God are ultimately nothing less than death. By applying the language of imprisonment, darkness and death from Psalm 106 to the passion and resurrection of Christ, the hymnographer expands the range of the psalmist's "embitterment," and "spurning" to include every human sin from Adam onward, the wages of which were always death (Genesis 3,3; Romans 5–6).

(68) The Greek could also be read: "they had embittered the words of God;" the underlying Hebrew also lacks the second object that might clarify the issue.

Details of infernal imagery are what bring Job 38 and Psalm 106 together around the new common element of Christ's resurrection in the hymnographer's imagination, but the resultant new song responds to an exegetical need. Neither Job 38 nor Psalm 106 has an obvious real-time referent on the literal level, yet neither of these inspired words can be dismissed as superfluous, decorative, or void (Isaiah 55,11). Their fulfillment requires identifying their protagonist and their beneficiaries. This interpretive task the hymnographer realizes.

One final observation about the exegesis at work in these hymns is unavoidable. In their dramatization of the harrowing of Hades, the hymnographers we have quoted typically alter the raw material of their biblical citations in one striking way. Whether as actors in the biblical drama or as spectators who see and react, the hymns include "us" — the worshipping community which sings the hymns in the Church's liturgical "today." Thus, undergirding every other exegetical technique we have explored in Byzantine hymnography are two fundamental axioms: the "meaning" of the Old Testament is, even in its details, Christ. And whatever God has foreshadowed in the Old Testament or realized in the New Testament has been accomplished "for us and for our salvation."

SUMMARY

Like all authentic monuments of Christian culture, the liturgical hymnography of the Byzantine tradition springs from the Church's ongoing engagement with biblical revelation. Liturgical hymns, in particular, are deeply rooted in patristic preaching, whose interpretive strategies and conclusions they mirror and disseminate in a form accessible to the entire worshipping community. Along with the standard exegetical tools of the patristic era, the hymnographers exploit verbal, audial and visual relationships among inspired texts to unpack the drama inherent in spare biblical narratives. Citation and allusion allow these inspired texts to weave rich intertextual celebrations of individual moments in the Christian mystery and to find the New Testament hidden in the Old.