

ANTI-JEWISH RHETORIC IN BYZANTINE HYMNOGRAPHY: EXEGETICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION

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A discussion of the anti-Jewish rhetoric in Orthodox hymnography is especially difficult today—in the aftermath of anti-Jewish pogroms, in the sinister shadow of Auschwitz, and at a time when Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land continue to be doubly marginalized and oppressed by the modern-day Jewish state of Israel and by their own Greek hierarchy. But it is just such painful realities that make such a discussion necessary. Fortunately, a conversation has already begun among Orthodox academics.¹ As Father Eugen Pentiuc, a scholar of the Hebrew Bible who is directly involved in teaching and advising Orthodox seminarians in the U.S., has recently stated in his authoritative volume, *The Old Testament: Eastern Orthodox Tradition*,

The Orthodox Church as a whole, and especially and more effectively the hierarchs, should revise and discard anti-Judaic statements and allusions from hymnography and from liturgy itself, as a matter of fact. The poetry of Eastern Orthodox hymns is too sublime to be marred by such low sentiments echoing from a past dominated by religious quarrels and controversies. Having said this, I am not calling here on a quick and in toto revision of the Eastern Orthodox liturgy,

- 1 Sergei Hackel, "The Relevance of Western Post-Holocaust Theology to the Thought and Practice of the Russian Orthodox Church," *Sobornost* 20 (1998): 7–25; Elizabeth Theokritoff, "The Orthodox Services of Holy Week: The Jews and the New Sion," *Sobornost* 25 (2003): 25–50; Bert Groen, "Anti-Judaism in the Present-Day Byzantine Liturgy," *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 60 (2008): 369–87; Michael G. Azar, "Prophetic Matrix and Theological Paradox: Jews and Judaism in the Holy Week and Pascha Observances of the Greek Orthodox Church," *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 10 (2015): 1–27.

but rather for an ongoing serious reflection and congenial discussion on those anti-Judaic statements in hymnography, which are not and should not be part of such a sophisticated and Christ-centered tradition as is the Orthodox.²

While I find myself in complete agreement with the author's sentiments, I think it useful to extend his observations into a more elaborate argument. I will attempt to do so here, chiefly by building on the articles of Elizabeth Theokritoff and Michael Azar (mentioned in footnote 1 above) and proposing an exegetical and theological contextualization of the problematic hymnographic material.

1. "Byzantine Hymnography"

"Byzantine hymnography" as we know it today is the result of intense interaction among the St Sabbas Monastery in Palestine, the "Great Church" (Hagia Sophia) and the Stoudion 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). The hymnographic material itself, however, existed prior to its codification, scattered in loose collections.³ The Studite emphasis

- 2 Eugen Pentiu, *The Old Testament: Eastern Orthodox Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 40. Similarly, George C. Papademetriou, "Judaism and Greek Orthodoxy in Historical Perspective," *GOTR* 21 (1976): 93–113, at 102: "The negative language of the liturgical texts of the Church arouses hatred and, *in extremis*, destructive initiatives towards the Jews. No adequate justification can be advanced for retention of offensive texts; the fact is that Orthodoxy is rich in liturgical forms that can be purged, without serious loss, of language that engenders hatred."
- 3 The codification of the Triodion dates to the tenth century. Yet, "before the constitution of hymnographic anthologies, such as the Oktoechos, the Triodion, and the series of Menaia, the hymnography contained therein was spread out in loose collections of *kanones*, *stichera*, *kontakaria*, *tropologia*, and *kathismata*" (Thomas Pott, *La réforme liturgique byzantine* [Rome: Edizioni Liturgiche, 2000], 107; Robert F. Taft, *The Byzantine Rite: A Short History* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992] 75, 83). About two centuries prior to the most ancient manuscript of the Triodion (dated around 1027–1029, Pott, *Réforme liturgique*, 106, n. 42), the Studite emphasis on hymnography was in full swing; yet, as Pott notes (*Réforme liturgique*, 118), Theodore and his monks inherited the hymnographic tradition

on hymnography was inherited from St Sabbas, and can be traced back to fourth- or fifth-century Jerusalem. Indeed, within the complex theological exchange that characterizes the “tale of two cities” (Jerusalem and Constantinople) that shaped the Byzantine liturgical tradition, the monastery of St Sabbas supplied the hymnography, receiving “in exchange” the readings. The synthesis created by the monks at Stoudion—“a Palestinian horologion with its psalmody and hymns grafted onto a skeleton of litanies and their collects from the euchology of the Great Church”—was later adopted by the monastic community of Mount Athos, from where it spread to the entire Byzantine world.⁴ There is also evidence of “a Palestinian monastic influence in Southern Italy and Rome,” dating to end of the seventh or early eighth century.⁵

of St Sabbas’ monastery, after the invasion of the Persians, in 614, and the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem in 638.

- 4 The “tale of two cities” is, of course, much more complex. The influence of Jerusalem over Constantinople was due not only to the natural preeminence of the Mother Church, but also to an influx of Palestinian monks on Mt Olympus in Bythinia, following the Arab conquest of Jerusalem in 638, and the subsequent move of Theodore with his monks from Mt Olympus to the Stoudion monastery in Constantinople in 799. The final “monasticization” of the Constantinopolitan cathedral rite and the complete capitulation to Sabbaïtic liturgical usage was facilitated by the disastrous loss of the city to the crusaders in 1204, and the rising importance of monastics after the recapture of Constantinople in 1261. For more details, see Pott, *Réforme liturgique*, 99–167; Taft, “Mount Athos: A Late Chapter in the History of the Byzantine Rite,” 182–83; “A Tale of Two Cities,” 22–23, 31; “In the Bridegroom’s Absence,” 72–73; all three articles are collected, with their original pagination, in Taft, *Liturgy in Byzantium and Beyond* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Variorum, 1995). On the other hand, “around the turn of the millennium our Holy Week documentation reveals a fascinating symbiosis: as the rite of Constantinople is being monasticized via Palestine, the rite of Palestine is being further byzantinized” (Taft, “In the Bridegroom’s Absence,” 73).
- 5 André Rose, “Les fêtes de Noël à Rome et l’hymnographie orientale,” in *L’Hymnographie: Conférences Saint-Serge XLVIe semaine d’études liturgiques, Paris, 29 Juin–2 Juillet 1999* (ed. A. M. Triacca, A. Pistoia; Rome: Edizioni Liturgiche, 2000), 248; Pott, *Réforme Liturgique*, 111. The hymns have been edited and published in thirteen volumes in *Analecta hymnica graeca e codicibus eruta Italiae inferioris* (ed. I. Schiró; Rome: Istituto di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici, Università di Roma, 1966–1983). See also, specifically for the import of the *Improperia* from Syria to the West around the eighth century, Anton Baumstark, “Der Orient und die

