

# OLD TESTAMENT SAINTS AND ANTI-JUDAISM IN THE CURRENT BYZANTINE LITURGY

BERT GROEN

## 1. Introduction

'Paradox' and 'Antithesis' are two Greek words.<sup>1</sup> They are relevant to the attitude towards Judaism and the Old Testament within Byzantine rite. On the one hand, Old Testament saints, righteous Jews from the Tenach, have a prominent place in Byzantine liturgy. On the other, we meet with strong anti-Jewish thought in several hymns, in particular those of Holy Week. Although Easter is the 'Feast of Feasts', the festival of the Resurrection of Christ that brings salvation and forgiveness to all people believing in this mystery, it looks as if *one* people, the Jews, will never share in the joy of the salvation of mankind, according to various texts of Byzantine liturgy.

My aims are: firstly, to examine the position of Old Testament Jewish saints in current Byzantine liturgy; secondly, to explore anti-Jewish polemics in Byzantine hymnography; thirdly, to discuss the urgent question of whether reform of anti-Jewish texts is desirable and whether this seems possible in the near future.

## 2. Old Testament saints

In contrast with current Roman rite, in which Old Testament saints are hardly commemorated, Byzantine liturgy numbers many Old Testament saints, as do other Oriental liturgies, such as those of the Syrian and Ethiopian Orthodox Churches.<sup>2</sup> Illustrative of the marginal position of these saints in Roman rite is the fact that in several Catholic dictionaries on saints, Old Testament saints are not even mentioned.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The author wishes to thank Ania Lentz-Michaelis for her help in revising this text.

<sup>2</sup> P. WIERTZ & M. PETZOLT: Zur religiösen Volkskultur der orientalischen und orthodoxen Kirchen, in W. NYSSSEN, H.J. SCHULZ & P. WIERTZ: *Handbuch der Ostkirchenkunde* III (Düsseldorf 1997) 70-133, p. 79-94.

<sup>3</sup> A. JONES: *The Wordsworth dictionary of saints* (Ware, Hertfordshire 1994); E. BIEGER & H. ZIMMERMANN: *Heilige und ihre Feste. Entstehung, Bedeutung, Brauchtum* (Kevelaer 2004 = Topos plus Taschenbüchlein 514).

Reasons for the significant place of Old Testament saints in Byzantine rite are mainly geographical and cultural: the Eastern part of the Roman Empire was closer to Jewish land and there were more Jewish settlements in the Eastern part than in the West. In the East, Old Testament saints were, in a sense, local figures.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout the current Greek Orthodox liturgical year (1 September to 31 August), we come across some thirty important festivals of Old Testament saints, who are sung and praised in numerous hymns.<sup>5</sup> One of the most popular is the Prophet Elijah, whose festival in Greece on 20 July causes most bakeries to be closed, because he is the patron saint of bakers. Weather, fertility and protection against fire are also within his competence – think of the flour miracle, the feeding of Elijah by the Angel, the rain miracle, the events at Mount Carmel with the Baal prophets and other fire events; 1 Kings 17 and 18; 19: 4-8; 2 Kings 1: 9-15; 2: 11 respectively. Because of his ascent into heaven, many chapels on top of Greek hills and mountains are dedicated to Elijah. In Byzantine art, he is often depicted, not only on his *vita*-icons, in particular his ascension, but also on the icon of the Festival of the Transfiguration<sup>6</sup> – together with Moses and Jesus – and in the series of prophets on the iconostasis.<sup>7</sup> It may sound strange to non-Orthodox and, in particular, Jewish ears, but for many Greeks, Elijah is a great Eastern Orthodox, Christian saint.

In addition, we meet with saints like the aforementioned Prophet Moses. In Byzantine rite, his annual liturgical commemoration takes place on 4 September. According to the Tenach, Moses saw God (Ex 24: 9-11; 33: 11. Cf. Ex 3; 20: 21; 24: 18; 33: 14-23; 34). Therefore, the Greek hymnographers call Moses the 'God-seer' (*theoptês*). Sometimes,

<sup>4</sup> Cf. K. DONOVAN: The Sanctoral, in C. JONES, G. WAINWRIGHT, E. YARNOLD & P. BRADSHAW: *The study of liturgy* (London / New York 1992<sup>3</sup>) 472-484: p. 479: "(...) in the East, (...) they (= Old Testament saints; BG) were in some sense local figures (...)".

<sup>5</sup> *Mikron Euchologion è Hagiasmatarion* (Athens 1999<sup>14</sup>) 477-507. Numerous others and the dates of their liturgical (minor) commemoration are named in the so-called 'All Saints List' (*Panagion*): *Mikron Euchologion* 509-544. The hymns themselves can be found in the twelve Month Books (*Mènaia*).

