

THE GOSPEL LECTIONARY OF THE BYZANTINE CHURCH

David M. Petras

The fullness of the celebration of "Christ among us" needs the proclamation of his deeds and words that our understanding and way of life may be transformed. For this reason, the reading of the Gospel has become an integral part of the worship of the community in all traditional Christian eucharists. The Divine Liturgy can be clearly divided into two distinct sections, by convention called the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The anaphora itself proclaims the Gospel words of our Lord, "Take, eat, this is my body," and "Take, drink, this is my blood," which, through the power of the Holy Spirit, bring the believer here and now into the transcendent presence of our Lord. St John Chrysostom expressed this, "It is always the Passover."¹ This unchanging proclamation is complemented by the daily reading of a different section of the Gospel in the Liturgy of the Word.

Just as each Church has evolved different anaphoras, so also have they developed different systems for the reading of Scripture. The Byzantine tradition presents two different sections from the New Testament (the Epistle and Gospel) for each liturgical day of the Church year. The focal point of this system is the annual celebration of the resurrection on the Sunday of Pascha.

The Byzantine Church does not have a reading from the Old Testament at the Divine Liturgy. Three course readings of the Old Testament remain: 1) the reading of the Prophecy of Isaiah at the Tersext (originally a morning Liturgy of the Word, now simply the combination of the common Terce and Sext) of Lent; 2) the Reading of Genesis at Vespers of Lent; and 3) the reading of Proverbs at

1 Homily 5 on 1 Timothy. Cf. also his Oration against the Judaizers 3,4.

Vespers of Lent. Vespers may be joined with the Presanctified Liturgy, which existed by the beginning of the seventh century in its basic present form.² Engberg writes that the *prophetologium* "was invented in the early eighth century, shortly after the reform that relegated the O. T. lessons to the "*Missa Presanctificatorum...*," but gives no further information.³ There are also remnants of a course reading of the Prophecy of Ezekiel (Tersext), Exodus and Job (Vespers) during Holy Week. Kniazeff, following Karabinov,⁴ believes the Prophecy of Isaiah to have been constructed after Heraclius' victory over the Persians in the Holy Land in the seventh century. The selection of readings is a kind of commentary on his victory.⁵ The continuous readings of Genesis and Proverbs are ancient catechumenate material and present no special problems. Outside of Lent, Old Testament readings are found only at Vespers on the eves of particular feasts and important saints. The main problem with the Old Testament readings is the question whether they were ever used in the Divine Liturgy of the Byzantine Church. Juan Mateos claims the Byzantine Divine Liturgy once had an Old Testament reading like the other rites, but that it disappeared between the times of Maximus the Confessor (7th century) and Patriarch Germanus (8th century).⁶ The only evidence, though, is a passing reference in Maximus' *Mystagogy*: "There (in the Church) it (the soul) learns, by symbols of the divine readings which take place, the principles of beings and the marvelous and grand mysteries of divine Providence revealed in the Law and the Prophets..."⁷ Mateos also thinks he has isolated three remaining liturgical Old Testament readings, the final readings in the series at the Vigils of

2 Miguel Arranz, "La liturgie des Présanctifiés de l'ancien Euchologe byzantin," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 47 (1981), 334.

3 Sysse Gudrun Engberg, "The Greek Old Testament Lectionary as a Liturgical Book," (University of Copenhagen, *Cahiers de l'Institut du moyen-âge grec et latin* 54, 1987), 40.

4 Ivan Karabinov, *Postnaja Triod* ("Lenten Triodion") (St Petersburg, 1910), 45ff.

5 *Op. Cit.*, 237-241.

6 Juan Mateos, *La célébration de la parole dans la liturgie byzantine* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 191) (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1971), 131.

7 *The Church's Mystagogy* 23, translation by George Berthold, *Maximus the Confessor: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 204.

Christmas (Isaiah 7:10-16; 8:1-4, 9-10), Epiphany (Isaiah 49:8-15) and Pascha (Daniel 3:1-90).⁸ However, outside of Lent, we have no traces of the Old Testament course readings in the Byzantine eucharistic Liturgy. However, we do have a complete record of the Old Testament readings used at the liturgy in Syrian Churches.⁹ One of the three readings assigned for the Third Sunday of Lent is 1 Samuel 17:2-9, 32, 37, 40, 42, 49-51, an edited version of the story of David and Goliath. Interestingly enough, this finds a reflection in the hymnography of the Byzantine Church. The doxasticheron at the aposticha of Vespers for this Sunday begins, "O Lord, who helped gentle David in combat and enabled him to overcome the Philistine...by the weapon of the Cross cast down our enemies." One is tempted to hypothesize that the Byzantines used a Syrian system of Old Testament lections in their Liturgy, but again, this may have happened only because the hymnography was taken from the Syrian Church.