If, as Robert Taft notes, “in Jerusalem lies the key to much of the present-day Byzantine rite,”⁶ the same holds true for hymnography. Indeed, “it was Jerusalem that produced the earliest annual cycle of chants, the earliest known true chantbook, and the first repertories organized in eight modes.”⁷ Some of the Byzantine festal hymns—more than two hundred, according to Peter Jeffery⁸—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.⁹ The Greek hymnographic material preserved in these sources is now dated to late fourth or early fifth century.¹⁰ In fact, it is generally the case that the “classic” authors of Byzantine hymnography such as Romanos the Melodist, John Damascene, and Cosmas of Maiuma, are deeply indebted to fourth-century writers like Ephrem Syrus and Gregory Nazianzen.¹¹

Gesänge der Adoratio Crucis,” *Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft* 2 (1922): 1–17, at 16.

- 6 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. I. Scicolone; Rome: Abbazia di S. Paolo, 1990), 71–97, at 72.
- 7 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.
- 8 Jeffery, “Earliest Christian Chant,” 17, n. 36.
- 9 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 CSCO, 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.”
- 10 Leeb, *Gemeindegottesdienst von Jerusalem*, 30; Baumstark, *Comparative Liturgy* (revised by B. Botte; London: Mowbrey & Co, 1958) 95; Jeffery, “Earliest Christian Chant,” 8 n.18; Charles Renoux, “Une hymnographie ancienne en géorgien,” in *L’Hymnographie: Conférences Saint-Serge XLVle semaine d’études liturgiques, Paris, 29 Juin–2 Juillet 1999* (ed. J. Clair, A. M. Triacca, & A. Pistoia; Rome: Edizioni Liturgiche, 2000), 138, 148.
- 11 Peter Karavites, “Gregory Nazianzen and Byzantine Hymnography,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 113 (1993): 81–98; William L. Petersen, “The Dependence of

If one considers the *Improperia*-type hymnography—that is, the various earlier forms of the tradition that found expression in the *Improperia* (“Reproaches”) of the Roman Holy Friday service, as well as other Byzantine compositions evincing the same theology of the Lord’s “reproaches” to Israel (e.g., Antiphon XV and the *Glory Sticheron* at the Ninth Hour of the Eve of Nativity, both quoted in full below)¹²—the roots of Christian hymnography lie even further in the past. Scholars have pointed out the extraordinary diffusion of the *Improperia* compositions in Syriac, Greek, and Latin liturgical usage; in patristic writers such as Aphrahat, Ephrem of Nisibis, Jacob of Serug, Melito of Sardis, Cyril of Jerusalem, (Ps.?)-Asterius,¹³ 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; and in New Testament Apocrypha such as the *Acts of Pilate*, the *Acts of Thomas*, and the *Gospel of Bartholomew*.¹⁴ The oldest example of *Improperia* is generally thought to be Melito’s paschal homily, dated to the third

Romanos the Melodist upon the Syriac Ephrem: Its Importance for the Origin of the Kontakion,” *Vigiliae christianae* 39 (1985): 171–87; idem, *The Diatessaron and Ephrem Syrus as Sources of Romanos the Melodist* (Louvain: Peeters, 1985); Sebastian P. Brock, “From Ephrem to Romanos,” in *Studia Patristica* 20 (ed. E. A. Livingstone; Leuven: Peeters, 1989), 139–51.

- 12 Cf. Hansjörg Auf der Maur, *Die Osterhomilien des Asterius Sophistes als Quelle für die Geschichte der Osterfeier* (Trier: Paulinus, 1967), 134, n. 380: “An sich wäre es besser, den Begriff Improperien ... für die heutigen, lateinischen Improperien, zu gebrauchen. In Ermangelung eines anderen (kurzen) Begriffes verwenden wir ihn aber doch schon für die früheren Formen dieser Tradition. Wir verstehen damit hier unter ‘Improperien-Tradition’ die Tradition aller jener mit den lateinischen Improperien verwandten Texte, die das Tadel- und Vorwurfs-Schema aufweisen ...”
- 13 The identification of the author as Asterius of Amasea has been disputed by Wolfram Kinzig, *In Search of Asterius: Studies on the Authorship of Homilies on the Psalms* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), who argues that the homilies are the work of an unknown pro-Nicene theologian in the area of Antioch.
- 14 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*, 143–51; Sebastia Janeras, *Le Vendredi-Saint dans la tradition liturgique byzantine: Structure et histoire de ses offices* (Studia Anselmiana 99; Rome: Benedictina, 1988), 264–70.

quarter of the second century.¹⁵ Consider the following passages, taken from Melito's paschal homily and from 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 ...¹⁶

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 ...¹⁷

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 ...¹⁸

The Christological proclamation follows an evidently similar pattern in Melito's rhythmic prose and in the later Byzantine hymns.