<sup>6</sup> This festival falls on 6 August and is one of the so called 'Twelve Festivals', main festivals during the Orthodox liturgical year.

<sup>7</sup> E. VOORDECKERS: Élie dans l'art byzantin, in G. WILLEMS (ed.): *Élie le Prophète. Bible, tradition, iconographie. Colloque des 10 et 11 novembre 1995, Bruxelles* (Leuven s.a. = Publications de l'Institutum Iudaicum) 155-196.

however, when in Byzantine rite the old and new covenants are opposed, Moses is denied this quality. On the Festival of the Presentation of the Lord on 2 February for instance, it is said that Moses saw only God's back, but Simeon, who held Jesus in his hands, really saw and received Him.<sup>8</sup>

A special place is held by those to whom the authorship of the Books of the Prophets is attributed.<sup>9</sup> Their festival days throughout the liturgical year are: Jonah: 21 September; Baruch: 28 September; Hosea: 17 October; Joel: 19 October; Obadiah: 19 November; Nahum: 1 December; Habakkuk: 2 December; Zephaniah: 3 December; Haggai: 16 December; Daniel: 17 December; Malachi: 3 January; Zechariah: 8 February; Jeremiah: 1 May; Isaiah: 9 May; Amos: 15 June; Ezekiel: 23 July; Micah: 14 August. Jeremiah has another festival on 4 November, when his Lamentations concerning the fall of Jerusalem are commemorated.

Other important memorial days of Old Testament saints are those of Joshua (in Greek his name is identical with Jesus' name and therefore his origin is added, viz. *Iêsous ho Nauês*): 1 September; Abraham: 9 October; the Three Youths in the Furnace: 17 December; Job: 6 May; Elisha: 14 June; the Seven Maccabean Martyrs, their mother and their teacher:<sup>10</sup> 1 August; Samuel: 20 August. Sometimes the epithet 'the Righteous' is added to their names (for instance: *Abraam ho dikaios*). The liturgical commemoration of any saint, consequently also of the Old Testament protagonists, involves their names being mentioned during the *prothesis* of the Divine Liturgy and the Dismissal. Furthermore, they are usually praised in the *apolytikion*, the most important troparion of the day.

All Old Testament saints are collectively commemorated on the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers of Christ, i.e. the last Sunday but one before Christmas.<sup>11</sup> One week later, on the Sunday before the Birth of Christ,

<sup>8</sup> B. GROEN: The Festival of the Presentation of the Lord, in P. POST, G. ROUWHORST, L. VAN TONGEREN & A. SCHEER (eds.): *Christian feast and festival. The dynamics of western liturgy and culture* (Leuven 2001 = Liturgia Condenda 12) 345-381, p. 358.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. D. RIZOS: *Hagiologia* (Thessalonica 1983) 118-120, 133-137; D. TSAMËS: *Hagiologia tês Orthodoxês Ekklesiâs* (Thessalonica 1999) 56.

<sup>10</sup> See 2 Macc 6-7. According to Byzantine tradition, the names of the seven brothers and their mother, not mentioned in the Bible, are: Abeim, Antônios, Gourias, Eleazar, Eusebônas, Acheim, Markellos and Salomonê. The scribe Eleazar, whose martyrdom is described in 2 Macc 6: 18-31, is considered as their teacher.

<sup>11</sup> *Mênaion tou Dekembriou* (Athens 1980<sup>4</sup>) 76-82.

all those who have pleased God – ‘from Adam to Joseph, the betrothed of the holy Mother of God’ – are commemorated.<sup>12</sup> On this day, a special place is held by the Prophets and Prophetesses. In particular, on both Sundays, the Prophet Daniel and the Three Youths in the Furnace are extolled, not only because their festivals are celebrated in the same period, but also because of their importance in the Matins canons. Of course, the Old Testament saints are also celebrated on All Saints Day, which in Orthodoxy falls on the first Sunday after Pentecost and concludes the paschal cycle of moveable feasts.