Perhaps the best study to date of the Byzantine lectionary is Kniazeff's "La lecture de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament, dans le rite byzantin," in *La Prière des Heures*.¹⁰ There have been other, popular works, which are helpful as homily material, but do not give evaluative information, such as Barrois' *Scripture Readings in Orthodox Worship*.¹¹ Scriptural scholars have made many studies of the Byzantine lectionaries from the viewpoint of helping to establish the Greek text of the Bible, and in so doing, have given a few valuable insights into the origins of the system itself, particularly the Chicago series¹² and

8 *Op. cit.*, 131.

9 L. Chidiac and G. Khouri-Sarkis, "Table des péricopes bibliques den les Églises de langue syriaque," *L'Orient Syrien* 3 (1958), 359-386.

10 (Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 1963), 201-252.

11 (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977).

12 S. Allen Wikgren, "Chicago Studies in the Greek Lectionary of the New Testament," in *Biblical and Patristic Studies in Memory of Robert Pierce Casey* (Freiburg: Herder, 1963); Harry Merwyn Buck, Jr., "The Johannine Lessons in the Greek Gospel Lectionary," *Studies in the Lectionary Text of the Greek New Testament* II, 4 (University of Chicago Press, 1958); B. M. Metzger, *The Saturday and Sunday Lessons from Luke in the Greek Gospel Texts* (University of Chicago Press, 1944); William D. Bray, *The Weekday Lessons from Luke in the Greek Gospel Lectionary* (University of

some works of Yvonne Burns.¹³ A short, but basic work is Pierre-Marie Gy's, "La question du système des lectures de la liturgie byzantine."¹⁴

While it is not possible to reconstruct these Old Testament readings, almost the whole text of the epistles and gospels is read every year, beginning on the Sunday of Pascha with the first sections of the Acts of the Apostles and of the Gospel of St John. The Gospel is the most important of the two readings that remain. The book of the four canonical Gospels is especially bound in a beautiful way to attract the eye and to emphasize their central significance. The Gospel at the Divine Liturgy is chanted by the deacon, customarily surrounded by candle-bearers, as much to symbolize the light-giving role of its proclamation as to give light to the reader. However, there are questions about the choice of Gospels for the Sunday readings. Because of their importance, I will limit myself in this article to a discussion of the Gospel readings.

Description of the Byzantine Gospel Cycle

There are three separate cycles of Gospel readings for the Divine Liturgy based on the Paschal-Lenten Church year: Saturday, Sunday, and weekday (Monday to Friday). Each cycle is complete in itself, but not completely independent, because the readings chosen for Saturday and Sunday are not repeated during the week. The Saturday and Sunday cycles present selected pericopes from the four Gospels, while the weekday readings are a *lectio continua* omitting those sections read on Saturday and Sunday.

Chicago Press, 1959). For an extensive bibliography of textual criticism connected with the Byzantine lectionary, see Harry A. Sturz, *The Byzantine Text-Type and New Testament Textual Criticism* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984).

13 "The Greek Manuscripts connected by their Lection Systems with the Palestinians Syriac Gospel Lectionaries," *Studia Biblica* 1978, II: *Papers on the Gospels*, Sixth International Congress on Biblical Studies, Oxford, 3-7 April 1978; "The Historical Events that Occasioned the Inception of the Byzantine Gospel Lectionaries," 16th Inter. Byz.-Kongr. Akten II/4 (Vienna 1982), 119-127; "The Lectionary of the Patriarch of Constantinople," *Studia Patristica* 15/1 (Berlin 1984), 515-520.

14 . In: *Miscellanea liturgica in onore di Sua Eminenza il Cardinale Giacomo Lercaro* (Vol. II, Rome, 1967), 251-261.

The Gospel of St Matthew is read on the Saturdays and Sundays from the Sunday of All Saints (the Sunday after Pentecost) to the Second Sunday before the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. The Gospel of St Luke is read from the second Sunday after the Exaltation of the Holy Cross to Meatfare Saturday (the second Saturday before the beginning of the Great Fast). The Gospel of St Mark, with the exception of the First Sunday, is read on all the Saturdays and Sundays of Lent. The weekday continuous readings follow the same format, except for the Gospel of St Mark. Since there are no weekday readings assigned to the Great Fast, chapters 1 to 8 of Mark are read during the 12th to 16th weeks after Pentecost, and chapters 8 (repeating one week) to 15 during the 30th to the 35th weeks after Pentecost. In both cases, the continuous readings from Matthew and Luke finish before the Saturday and Sunday series. These periods, therefore, have acquired the titles of the period of St Matthew and the period of St Luke. During the course of the church year, virtually the whole of the four Gospels are read.