- 15 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, mein Volk?," 1, 2, 38; Janeras, *Vendredi-Saint*, 264–70.
- 16 Melito of Sardis, "On Pascha," 96 (tr. Alistair Stewart-Sykes, *Melito of Sardis: On Pascha. With the Fragments of Melito and Other Material Related to the Quartodecimans* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 2001).
- 17 Holy Friday: Antiphon 15 [*Triodion*, 587]. The English translation of the hymns is taken from *The Festal Menaion* (tr. Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware; London/Boston: Faber & Faber, 1969) and *The Lenten Triodion* (tr. Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware; London/Boston: Faber & Faber, 1977), modified only to conform to contemporary use of pronouns and verbs.
- 18 Ninth Royal Hour at the Eve of Nativity: *Glory Sticheron* [*Menaion*, 245–46].

Christ's lofty identity, suggested by recourse to biblical statements about the God of Israel, is united in a paradoxical way with the humility of the New Testament events. As the quotations suggest, festal hymns (Baptism, Palm Sunday, Nativity, Presentation, etc) are patterned creatively after the Paschal hymnography, which in turn seems indebted to archaic material.¹⁹

We find, then, in the *Improperia*-type hymns, a very ancient layer of Christian thought, whose intention is primarily testimonial and proclamatory rather than polemical. Regrettably, however, as Bert Groen—a specialist on this topic—notes, “in the official liturgical books used in several Byzantine rites today we still meet with a drastic and extensive anti-Jewish polemic that also several times degenerates into torrents of abuse.”²⁰ During the very popular services of Holy Week, for instance, the congregants chant or hear constant invectives against “the swarm of murderers,” “the gang of God-haters,” “the lawless assembly,” that “teeth-grinding, most malicious race of the Hebrews,” and so forth *ad nauseam*. It is true that these invectives find rich precedent in prophetic literature and follow the conventions of Byzantine rhetoric.²¹ *Today*, however, these invectives are deeply

19 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 the references to studies by Petersen and Brock above). And Ephrem's paschal hymns “almost immediately recall the most ancient paschal homily that we know, that of the Quartodeciman Melito of Sardis” (G. A. M. Rouwhorst, *Les hymnes pascales d'Ephrem de Nisibe* [2 vols. New York: Brill, 1989] 1:128), although one can also point to Aphrahat's *Demonstration* 6.9. Indeed, Melito's homily appears to have engendered a homiletic tradition that eventually produced the Byzantine hymnography of Holy Friday (Schütz, “Was habe ich dir getan, mein Volk?” 37).

20 Groen, “Anti-Judaism in the Present-Day Byzantine Liturgy,” 370.

21 See Theokritoff, “The Jews and the New Sion,” 25–26: “It should be said at the outset that the services, Holy Friday especially, contain some phrases that can only be described as gratuitous invective against the Jewish people ... While this style of discourse is in itself shocking to most modern Western ears, we can safely say that the Byzantine worshipper would have found it not only less exceptionable, but also less exceptional. ... Most references to the Hebrews/Jews/Israel do not, however, fall into the category of gratuitous invective; they play a significant part in elucidating the Church's understanding of the passion and resurrection as a transition from an

disturbing, especially since rhetoric of this kind has at times been part of the explosive mix that led to violence against Jews. As a matter of fact, “[t]he Easter season was the traditional time for fights between Christians and Jews, which always had the potential to turn into pogroms,” so that “traditionally the worst time for pogroms was Easter”; additionally, “[d]uring the Civil War many priests described Bolshevik Russia as a country ruled by anti-Christ and attempted to persuade their listeners that socialism was a Jewish creation.”²²

In the pages to follow I am only marginally concerned with those instances of “gratuitous vituperation,” which, in the precise words of Theokritoff, “to say the least, contribute nothing to our theological understanding,” but infuse the services with “a mood of anger and indignation ... as if, in our struggle to watch our sharing in the disciples’ struggle to remain faithful to Christ, at certain points we react like the apostle Peter, who drew his sword and cut off Malchus’ ear.”²³ I will rather focus on Byzantine hymns of the *Improperia*-type: hymns whose anti-Jewish rhetoric is disturbing but does not fall “into the category of gratuitous invective.”²⁴ Here are some examples:

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

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.²⁶

exclusive to an inclusive ‘people of God.’ If they use intemperate language, as they frequently do, this has much to do with their heavy reliance on Jeremiah in particular and the prophets in general—none of whom is noted for diplomatic circumlocutions.”

- 22 John D. Klier, “The Pogrom Paradigm in Russian history,” and Peter Kenez, “Pogroms and White Ideology of the Russian Civil War,” both in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History* (ed. John D. Klier & Shlomo Lambroza; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 13–39 and 293–313, at 33; 306.
- 23 Theokritoff, “The Jews and the New Sion,” 49; 42.
- 24 Theokritoff, “The Jews and the New Sion,” 26.
- 25 Holy Friday: Antiphon 12 [*Triodion*, 583]. The similarity with the Western *Reproaches* is evident. See Baumstark’s detailed analysis of the text in his “Der Orient und die Gesänge der Adoratio Crucis.”
- 26 Holy Friday: Antiphon 6 [*Triodion*, 577].

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

Be not deceived, O Jews: for this is He who saved you in the sea and fed
you in the wilderness.²⁸

Before discussing the need, appropriateness, or criteria for a liturgical reform, it is absolutely crucial to first attempt a theological contextualization of these hymns.

2. Theological Contextualization

Hymns of Holy Week and Other Festal Hymns

The first thing to note is that the Western *Improperia* and the Byzantine *Improperia*-type hymns carry on and popularize a venerable Christian tradition—reaching back, as I have shown, to Melito, and, as far as content is concerned, to the New Testament²⁹—and that this tradition continues and reinterprets a venerable tradition in biblical prophetic literature (e.g., Amos 2:9–12; Mic 6:1–5; cf. also Neh 9:26 for the theme of Israel killing of the prophets).³⁰ Nevertheless, the continuity between intra-Jewish polemic that characterizes and shapes the religious conceptions vying for supremacy during the Second Temple era³¹

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

28 Holy Friday: Antiphon 12 [*Triodion*, 584].

29 William R. Farmer, ed., *Anti-Judaism and the Gospels* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999); *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel* (ed. Reimund Bieringer et al.; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

30 Julien Harvey, "Le 'Rib-Pattern,' requisiatoire prophétique sur la rupture de l'alliance," *Biblica* 43 (1962) 172–96; idem, *Le Plaidoyer prophétique contre Israël après la rupture de l'alliance* (Bruges-Paris-Montreal, 1967); Robert Murray, "Some Rhetorical Patterns in Early Syriac Literature," in *A Tribute to Arthur Vööbus* (ed. R. H. Fischer; Chicago, Ill.: The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1977), 129; Michael D. Brocke, "On the Jewish Origin of the *Improperia*," *Immanuel* 7 (1977): 44–51.