St John the Baptist serves as a bridge between the Old and New Testament.<sup>13</sup> He is not only the precursor of Jesus Christ but also the leader with respect to the number of festivals devoted to any saint (except for Mary, of course): he has six annual festivals. One day after Epiphany, on 7 January, the main festival in his honour, the Synaxis, is celebrated. It is interesting to note that most Greek boys named Yannis celebrate their name day on this day – they are apparently not named after St John the Evangelist but after the Baptist. He is regarded a great ascetic, even as the ‘first monk’, an ‘angelic’ man, who had reached a state of total self-renunciation; he is often depicted with angel’s wings.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, many Orthodox monasteries are named after him. Furthermore, the Baptist’s conception and birth are commemorated on 23 September and 24 June respectively. It is obvious that, by choosing these dates, church leaders also wanted to Christianize important seasonal transitions. On 29 August, a day of fasting, the beheading of the Baptist is commemorated. Minor festivals are 24 February, when the first and second, and 25 May, when the third finding of his head are on the liturgical agenda, and 23 July, when a Synaxis *en tois Olympou* takes place. Moreover, every Tuesday, St John is commemorated in hymnology. In the *deësis* on the iconostasis, he is depicted to the left of Christ (with Mary on the right of her son). Furthermore, together with David, Solomon and other prophets, John is usually part of the icon of the Descent into Hell

<sup>12</sup> *Mēnaion tou Dekembriou* 120-133.

<sup>13</sup> G. KOUGIOUMTZOGLOU: *Latreutiko excheiridio. Stoicheia agogēs gia tēn taxē kai tē latreia tēs ekklēsiās* (Thessalonica 1998) 339-340; RIZOS: *Hagiologia* 137-143; TSAMÉS: *Hagiologia* 101. See also the spiritual work from the noted Russian Orthodox theologian, S. BULGAKOV: *The friend of the bridegroom. On the Orthodox veneration of the Forerunner* (Grand Rapids MI 2003); the Russian original appeared in 1927.

<sup>14</sup> H. PRÓTOPAPADAKĒ-PAPAKŌNSTANTINOY: *Idannēs ho Baptistēs. Keimena-Eikones* (Athens 1993).

(*Anastasis*), where Christ draws Adam and Eve from their tombs. The Forerunner can also be seen on the icon of the Second Coming of Christ, together with various groups of righteous Old Testament saints. During the *proskomidē* a special part of the liturgical bread is cut off in his honour, indeed in honour of the 'holy, illustrious prophets' in general and also, in particular, of Moses and Aaron, Elijah, Elisha, David and Jesse, Daniel and the Three Youths.<sup>15</sup> In the anaphora, both in that of St John Chrysostom and in that of St Basil, after the words of institution, the Baptist is once more commemorated. In the former anaphora, the 'Forefathers, Fathers, Patriarchs, Prophets ...' are also commemorated.<sup>16</sup> The more poetical and theologically more profound anaphora of St Basil also contains this commemoration and, at the same time, describes how God sent prophets and saints before the coming of Christ.<sup>17</sup> In the prayer after the Great Entrance in St. Basil's liturgy, the priest requests God to accept the liturgy, just as He once accepted the gifts etcetera from Abel, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Aaron and Samuel.<sup>18</sup> In addition, the dismissal prayer of Vespers, Matins and the three liturgies – not only the two just mentioned but also that of the Presanctified Gifts – mentions the intercessions made by the Baptist and the 'ancestors of God' (*theopatores*), Joachim and Anna.<sup>19</sup> The latter also have their own yearly festival: 9 September, one day after the festival of the Birth of the Mother of God. Anna's Dormition on 25 July is a major annual event, also on account of the fact that many Greek women are called after her and therefore celebrate their name day. It is interesting to note that several other Old Testament representatives within the New Testament also have their own festivals. These contemporaries of Jesus include Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, who is commemorated on 5 September; Simeon and Anna, protagonists of the Festival of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple on 2 February, who are commemorated on 3 February; Photeine, the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) on 26 February; Mary and Martha, Lazarus' sisters, on 4 June; and others.

<sup>15</sup> *Hieratikon* (Athens 1962) 66.

<sup>16</sup> *Hieratikon* 96. Cf. G. LARENTZAKIS: *Die Orthodoxe Kirche. Ihr Leben und ihr Glaube* (Graz / Vienna / Cologne 2000) 99, who points out that here borders between the Old and the New Testament saints do not exist.

<sup>17</sup> *Hieratikon* 132, 135.

<sup>18</sup> *Hieratikon* 128.

<sup>19</sup> *Hieratikon* 27 (cf. 24), 53 (cf. 46-47), 110, 146, 172-173. Joachim and Anna are also named during the ritual preparation of the liturgical bread, p. 67.