The Gospel of St John is a special case. It is read continuously during the Pentecostarion from Pascha to Pentecost. During this period there is some selection of material. The Sunday after Pascha is called "Thomas Sunday," and has the reading of John 20:19-31 about the events of the eighth day. The second Sunday after Pascha has the reading of the resurrection Gospel of St Mark. The third, fourth and fifth Sundays all have readings with baptismal themes: John 5:1-15 (the Paralytic Man at the Sheep Pool); John 4:5-42 (the Samaritan Woman); and John 9:1-38 (the Man born Blind). Ascension and Pentecost have special readings, of course, but the choice for Pentecost is the second part of the story of Jesus at the Feast of Booths (John 7:37-52 and 8:12),¹⁵ probably because of verse 39 of chapter 7. It is fascinating that the first part of this episode (7:14-30) is read on the twenty-fifth day of the Pentecostarion, called the Feast of Mid-Pentecost. This pericope begins, "The feast was half over when Jesus went into the temple area and

15 The inclusion of 8:12 in the Pentecost reading is an indication that the story of the adulterous woman is an interpolation into the Gospel of St John.

began to teach" (7:14). This reading is not out of sequence, so the whole Pentecost cycle may have been well planned to fit this key phrase at the beginning of the midpoint Gospel.

Some other pericopes during the Pentecost period that are also out of sequence. The miracles at Cana (John 2:1-11 and 4:46-54), for example, are read on the second and third Mondays after Easter. One of the most significant selected Gospels is the reading of John 6:5-14 (the miracle of the loaves) on the Wednesday after Mid-Pentecost). Van Goudoever notes the thirty-third day of the computation of 'omer in the Jewish liturgical calendar was *Lag ba'omer*, which, among other things, commemorated the fall of manna.¹⁶ Perhaps there is a connection here with the Jewish calendar in the similarity of themes.

The opening reading on the Sunday of Pascha is the first section of the Gospel of John. This has led some to the conclusion the Gospel for the Resurrection is John's prologue, and to construct various theologies on the basis of this assumption. This is, in fact, the crux of Yvonne Burns' article. Her point is that "the interpretation of this pericope, 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God . . . and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us,' was the crux of the protracted theological controversy of the fifth century which resulted in the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon, the decisions of which encouraged increased emphasis on the Theotokos, and so led to the inauguration of the Annunciation as a separate festival."¹⁷ From these historical circumstances, she concludes that "the use of the prologue to the gospel of John for the lection on Easter Sunday is an exception to the rule that the earliest and most important festivals simply use the pericope that describes the event whenever such an event is described in the New Testament."¹⁸

16 J. Van Goudoever, *Fêtes et Calendriers Bibliques* (Théologie Historique 7) (Paris: Beauchesne, 1967), 195-196. Translated from the English original *Biblical Calendars* (E. J. Brill, 1961).

17 Burns, 122.

18 *Ibid.*

The historical facts may be right, and the transfer of the feast of the Annunciation and the inception of the Church Year on Easter Sunday in the Byzantine Church may mark the inception of the present lectionary system. However, the explanation of the reading of John 1 on the Sunday of Pascha may be simpler. The Gospel of John was chosen as the Scripture for the Pentecostarion period because of its sacramental theology. The Pentecost was the period of mystagogy after baptism. The Liturgy of Sunday morning began the fifty-day celebration of the mystery of the incarnation, mystically manifested in its fullness by the resurrection. This Liturgy, then, was the first after the resurrection and the beginning of a new cycle, a logical place to begin the Church Year. At the same time, the prologue of John did not replace the description of the event, for the important Paschal Liturgy was the baptismal vigil on Saturday night when the resurrection gospel of Matthew (28:1-20) was read, climaxing the reading of the passion according to Matthew at all the important Liturgies of Holy Week. The resurrection, liturgically, happens then, and this gospel was not replaced. A similar structure is found at Christmas, where the gospel of the birth of Jesus is read at the vigil Liturgy in the night of December 24-25, and the story of the Magi, which happened after the birth, is read at the Liturgy of the day of December 25. This parallelism cannot be pushed too far. The choice of the Magi story may have been the original center of the Byzantine feast of the incarnation of Christ, that is, his manifestation (epiphany) in the flesh, now called Christmas, and the Magi story has a great role in the hymnography of the day. On the other hand, the prologue of John has no influence on the hymnography of Easter, another indication that it was not considered a gospel of the resurrection.¹⁹

There are also special Gospels in the periods of St Matthew and St Luke. The period of St Matthew begins on Pentecost Monday with a special pericope, Matthew 18:10-20. Since this feast celebrates the descent of the Holy Spirit, this section may have