31 For intra-Jewish polemics in the Dead Sea Scrolls, see Stephen Goranson, "Others and Intra-Jewish Polemic as Reflected in Qumran Texts," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment* (ed. Peter W. Flint and James C. VanderKam; 2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1998–1999) 2:534–51. For an extensive discussion of the polemics between Enoch-traditions and Moses-tradition in Second Temple Judaism, see Andrei A. Orlov, *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck,

must be problematized. Groen is correct in stating that “[t]he Jewish prophetic self-criticism ... in the *Tanakh* and the self-criticism in later Jewish tradition were used, indeed abused by Christians and directed against the entire Jewish people.”³² During the early decades of the Christian movement, the context for the vitriolic anti-Judaism found in the Hebrew Bible, in some apocalyptic writings of the Second Temple era, and in the New Testament (e.g., “brood of vipers,” “synagogue of Satan,” “enemies of God,” “sons of the devil”)—shifted gradually from harsh intra-Jewish polemics to polemics between the overwhelmingly Gentile Church and “the Jews.” The observations of a prominent scholar of early Christianity, Oskar Skarsaune, are particularly to the point:

It may be worthwhile to reflect a little on the genesis of this strongly anti-Jewish trait in early (and later) Christian hermeneutics. ... As long as this tradition is used in an inner-Jewish setting, there can be no question of anti-Jewish (far less “anti-semitic”) tendencies, but rather of extreme Jewish self-criticism. ... Something fateful happened to this tradition when it was appropriated by Gentile Christians with no basic feeling of solidarity with the Jewish people. Very soon it deteriorated into a slogan about Jews being unbelievers by nature and Christ-killers by habit.³³

2005); for the polemics between solar and calendar, Zadokite and Hasmonite priesthood, and between the emerging rabbinic movement and the priests, see Rachel Elior, *The Three Temples: On the Emergence of Jewish Mysticism* (Oxford/Portland: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2005); for a comparison between Luke’s anti-Jewish statements and the Rabbinic pronouncements against Sadducees, Samaritans, and Gentiles, see Craig Evans, “Is Luke’s View of the Rejection of Jesus Anti-Semitic?,” in *Reimagining the Death of the Lukan Jesus* (ed. D. D. Sylva; Frankfurt am Main: Anton Hain, 1990), 29–56, 174–83.

32 Groen, “Anti-Judaism in the Present-Day Byzantine Liturgy,” 380.

33 Skarsaune, “The Development of Scriptural Interpretation in the Second and Third Centuries—Except Clement and Origen,” in *Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation. I/1: Antiquity* (ed. Magne Sæbø; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 372–450, at 404. See also Skarsaune’s more elaborate discussion in *Proof from Prophecy: A Study in Justin Martyr’s Proof-Text Tradition: Text-Type, Provenance, Theological Profile* (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 278–80; 288–95; *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity*

It follows that the theological, liturgical, and pastoral considerations that are brought to bear on the hymnographic material must consider the larger context of the Church's growth from a charismatic, egalitarian, theologically innovative, and administratively schismatic group *within* first-century Judaism into the increasingly Gentile reality of the second century. Without taking into account this gradual shift in "setting," to use Skarsaune's phrase, for the Christian use of anti-Jewish rhetoric, and the simultaneous polemic against theologies which the emerging rabbinic movement deemed heretical because of their perceived belief in "two powers in heaven,"³⁴ the problematic elements of Byzantine hymnography tend to be seen in isolation from the historical and theological complex to which they belong organically. Such myopia hinders us in our quest to find the right premises for a solution to the problem of Christian anti-Judaism.

Anti-Semitic Rant or Christological Proclamation?

A second necessary observation concerns the theological content of these hymns. The very fact that the biblical "Lord's reproaches to Israel" are placed on the lips of Jesus points to the primarily Christological intention of the hymns. In the line quoted above, the point seems to be that *it is Christ* who rained manna in the desert; *it is Christ* who divided the Red Sea; *it is Christ* who smote Egypt with plagues; *it is Christ* who fed Israel in the desert—in short, *it is Christ* who is the "Lord" of the Exodus account. One could say, indeed, that the theological program of Holy Week is precisely

(Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 262–64.

34 For the early rabbinic polemic against the notion of "two powers in heaven," see Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), and Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). This category would include Philo's Logos-speculations, the exaltation of various patriarchs, especially Enoch, in Second Temple apocalyptic literature, as well as the early Christian exaltation of Jesus as Lord, with the added difficulty, that the latter also proclaimed the "second power," the Logos, to have "become flesh and lived among us" (Jn 1:14) and to be worshipped as "Lord and God" (Jn 20:28) in a cultic setting.

the bold identification of the Lord Jesus with the "Lord" (κύριος/ YHWH), He-Who-Is, the God of our fathers, the thrice-holy Lord of the seraphim (Is 6), the Glory enthroned upon the cherubim (Ezek 1; 10; Ps 18:10 / LXX 17:11), the king of Israel (Is 44:6).