It is not surprising that in services other than the Eucharist we also meet with Old Testament saints. In the popular 'Thrice-Holy for the dead' (*nekrôsimon trisagion*), sung at the third and ninth day after death, for example, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Christ's friend, Lazarus, are named and Christ is asked that the dead rest in Abraham's bosom.<sup>20</sup>

Regrettably, female Old Testament saints are lacking. Where are the festivals of St Sarah, St Rebecca, St Judith, St Esther, and so on? The female protagonists of the Old Testament also only play a marginal role on the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers and the Sunday before the Birth of Christ. Most persons named in these services belong to the male sex, women only being mentioned in several troparia at the end of the services.<sup>21</sup> In the Synaxarion of the Sunday before the Birth of Christ, the names of Adam and Eve, the 'first creatures' (*prôtoplastoi*), occur initially, then numerous names of patriarchs, kings, prophets, and so on follow, and at the end fourteen women are named, but most of them in relation to an important man: Sarah ('Abraham's wife'), Rebecca ('Isaac's wife'), Lea ('Jacob's first wife'), Rachel ('Jacob's second wife'), Aseneth ('wife of the very good Joseph'), Miriam ('Moses' sister'), Deborah ('who judged Israel'), Ruth, Zarephath ('to whom Elijah was sent') – the hymnographer obviously confused the name of the place with the anonymous widow (1 Kings 17: 8-24) –, the Shunammite woman ('who offered hospitality to Elisha'), Judith ('who killed Holofernes'), Esther ('who saved Israel from death'), Hannah ('the mother of Samuel, the Prophet') and Susanna. All these fourteen women are entitled 'the Righteous' (*hê dikaia*).<sup>22</sup> In the Orthodox wedding-service prayers, it is true, not only Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but also Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel, as well as other famous couples from the era before Christ,<sup>23</sup> are named.<sup>24</sup> However, the Jewish matriarchs could never attain the posi-

<sup>20</sup> Dismissal prayer. See *Hieratikon* 204 and *Mikron Euchologion* 279.

<sup>21</sup> The first troparion of the ninth ode of the canon of the Holy Forefathers mentions Hannah, Judith, Deborah, Olda, Jael, Esther, Sarah, Miriam (of Moses!), Rachel, Rebecca and Ruth. The third stichiron of the Holy Fathers at the end of the matins for the Sunday before the Birth of Christ mentions Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Hannah and Miriam. See *Mênaion tou Dekembriou* 81, 133.

<sup>22</sup> *Mênaion tou Dekembriou* 127-130.

<sup>23</sup> In particular, Joseph and Aseneth, Moses and Zipporah, Joachim and Anna, Zechariah and Elisabeth.

<sup>24</sup> *Mikron Euchologion* 114-120 (engagement service): 117-119; 121-139 (wedding service): 124-128, 137.

tion held by their male counterparts. Just as in many other Christian traditions, also in the Greek Orthodox Church androcentrism prevailed and women were (and often still are) regarded as second-class Christians. Because of their so-called 'weak' character, they were subordinated and silenced.<sup>25</sup> The Old Testament female saints met with the same fate. Consequently, it is not unusual for Orthodox monks to have names such as Father Abraham, Father Moses, Father David, Father Isaiah, Father Habakkuk and so on, but it is not common for Orthodox nuns to be called Mother Sarah, Mother Rachel, Mother Esther, etcetera.

During the pre-paschal period, viz. the forefast, Great Lent and Holy Week, to which I shall now limit myself, several Old Testament personages are used as images of fasting. According to some hymns, Adam and Eve did not fast – on the contrary, they sinned by eating from the forbidden tree and were consequently punished. Moses fasted as a precondition for seeing God and receiving His commandments and, at the same time, as a means of reconciliation between God and His people. Elijah fasted, as did Daniel and the Three Youths in the Furnace. The people of Israel's forty years' sojourn in the desert and the ascetic patterns of behaviour of Noah, Enoch, Samson and Samuel, Joshua, Joseph, David, Elisha, Isaiah, Jonah and the inhabitants of Nineveh also serve as models of Christian Lent fasting and asceticism.<sup>26</sup>

In former times, on the first Sunday of Lent, the prophets Moses, Aaron, Samuel 'and the others' (*kai tôn loipôn*) were commemorated. However, in 843, this Sunday was also dedicated to 'Orthodoxy', actually to the victory over Iconoclasm. This festival was a great success: it was popular, not only because it was new and concluded a long period of religious battle and confrontation, but also because of the procession with icons and the reading of the Synodicon. Unfortunately, the commemoration of the Prophets from the 'old age' has gradually declined. In present-day liturgy, only some of the troparia concerned remain.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> E. CATAFYGIOTU TOPPING: *Holy mothers of Orthodoxy. Women and the Church* (Minneapolis 1987) 1-11.

<sup>26</sup> I. FOUNTOULÈS: *Tupologia tês Megalês Tessarakostês*, in I. FOUNTOULÈS: *Leitourgika Themata B'* (Thessalonica 1977) 23-38, p. 28-35.

<sup>27</sup> I. FOUNTOULÈS: *Hoi hododeiktres tês Megalês Tessarakostês*, in I. FOUNTOULÈS: *Leitourgika themata B'* 53-70, p. 64-66.