The preceding observation holds true of Byzantine festal hymnography generally, and can be verified by recourse to other festal hymns (Baptism, Palm Sunday, Nativity, Presentation, etc), which are patterned creatively after the hymnography of Pascha.³⁵ For instance in the celebration of the Transfiguration the hymns bring together Christ's manifestation on Tabor with his earlier apparition to deliver the Law to Moses on Sinai,³⁶ and present Christ as "riding upon the cloud, in the midst of fire and darkness and tempest" (Ex 19:18–19; Dt 4:11; 1/3 Kgs 19:12) to deliver the Law to Moses.³⁷ What Moses once saw in darkness, he now sees, on Tabor, in the blazing light of the Transfiguration: the same glory, the same "most pure feet," the same Lord.³⁸ The hymns of the

35 The application of the pattern of Paschal hymns to other festal hymns (see Janeras, *Vendredi-Saint*, 254–56) is quite evident in the writings of the celebrated sixth-century hymnographer Romanos the Melodist. Romanos, however, is indebted to the fourth-century Ephrem Syrus (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* [New York: Brill, 1989], I:128). Indeed, Melito's homily appears to have engendered a homiletic tradition that eventually produced the Byzantine hymnography of Great Friday (Schütz, "Was habe ich dir getan, mein Volk?" 37).

36 "In the past, Christ led Israel in the wilderness with the pillar of fire and the cloud [Ex 14:19]; and today ineffably He has shone forth in light upon Mount Tabor" (First Canon of Transfiguration: Ode 3 Sticheron [*Menaion*, 484]); "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 at *Lord I have cried* [*Menaion*, 471]).

37 First Canon of Transfiguration: Ode 4 Sticheron [*Menaion*, 485].

38 "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" (Second Canon of Transfiguration, Ode 1 Sticheron [*Menaion*, 483]); "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 ..." (Great Vespers of Transfiguration, Apostichon [*Menaion*, 476]).

Presentation are also replete with the same Christological reading of the divine manifestation on Sinai,³⁹ and the same occurs in the hymns of Epiphany. The Baptist is shaken with awe, knowing that he is to baptize the Creator of Adam,⁴⁰ the God of Jacob,⁴¹ the God of Moses,⁴² the Lord who drowned the Egyptian army in the Red Sea.⁴³

- 39 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! ..." (Great Vespers of the Presentation: Sticheron at *Lord I have cried* [*Menaion*, 408]); "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 ..." (Great Vespers of the Presentation: Sticheron at the Lity [*Menaion*, 412]); "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 ..." (Presentation of the Lord: Sticheron at the Lity [*Menaion*, 413]). See also the following: "Today He who once gave the Law to Moses on Sinai submits Himself to the ordinances of the Law, in His compassion becoming for our sakes as we are ..." (Great Vespers of the Presentation: Sticheron at the Lity [*Menaion*, 412]); "Today the holy Mother, who is higher than any temple, has come into the temple, disclosing to the world the Maker of the world and Giver of the Law" (Small Vespers of the Presentation: *Glory* Sticheron [*Menaion*, 407]).
- 40 "The Maker saw the man whom He had formed with His own hand, held in the obscurity of sin, in bonds that knew no escape. Raising him up, He laid him on His shoulders [Luke 15:5], and now in abundant floods He washes him clean from the ancient shame of Adam's sinfulness" (Second Canon of Theophany: Ode 5 Sticheron [*Menaion*, 372–373]); "Thus spoke the Lord to John: 'O Prophet, come and baptize Me who created you, for I enlighten all by grace and cleanse them. Touch my divine head and do not doubt' (Eve of Theophany: Sticheron at the Sixth Royal Hour [*Menaion*, 327]).
- 41 "Today the prophecy of the psalms swiftly approaches its fulfillment: the sea looked and fled, Jordan was driven back before the face of the Lord, before the face of the God of Jacob [Ps 113/114:3–7], when He came to receive baptism from His servant" (Eve of Theophany: Sticheron at the Sixth Royal Hour [*Menaion*, 327]).
- 42 [John the Baptist speaking to Jesus]: "Moses, when he came upon You, displayed the holy reverence that he felt: perceiving that it was Your voice that spoke from the bush, he forthwith turned away his gaze [Ex 3:6]. How then shall I behold You openly? How shall I lay my hand upon You?" (First Canon of Theophany: Ode 4 Sticheron [*Menaion*, 370]); "If I baptize You, I shall have as my accusers the mountain that smoked with fire [Ex 19:8], the sea which fled on either side, and this same Jordan which turned back [Ps 113/114:5]" (First Canon of Theophany: Ode 4 Sticheron [*Menaion*, 370]).
- 43 "He who in ancient times hid the pursuing tyrant beneath the waves of the sea, now

In all these hymns one encounters the very same reading of biblical theophanies, and, by way of consequence, the same type of “YHWH Christology.” But the anti-Jewish polemic is largely absent. In my opinion, this absence demonstrates that the anti-Jewish overtones are not essential to the theological message of the hymns. I will return to the implications of this finding in the last section of my essay. Before making some remarks about the pastoral responsibilities of the clergy and making preliminary suggestions for a liturgical reform of the hymnography, however, it is important also to place the biblical exegesis discerned in the *Improperia*-type hymns within the exegetical tradition of early Christianity.

3. Exegetical Contextualization: Christian Exegesis of Biblical Theophanies

It is important to recognize that the Christological interpretation of Old Testament theophanies, which lies at the heart of the *Improperia*-type hymns, constitutes one of the most potent, enduring, and versatile “ingredients” involved in the gradual crystallization of a distinct exegesis, doctrine, liturgy, and spirituality from the earliest stages of the Jesus movement and throughout the first millennium of the common era. The New Testament often alludes to the divine Name (Ex 3:14, *egō eimi ho ōn*; Ex 6:3, *kyrios*), and proclaims Jesus Christ as “Lord” (*kyrios*)—obviously a reference to the Old Testament “Lord” (*kyrios* in the LXX) seen by the prophets. This sort of “YHWH Christology,” “Christology of Divine Identity” or “divine Christology,” has been traced back to the Gospel of Mark, the Gospel of John, the Pauline corpus, and the Catholic Epistle of Jude.⁴⁴ It was prominent in the pre-Nicene era and continued to

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

44 Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008); A.T. Hanson, *Jesus Christ in the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 1965); Walther Binni & Bernardo Gianluigi Boschi, *Cristologia primitiva: dalla teofania del*

underlie the Christology of the conciliar era. It figured significantly in catechetical manuals such as Irenaeus' *Demonstration*, and was not absent from Clement of Alexandria's *Pedagogue*. It contributed significantly to Justin Martyr's articulation of the Christian faith in opposition to contemporary Judaism,⁴⁵ and was part of the anti-dualistic arsenal deployed by Irenaeus and Tertullian. Indeed, it was the crucial argument used by Tertullian and Hippolytus against Monarchians, and later by Eusebius against Marcellus, and by Homoians against the "modalistic" theology of Photinus. The exegesis of theophanic texts (e.g., Gen 18, 28, 32; Ex 3, 19, 24, 33; Is 6; Ezek 1; Hab 3:2, LXX) was, by the end of the first millennium, inextricably linked to Christianity as performed and experienced in liturgy, irresistibly commanding the gaze of the iconographer, the ready pen of the hymnographer, and the amazing tales of the hagiographer.⁴⁶ The Christological interpretation of

Sinai all'Io sono giovanneo (Bologna: Dehoniane, 2004); David Capes, *Old Testament Yahweh Texts in Paul's Christology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992); Chris Tilling, *Paul's Divine Christology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012); Daniel Block, "Who do Commentators Say 'the Lord' is? The Scandalous Rock of Romans 10:13," in *On the Writing of New Testament Commentaries: FS Grant R. Osborne* (ed. S. E. Porter and E. J. Schnabel; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 173–92; C. Kavin Rowe, "Romans 10:13: What Is the Name of the Lord?," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 22 (2000): 135–73; 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. M. Turner and J. B. Greene; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 192–203; Jarl Fossum, "Kyrios Jesus as the Angel of the Lord in Jude 5–7," *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987): 226–43; Simon J. Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006); Christopher Barina Kaiser, *Seeing the Lord's Glory: Kyriocentric Visions and the Dilemma of Early Christology* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2014); Sean M. McDonough, *Christ as Creator: Origins of a New Testament Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

45 See Charles Gieschen, "The Divine Name in Ante-Nicene Christology," *Vigiliae christianae* 57 (2003): 115–58; Bucur, "Clement of Alexandria's Exegesis of Old Testament Theophanies," *Phronema* 29 (2014): 63–81; Idem, "Justin Martyr's Exegesis of Old Testament Theophanies and the Parting of the Ways Between Christianity and Judaism," *Theological Studies* 75 (2014): 34–51.

46 See my articles, "The Early Christian Reception History of Genesis 18: From Theophany to Trinitarian Symbolism," *J ECS* 23 (2015): 245–72; "I Saw the Lord: Observations on the Early Christian Reception of Isaiah 6," *Pro Ecclesia* 23 (2014):

theophanies also underlies the Byzantine theology of icons⁴⁷ and finds its visual counterpart in numerous Byzantine icons and manuscript illuminations. An alternative view—that theophanies were created manifestations of the divine nature—was advocated by Augustine of Hippo and gradually adopted as normative in Western Christianity.⁴⁸ But in fourteenth-century Byzantium, it was yet again the exegesis of biblical theophanies in terms of “YHWH Christology” that provided the exegetical infrastructure for the Hesychastic controversy.⁴⁹

I would argue, then, that the exegesis of biblical theophanies, displayed so prominently in Byzantine festal hymns, is not simply one strand of tradition among others, but the very heart of Christian tradition. In the words of Alexander Golitzin,

Theophany permeates Orthodox Tradition throughout, informing its dogmatic theology and its liturgy. That Jesus, Mary's son, is the very One who appeared to Moses and the prophets—this is the consistent witness of the ante-Nicene Fathers, and remains foundational throughout the fourth century Trinitarian controversies and the later Christological disputes.⁵⁰

309–30; “Vision, Exegesis, and Theology in the Reception History of Hab 3:2 (LXX), in *“What Does the Scripture Say?”: Studies in the Function of Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity*. Volume 2: *The Letters and Liturgical Traditions* (ed. Craig A. Evans and H. Daniel Zacharias; London and New York: T & T Clark International, 2011), 134–46; “Exegesis of Biblical Theophanies in Byzantine Hymnography: Rewritten Bible?,” *TS* 68 (2007): 81–112.

47 Ambrosias Giakalis, *Images of the Divine: The Theology of Icons at the Seventh Ecumenical Council* (rev. ed.; Leiden: Brill, 2005) 59 and n. 23.

48 Basil Studer, *Zur Theophanie-Exegese Augustins: Untersuchung zu einem mbrosius-Zitat in der Schrift ‘De videndo Deo’* (Rome: Herder, 1971); Michel René Barnes, “Exegesis and Polemic in Augustine’s *De Trinitate* I,” *Augustinian Studies* 30 (1999): 43–60; Bucur, “Theophanies and Vision of God in Augustine’s *De Trinitate*: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective,” *SVTQ* 52 (2008): 67–93.

49 See John S. Romanides, “Notes on the Palamite Controversy and Related Topics,” *GOTR* 6 (1960–1961): 186–205; 9 (1963–1964): 225–70; Bucur, “Dionysius East and West: Unities, Differentiations, and the Exegesis of Biblical Theophanies,” *Dionysius* 26 (2008): 115–38.

50 Alexander Golitzin, “Theophaneia: Forum on the Jewish Roots of Orthodox Spirituality,” in *The Theophaneia School: Jewish Roots of Eastern Christian Mysticism* (Saint Petersburg: Byzantinorossica, 2007), xvii–xx, at xviii.