During Holy Week itself, several Old Testament saints are also the focus of attention.<sup>28</sup> Here, I only mention the 'very good' Joseph (*Iōsef ho pagkalos*), commemorated on Holy Monday. Because of the envy of his brothers, who threw him into the pit and sold him, and because of his prudence, asceticism – he successfully struggled against sexual seduction by Potiphar's wife – and because of other virtues, he is seen as a prefiguration of Christ.

Nevertheless, one should also critically remark that these Old Testament saints are hardly perceived as Jews, but are especially significant because they fit well into the Christian typological design: like the Jewish Passover itself, they are 'types' (*tupoi*), 'shadows' (*skiai*), 'enigmas' (*ainigmata*) of the real truth, namely Jesus Christ and His salutary death and resurrection. They belong to the 'Law' (*nomos*), incomplete and faulty without its fulfilment and realisation in the Christian era. They are members of the 'old people of God', whereas the Christians are the 'new Israel' and the 'new people of God'.<sup>29</sup> The Prophets proclaimed the Word of the Lord to the people of Israel, inspired them, called them to repentance and so on, but, in the Christian tradition, their primary significance is that they prophesied the coming of Christ and His Mother. In addition, the main reason that John the Baptist is such an important saint is that he refers directly to Christ and is the mediator between the Old and the New Testament. During Jesus' baptism he witnessed the revelation of the Holy Trinity: the Son whom he baptized, the Spirit that descended and the Father who spoke.

This does not imply that the Old Testament saints have fully lost their worth in the Christian era, but they refer to another, greater reality. They may still serve as pedagogical examples, but the true Pedagogue is Jesus Christ himself.

### 3. Survey of anti-Jewish polemics

The prominent place held by these Jewish saints contrasts sharply with various statements on Jews in Byzantine hymnography. My exploration

<sup>28</sup> Cf. I. FOUNTOULÉS: Pascha Kuriou, in I. FOUNTOULÉS: *Leitourgika themata D'* (Thessalonica 1979) 91-110, p. 104-105.

<sup>29</sup> Good examples of such typological thought can be found in several articles of the Greek Orthodox liturgiologist, Ioannes Fountoules. See e.g. FOUNTOULÉS: *Tupologia* 35-37 and FOUNTOULÉS: Pascha Kuriou 93-97, 100, 106.

of the liturgical texts will concentrate upon Greek pre-paschal liturgical hymns, viz. the hymns of Lazarus Saturday (the day before Palm Sunday), when the raising of Lazarus is commemorated, and the hymns of Palm Sunday and Holy Week.<sup>30</sup> As throughout the history of Western Christian liturgy, the 'apogee' of anti-Jewish thought is found in the Holy Week celebrations, because of the alleged Jewish 'guilt' of the death of Jesus Christ.

The first main theme in the hymns concerned is the murder of God (*theoktonia*). This theme is heard on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday in particular. In several hymns of the popular Maundy Thursday 'Service of the Holy Passion', in which the vast majority of the Greek population takes part, the Jews are called "the swarm of murderers of God and the lawless people",<sup>31</sup> "the Synagogue of evil-committing God-murderers",<sup>32</sup> an "impious and criminal people".<sup>33</sup> In particular in the hymns of the popular *Epitafios* service on Good Friday – during this service, Christ is buried, as it were, but at the same time the paradox of the powerful God who conquers death by His own death is sung – hard statements about the Jews are again found: "Arrogant Israel, murder-stained people (...)", "Jealous, murderous and revengeful people (...)" and "(teeth-)grinding, most malicious race of Hebrews (...)".<sup>34</sup> In this service, one also finds verses such as: "According to Solomon, the mouth of the felonious Hebrews is a deep hole", "On the malicious paths of the wicked Hebrews lie thistles and traps".<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> The texts concerned can be found in *Triodion katanuktikon* (Athens 1960) 336-443. The Greek priest and liturgical scholar, Konstantinos Papayannis, prepared a critical edition of the official liturgical book that contains the texts of Holy Week and added the texts of Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday to it. See K. PAPAGIANNES (ed.): *Hē Hagia kai Megalē Hebdomas* (Athens 1985<sup>9</sup>) (from now on, here abbreviated as *Hagia Hebdomas*). The translations from the Greek are my own. Cf. B. GROEN: Antijudaismus in der heutigen byzantinischen Liturgie, in A. GERHARDS & H.H. HENRIX (eds.): *Dialog oder Monolog. Zur liturgischen Beziehung zwischen Judentum und Christentum* (Freiburg / Basel / Vienna 2004 = *Quaestiones Disputatae* 208) 210-222. See also TH. KRATZERT: "Wir sind wie die Juden". *Der griechisch-orthodoxe Beitrag zu einem ökumenischen jüdisch-christlichen Dialog* (Berlin 1994 = *Studien zu Kirche und Israel* 16) 160-186.