It is clear that serious attention needs to be given to the exegetical underpinning of the Byzantine *Improperia*-type hymns. We have here no less than the earliest Christology of the Church—Κύριος Ἰησοῦς, “Jesus is Lord” (1 Cor 12:3; Rom 10:9; Phil 2:11)—wrapped in the beauty of poetry, and consumed liturgically. Evidently, the very privileged place that hymnography has in Church ensures it a circulation and reception unrivalled by that of any patristic writings.

In Place of Conclusions: Some Pastoral and Liturgical Considerations

The heavy anti-Jewish rhetoric in some Byzantine hymns raises serious ethical and pastoral problems today. Most other Christian denominations have sought to address these concerns by way of liturgical reform. Since the 1980s, the Reproaches are optional in U.S. Catholic parishes, and are usually replaced by other texts, such as Ps 22. Some Byzantine-rite Catholic communities have tacitly replaced “Jews” and “Hebrews” with “evil men,” “sinners,” etc.⁵¹ A revised version used by Missouri Synod Lutherans replaces all reference to Exodus with verses such as “I have raised you up out of the prison house of sin and death,” “I have redeemed you from the house of bondage,” “I have conquered all your foes,” “I have fed you with my Word and refreshed you with living water.”⁵² A Methodist hymnal recommends adding several new verses (e.g., “I grafted you into the tree of my chosen Israel, and you turned on them with persecution and mass murder. I made you joint heirs with them of my covenants, but you made them scapegoats for your own guilt”) and suggests the creation of a contemporary version, using other examples of human abuse of God’s gifts.⁵³

Rewriting or eliminating the problematic phraseology of some hymns can itself be deeply problematic if not done in consultation

51 As noted by Groen (“Anti-Judaism in the Present-Day Byzantine Liturgy,” 386), who points to the Dutch *Byzantijns Liturgikon* (Tilburg and Zagreb: Sint Johannes Van Damascus-kapel, 1991), 419–540.

52 *Lutheran Worship Agenda* (St Louis, MO: Concordia, 1984).

53 *The New Handbook of the Christian Year: Based on the Revised Common Lectionary* (ed. Hoyt L. Hickman; Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), 188–90.

with the ecclesial body in such a way that it not only deals with the offending verses but also confronts the underlying problem of anti-Jewish animus. I would think it preferable to engage in a theologically sound and pastorally responsible Church-wide discussion of the Orthodox Christian engagement with the Judaism of the Synagogue, and, more generally, with those blood-relatives of the Lord who are our contemporaries. It is unconscionable today and unnecessary to continue singing that by Christ's lifting up on the Cross "the Hebrew race (γένος Εβραίων) was destroyed."⁵⁴ Whatever we can say about the theological intention of this line,⁵⁵ pastoral sensitivity to the sufferings inflicted, not long ago, upon millions of people simply for belonging to the "Hebrew race" by dictatorial states whose inhabitants claimed allegiance to the Christian faith, should guide the way in which the Church proclaims its doxological theology. By the same token, we must have the necessary sensitivity for Orthodox Christians whose relationship with Judaism is shaped by the experience of being marginalized and oppressed within the State of Israel. Azar articulates this point very well:

One ought not decontextualize the conversation related to possible emendation of these texts. To abstract any conversation related to Orthodox Christian-Jewish relations denies,

54 Great Friday Matins, Sticheron at the Praises (*Triodion*, 597).

55 See Theokritoff, "The Jews and the New Zion," 39: "... [I]n what sense has 'the nation of the Hebrews perished'? ... The reference in John 12 to Christ being 'lifted up' takes up an earlier use of the same phrase: the Son of Man must be lifted up 'so that whoever believes in him should not perish but may have eternal life' (Jn 3:14-15). The nation of the Hebrews as a unit has not believed, and has accordingly 'perished' (lest this should 'sound' like an irrevocable fate, it should be borne in mind that the same verb is used of the 'lost' sheep). ... it is hardly coincidental that the latter passage quoted above follows on from Jesus' explanation to Nicodemus that 'unless one is born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God' (Jn 3:6). Given this criterion for entering the kingdom—faith and baptism—there is clearly no place for the 'nation of the Hebrews'—or the nation of the gentiles—as a discrete entity." Her conclusion is that "the treatment of the people of Israel in the services is for the most part theologically coherent and true to the message of the prophets, and the apostle, on whom the texts draw ... the emphasis on the falling away of a greater part of the people of Israel serves to highlight the crucial moment when the gentiles can be 'grafted in' to the root stock of God's people" (49).

for example, the considerably different contexts in which Orthodox Christians of Russia or the West and Orthodox Christians of Palestinian communities find themselves. The Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, as one important example, has diverse, complicated, and often tense relationships with the State of Israel, other Orthodox Churches (which are independent of each other) and, most importantly, the Christian faithful in its care that each offers a unique dimension to the need for the betterment of Christian-Jewish relations. The call to amend these liturgical texts in countries where Christians experience little or no tension or hardship in the name of Judaism or a Jewish State is a call that must be articulated carefully and sensitively when transferred to those areas where Christians indeed experience such things.⁵⁶

If the foregoing considerations are not complex enough, consider the delicate pastoral setting of some parishes in the Antiochian Archdiocese, where new immigrants from Syria and Palestine—people who equate the modern state of Israel with military occupation, police harassment, injustice, and humiliation—worship side by side with Evangelical converts to Orthodoxy who have retained their strong pro-Israeli convictions.

At any rate, there is much to rediscover from the mind of the Church, starting perhaps with Saint Paul's admonition to the Gentile Christians—those grafted onto the olive tree of Israel: "do not boast ... it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you" (Rom 11:18). On this point I find the following statement by a learned Orthodox bishop helpful in charting our course forward:

In Jesus of Nazareth, Mary's son and eternal Son and Word of the Father, Israel has in a sense itself been crucified, raised, and changed, such as to become the "first-fruits" of the new creation (1 Cor 15:20), the "new" or "heavenly Adam" (cf. 1 Cor 15:45 ff.; Rom 5:12 ff.), the beginning of the world to come (Col 1:18). Yet, at least in Orthodox tradition, it would

56 Azar, "Prophetic Matrix and Theological Paradox," 26.

be most wrong to emphasize this change, these altered circumstances, as denoting rupture pure and simple with the Israel of the patriarchs, kings, and prophets. True, far and away the majority of Israel did not accept the change, and they carry on to the present apart from the Church, but I would maintain that that separation was and is not so much *between* Church and Israel, as between two separate and discrete entities, as it is a schism *within* Israel, a schism which, if we are to believe the Apostle, God—and only God!—will heal at the end of days (see Romans 9–11). Christian and Jewish polemics, both in the early centuries of the Church and in more recent times, may have often obscured this fundamental linkage and kinship, but they could not erase it. It is built into the earliest documents of Christianity and reflected continuously thereafter in Orthodox literature and liturgy. Thus for St Paul, as I read him, the discussion at issue in epistles such as Galatians and, especially, Romans centers not on the rejection of Israel, but rather, through the Messiah, on the expansion of Israel's boundaries to include the nations.⁵⁷

If and when liturgical corrections are to be applied, the Orthodox would do well to avoid some of the well-meaning but—in my view—theologically inept solutions adopted by their separated brethren. More specifically, it is of the utmost importance to avoid replacing concrete references to God's presence in the Old Testament (Passover, the Law at Sinai, the manna, the water from the rock) because this would dilute the Christological proclamation of the hymns—namely that Christ himself is the *kyrios* in the Exodus narrative.⁵⁸ Rather than excise this most ancient and effective

57 Golitzin, "Scriptural Images of the Church: An Eastern Orthodox Reflection," in *One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic: Ecumenical Reflections on the Church* (ed. Tamara Grdzeldze; Geneva: WCC Publications, 2005), 255–66, at 255–56.

58 Cf. Azar, "Prophetic Matrix and Theological Paradox," 24: "To completely dehistoricize the texts in such a way that Jews become entirely uninvolved in Christ's ultimate demise would lose what is a tremendously essential element of the hymns: that the Creator and Redeemer from the Books of Moses is rejected by the same people whom he created and redeemed. To completely dehistoricize would lose the stark juxtaposition, the marvel of paradox, that so underscores the way Orthodoxy

Christology by way of liturgical reform, it is imperative to emphasize that, far from warranting any sort of anti-Judaism, the prophetic reproaches against ancient Israel are actualized liturgically so as to address *Christians*, by calling them to recognize just Who it is that is facing them, so that they can commit themselves, “again and again,” to Christ as the “Lord,” the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the king of Israel. Once their Christological core is recognized as such, it is much easier to discern the essential ethical implications of the hymns.⁵⁹

I have shown above that the core Christological interpretation of Old Testament theophanies is present in hymns in which anti-Jewish rhetoric is absent, and that the anti-Jewish overtones are therefore not essential to the theological message of the hymns. Liturgical reform might proceed in accordance with the criterion of maintaining this theological message (that Christ is the Lord of the patriarchs and prophets, the Lawgiver on Sinai, the enthroned Glory) while excising the anti-Jewish “flourishes.”⁶⁰ In some cases, it might be helpful to switch to the passive voice; in others, to deliberately change the addressee from “Jews” to “believers” or “brothers,” *without, however, changing the Old Testament reference*. For instance, “Today the Jews nailed to the Cross the Lord who divided the sea ... they pierced with a lance the side of Him who for their sake smote Egypt with plagues ...” can become “Today is nailed to the Cross ... the Lord who divided the sea ... Today is nailed to the

understands the mystery of the God-Man who was voluntarily crucified on a tree that he created.”

59 By “ethical implications” I have in mind the approach suggested by Kallistos Ware (“The Meaning of the Great Fast,” in *Triodion*, 60): “If we deplore the actions of Judas, we do so not with vindictive self-righteousness but conscious always of our own guilt ... In general, all the passages in the Triodion that seem to be directed against the Jews should be understood in the same way. When the Triodion denounces those who rejected Christ and delivered Him to death, we recognize that these words apply not only to others, but to ourselves: for have we not betrayed the Saviour many times in our hearts and crucified Him afresh?”

60 Cf. Azar, “Prophetic Matrix and Theological Paradox,” 26: “Such appearances of psogos rhetoric one can do without, while nonetheless hopefully preserving the marvel of the paradox of Christ’s divine *sunkatabasis*.”

Cross the Lord who divided the sea ... Today is pierced with a lance the side of Him who for their sake smote Egypt with plagues ...” Or, similarly, “Do not be deceived, Jews: for this is He who saved you in the sea and fed you in the wilderness” could be changed to “Let us open well our hearts, O brethren: for this is He who saved Israel in the sea and fed then in the wilderness.” And what would be lost if, rather than chanting “when You were lifted up today, the Hebrew nation was destroyed,” the Church would instead focus on the fact that the Crucified One opens access to God for all, and that it is only the Crucified One who can lift up to heaven those who are being saved as they chant to the Savior? As for the many theologically vacuous incidents of “gratuitous vituperation,” let us recall Pentiuć’s apt phrase, quoted above: “The poetry of Eastern Orthodox hymns is too sublime to be marred by such low sentiments.”

In itself, the amendment of Orthodox liturgical texts and observances is neither wrong nor unprecedented. Azar invites us to consider a very relevant example, namely “the contemporary practice of no longer proclaiming the Synodikon of Orthodoxy with the more original censures against ‘the Greeks,’” suggesting that “[t]o choose to remove negative references against Jews is not far from this ...”⁶¹

I believe the time has come for the Orthodox Church to exorcize the anti-Jewish animus lurking at the door, intent on defiling our worship and devouring our souls (Gen 4:7). I also believe that we must be careful in handling the treasures we have inherited; and be especially mindful of the Christological proclamation of the hymns that articulate the traditional exegesis of Old Testament theophanies. It is my hope that this essay will have made a small contribution to finding the right path forward.

61 Azar, “Prophetic Matrix,” 22–23.