<sup>31</sup> Hymn after the fourth beatitude in the Service of the Holy Passion: *Hagia Hebdomas* 209.

<sup>32</sup> First troparion of the ninth canticle of the triodion in the Service of the Holy Passion: *Hagia Hebdomas* 217.

<sup>33</sup> Second apostichon after the eleventh gospel-reading and second idiomelon of the vespers for Good Friday: *Hagia Hebdomas* 222, 268.

<sup>34</sup> *Hagia Hebdomas* 299, 300, 306.

<sup>35</sup> *Hagia Hebdomas* 309.

The second theme is an important motive for the murder: jealousy. According to the *Synaxarion* of Lazarus Saturday, Jewish envy already began with the raising of Lazarus.

A third main theme, which can be heard in many hymns, is the absurdity of the Jewish crime. The Jews kill their benefactor! They kill Him Who not only always cared for them and healed them, but, throughout their history, also conferred great benefactions on them. For a proper understanding of these hymns, not only the Jewish-Christian polemics must be taken into account, but also the Christian identification between Jesus Christ and the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. As Logos and Son of God, Christ had already made heaven and earth, led Israel out of Egypt and spoken to his people through the Prophets:

Today the Jews nailed the Lord, who divided the sea with his staff und led them through the desert, to the Cross. Today they pierced with a lance the side of Him who vexed Egypt with plagues for their sake and He who sent Manna as fare for them was given gall to drink.<sup>36</sup>

With reference to the controversy between God and His people, described in the Book Micah (Mic 6: 1-8), the Jews are called to account. Here we meet with a style that is very similar to the Western Improperies, it is true, but it is more drastic; moreover, the Jews are now called by name:

Thus the Lord speaks to the Jews: My people, what have I done to you or with what have I wearied you? I gave light to your blind, cleansed your lepers, raised up a man who lay down on his bed. My people, what have I done to you and what have you given me in return? Instead of Manna, gall; instead of water, vinegar; instead of loving me, you nailed me to the Cross. I do not endure any longer; I will call the gentiles to me and they will glorify me together with the Father and the Spirit, and I will give them eternal life.<sup>37</sup>

When you were drawn upon the Cross, Lord, You cried thus: For which deed do you wish to crucify me, Jews? Because I cured your paralytics? Because I raised up your dead as if from sleep? Because I healed a woman suffering from haemorrhages? Because I pitied the Canaanite woman? For

<sup>36</sup> Second verse of the sixth antiphon in the Service of the Holy Passion; *Hagia Hebdomas* 193.

<sup>37</sup> First verse of the twelfth antiphon in the Service of the Holy Passion as well as first idiomelon in the sext of the service of the Great Hours on Good Friday: *Hagia Hebdomas* 201, 250. Cf. the idiomelon in the none: *Hagia Hebdomas* 261.

which deed do you wish to murder me, Jews? However, you will look on Christ, whom you now pierce, criminals.<sup>38</sup>

Therefore, it is hardly surprising that, in various verses, the Jews are called 'ungrateful', 'ignorant' or 'unwise'. To the Byzantine hymnographers, it is clear that such serious crimes must be punished. That is why one sings several times:

Pay them back, Lord, according to their works, because they made vain plans against You.<sup>39</sup>

The crime is passed on to the next generations, as the following troparion makes clear:

Alien to the lawless is the just legal order and strange to the unbelieving is the knowledge of God: the Jews spurned this because of their lawlessness; therefore, notably, they inherited the curse, just as the fig tree.<sup>40</sup>

The extreme classic example of Jewish treason is Judas. Linguistically, too, the names of Judas (*Ioudas*), the tribe Judah (*Iouda*) and the Jews (*Ioudaioi*) are very close in Greek. Incidentally, instead of 'Jews', 'Hebrews' (*Hebraioi*) may also be used. Judas is denoted as a miserable traitor, cheat, pervert and murderer – malicious, niggardly, idiotic, 'thrice wretched', ungrateful, evil etcetera.

Further subject matter concerns the incapacity of the Synagogue to bring forth good fruits any longer. In particular, we meet with such assertions on the Monday of Holy Week. On this day, among other things, the fig tree that was cursed by Jesus and subsequently withered is commemorated (Gospel reading of the day: Mt 21: 18-43). On this day and eve, the hymns are about the withered fig tree, symbol of the Synagogue, full of leaves but with no fruit. Christ has cursed this barren and unfruitful Synagogue. The hymnographers are convinced that the Law is fruitless anyhow and that the Synagogue has been excluded from spiritual fruits.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Third idiomelon in the terce of the service of the Great Hours on Good Friday: *Hagia Hebdomas* 243.

<sup>39</sup> Second and third verses of the eleventh antiphon (cf. first verse) as well as first verse of the thirteenth antiphon in the Service of the Holy Passion on Maundy Thursday: *Hagia Hebdomas* 200-201, 204.

<sup>40</sup> Second troparion of the ninth canticle of the triodion in the vespers for Palm Sunday evening: *Hagia Hebdomas* 63-64.

<sup>41</sup> Second troparion of the first canticle, fourth troparion of the eighth canticle, third, fourth and fifth troparia of the ninth canticle of the triodion in the vespers on

However, the fate of the fig tree not only symbolises Judaism, but is also a warning to the 'brothers' (*adelfoi*), i.e. the Orthodox monks and nuns, not to wither and remain fruitless.<sup>42</sup> This also applies to the bridesmaids (Mt 25: 1-13) who are commemorated on the Tuesday of Holy Week: 'We', the Orthodox, should be watchful and prepared like the wise maids, just as we must imitate the servants who traded the talents entrusted to them and did not hide the money in the ground (Mt 25: 14-30). Hence, it is our own purification, watchfulness and salvation that are at stake.

As is well known, anti-Jewish polemics are not an invention of the Byzantine hymnographers, but have their roots in the Old Testament and Early Church. Jewish prophetic self-criticism by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel etcetera in the Tenach and the self-criticism in later Jewish tradition were used or abused by Christians and directed against the entire Jewish people.<sup>43</sup> Further, the New Testament, the Gospel of St John for instance, is very polemical towards those Jews who did not accept Jesus as the Messiah. The Byzantine hymnographers also refer to the patristic apologetics and occasional invective against Jewry (among others, Meliton of Sardes, Ephrem the Syrian and John Chrysostom).<sup>44</sup>

It must be admitted that, even during Holy Week, the Jews are not only blackened; there are also several positive statements. Various hymns, for instance, speak of 'the beloved Israel'.<sup>45</sup> Others wish 'peace over Israel

Palm Sunday evening; Synaxarion in the matins for Great Monday: *Hagia Hebdomas* 60, 62-64, 73.

<sup>42</sup> Second and fourth troparia of the first canticle and kathisma of the triodion in the vespers on Palm Sunday evening; third apostichon in the matins for Great Monday; kontakion and oikos in the matins for Great Tuesday: *Hagia Hebdomas* 60-61, 77 (81), 103-104.

<sup>43</sup> M. POORTHUIS: De Improperia en het jodendom, in *Jaarboek voor liturgie-onderzoek* 5 (1989) 137-163; transl. into English: M. POORTHUIS: The Improperia and Judaism, in *Questions liturgiques* 72 (1991) 1-24.

<sup>44</sup> See e.g. H. SCHRECKENBERG: *Die christlichen Adversus Judaeos-Texte und ihr literarisches und historisches Umfeld (1.-11. Jh.)* (Frankfurt 1998<sup>4</sup> = Europäische Hochschulschriften XXIII) 172.

<sup>45</sup> Idiomelon accompanying the fifth verse from the 'Lord, I cried ...'-psalms (Pss. 141, 142, 130; LXX) during the Palm Sunday vespers: *Hagia Hebdomas* 32; second troparion of the ninth canticle of the canon during the Palm Sunday matins: *Hagia Hebdomas* 50.

and salvation for the gentiles'.<sup>46</sup> In the none of the Great Hours on Good Friday, the reader says:

Do not deliver us to the end (last judgment or death) because of Your holy name, do not dissipate Your covenant and do not take away Your mercy from us, for the sake of Abraham, Your beloved one, Isaac, Your servant and Israel, Your holy one.<sup>47</sup>

Further, as has already been mentioned, several Old Testament saints, such as the 'very good' Joseph, are commemorated.

#### 4. Reform?

I will close with several short remarks on the urgent question of whether reform of the indeed very problematic liturgical texts mentioned here is desirable, and whether such seems possible within the foreseeable future.

First a preliminary remark: it is necessary to investigate how people really experience the hymns in question. Do people identify with the anti-Jewish invective or do they just listen to the singing and immediately forget what they heard? Or do they not listen at all? Do they apply what they hear to present Jewry or do they merely experience the texts as something historical? In other words, do the hymns really feed anti-Semitism? Unfortunately, there is hardly any empirical research on how the Orthodox faithful actually live the liturgy.

During an official visit to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem in May 1995, the Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomaios, in his function of honorary Primate of the Orthodox Church, argued in favour of reform of the Holy Week liturgical texts about Jewry. Actually, he declared himself in favour of suppressing the anti-Jewish passages, in particular the invective. Background to the patriarchal plea is the fact that the Constantinople Patriarchate is not only engaged in dialogue with the other Christian Churches and Islam, but also with Judaism. It is difficult to take the Jewish partner seriously and, at the same time, demonize him during worship.

<sup>46</sup> Heirmos and troparia of the fifth canticle of the canon during the Palm Sunday matins: *Hagia Hebdomas* 46.

<sup>47</sup> *Hagia Hebdomas* 266.

In Orthodoxy, official liturgical reform can only be undertaken by the Holy Synod. In the Orthodox Church of Greece and in the Moscow Patriarchate, the atmosphere for such reform is at present unfavourable. Within the Constantinople Patriarchate, to which the Greek Orthodox in Western Europe, America and Australia also belong, the attitude to reform is more open. But no Orthodox Church wishes to reform the liturgy on its own. This decision is left to a large pan-Orthodox council. There are also influential groups, such as the Athos monasteries, that contend that the liturgical tradition is unalterable and that all troparia passed down to us are essential for worship.<sup>48</sup>

Attempts towards reinterpretation are being made. In his *Lenten Triodion*, the Auxiliary Bishop of the Greek Orthodox Church in Great Britain, Kallistos Ware, translates the anti-Jewish assertions literally,<sup>49</sup> but, at the same time, argues that the statements against those who delivered Christ to His death refer to the Christian community gathered in worship: we ourselves have often betrayed the Saviour and crucified Him again. The noted Russian-American Orthodox theologian, Alexander Schmemmann, thinks that we Christians ought to ask ourselves on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday if we are not like Judas in his perverted love and if we, too, would not have rejected Christ and killed Him.<sup>50</sup>

The French Orthodox catechism, *Dieu vivant*, denounces the Christian crimes against the Jews and points out that God never cancelled His covenant with the Jewish people, and that Jesus, the Son of God Himself, Mary and the Apostles had 'Semitic faces'. Furthermore, the authors of the catechism state that Christians, like Judas, are in danger of being hypocrites and becoming traitors and slayers of Christ by betraying their fellow men.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> See also the different opinions on this issue in *Immanuel*, nr. 26-27 (1994) 77, 89, 123, 125-126, 131. According to Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Peristeri (diocese in Athens), a reform is "christologically and soteriologically absurd" (p. 126), whereas professor N. Bratsiotis argues in favour of omitting the anti-Jewish hymns on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday (p. 123).

<sup>49</sup> MOTHER MARY & KALLISTOS WARE (transl.): *The Lenten Triodion* (London / Boston 1978) 60, 464-661.

<sup>50</sup> A. SCHMEMMANN & O. CLÉMENT: *Le mystère pascal. Commentaires liturgiques* (Abbaye de Bellefontaine 1975 = *Spiritualité orientale* 16) 33, 37-38; cf. 20-21: "des hommes 'normaux'".

<sup>51</sup> *Dieu est vivants. Catéchisme pour des familles par une équipe de chrétiens orthodoxes* (Paris 1979) 164-171.

A few Byzantine-rite communities within the Catholic Church have either already skipped the anti-Jewish liturgical texts or changed their language-form and contents. Within the Dutch *Byzantijns Liturgikon*, for example, the words 'Jews', 'Hebrews' etcetera in the hymns concerned have been replaced by expressions such as 'evil men' and 'sinners', without any reference to the Jews.<sup>52</sup> It is obvious that the Decree of the Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate* (1965),<sup>53</sup> which estimates the Jewish people and Jewish religion positively, gave an important impetus to this reform.

Generally speaking, Christian identity and the joy about Christ's redeeming acts must not be at the expense of others, in this case the Jews. Unfortunately, in many liturgical texts of the Byzantine rite, the old and new covenants are opposed, implying that God cancelled his covenant with the Jews and the redemption by God's Son from the old covenant is proclaimed. One should be cautious of all substitution theories that reduce Israel, its scriptures and saints to a historical prelude to the coming of Jesus and thus deny due attention to the continuity of God's appearance throughout the Bible.

The prominent place held in Byzantine rite by the Jewish saints who lived before Christ may also contribute towards a positive answer to the issue of reform of the anti-Jewish hymns. Their examples and veneration show that the authentic 'Semitic' face is an indispensable part of the Christian body.

<sup>52</sup> *Byzantijns liturgikon* (Tilburg / Zagreb 1991) 419-540.

<sup>53</sup> J. ALBERIGO e.a. (eds.): *Conciliorum oecumenicorum decreta* (Bologna 1973<sup>3</sup>) 968-971.