¹⁹ For another criticism of Burns' position, see Elena Velkovska, "Lo studio dei lezionari bizantini," *Ecclesia Orans* 13 (1996), 263.

been selected because of the key verse, "where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in their midst (v. 20)," expressing the idea that God is always among us through the power and working of the Holy Spirit.²⁰ On Tuesday of Pentecost Week the continuous reading begins with the Sermon on the Mount (4:25-5:12), passing over the infancy and theophany narratives which are read on their respective feasts. The Gospel of the call of the disciples is the first in the Sunday cycle following the special Sunday of All Saints. The weekday cycle presents a continuous reading of the Gospel, omitting those sections read on Saturday and Sunday, an indication that it was formulated at a later date. The Saturday and Sunday cycles are independent of one another, and are composed of selected readings which are, however, progressive in sequence, that is, a reading from chapter 17 will not be assigned before one from chapter 14. The only exception to this is the Matthew 15:21-28 passage (the Canaanite Woman), which is used as an extra Gospel at the end of the Lukan cycle if Pascha is celebrated very late. The reading of St Matthew is interrupted for the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (September 14), which is solemnized by the Saturdays and Sundays both before and after the feast, and its reading is not resumed.

The period of St Luke begins on the Monday after the Sunday after the Exaltation of the Cross, beginning with the story of the baptism of Jesus (3:19-22). It follows the same system as St Matthew. The weekday cycle omits those sections read on Saturday and Sunday, and the Saturday and Sunday Gospels are selected but are in sequence. There are sections out of sequence, however. The Gospel of the Fifth Sunday of Luke is the passage on the Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19-31). I have come across no satisfactory explanation for this anomaly, but it is curious that the Fifth Sunday of the Great Fast has a Canon at Matins based on this Gospel, as a kind of prelude to Lazarus Saturday, when the Gospel of the raising of Lazarus is read. The last four Sundays of the Lukan period

20 Georges Barrois, *Scripture Readings in Orthodox Worship* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977), 117.

are also special and form a pre-Lenten preparation. On the first two of these, the Gospel is from St Luke (the Publican and the Pharisee, 18:10-14; and the Prodigal Son, 15:11-32). On the final two Sundays before Lent, however, the Gospel readings are from St Matthew (the Last Judgment, 25:31-46; and Jesus' teaching on fasting, 6:14-21). In the Saturday cycle, only the final Saturday before Lent is affected, when the first part of Jesus' teaching is read (6:1-13). There are a few special weekends when the Saturday and Sunday pericopes are co-related.

The narrative sections concerning the infancy and baptism of Jesus are omitted and they are read at the time of the feasts themselves. The passion narratives are also treated in a special way. The passion of St Matthew is read, along with that of St John, during Holy Week. The Gospel of St Matthew is the preferred Gospel in the Byzantine Church at the great feasts. The passion of Luke, however, is read at the end of its period in the week before the 36th Sunday after Pentecost (Cheesefare Sunday). As noted above, the weekday readings of both Matthew and Luke last for only about twelve of their sixteen-week periods, with the last four weeks supplied from the Gospel of St Mark. The passion according to Mark is read in the week before the 35th Sunday after Pentecost (Meatfare Sunday).

The Great Fast is considered as the "period of St Mark." There are no Gospels assigned during the week. On Saturday the Gospels are selected, again in sequence, except for the first Saturday, the story of Jesus and his disciples on the Sabbath (2:23-35). Sunday poses a special problem. The first Sunday has a Gospel from John (1:43-51), because it was originally dedicated to the memory of the prophets.²¹ The key verse here seems to be 50, where Jesus proclaims to his newly-called disciples, "You will see much greater things than that," that is, "than the prophets saw." This represents an ecclesiastical interpretation. Very often Gospel readings were chosen, not because of their whole content, but based on certain

²¹ Alexis Kniazeff, "Les lectures dans le rite byzantin," *La Prière des Heures* (Lex Orandi 35) (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1963), 230-231.

key passages. This is true also of the final two Sundays of Lent, where the readings of Mark have a common element: a prediction of the Passion. Finally, the Third Sunday of Lent, the Veneration of the Holy Cross, has a theme Gospel on following Jesus in the way of the Cross (8:34-38), which comes shortly after a prediction of the Passion (v. 31), which is not read on this Sunday but on the Fifth Saturday of the Great Fast

The periods of Matthew, Mark and Luke comprise the movable cycle of Gospels which depend on the date of Easter. The Pentecostarion is a special period in which the Gospel of St John is read continuously. There is also an immovable cycle of gospels for the feasts or saints of the day. Greater feasts and more notable saints in practice preempt the Gospels of the movable cycle, except on Sunday, when the two cycles are read together. If it is a feast of the Lord, then the movable reading is omitted. The more important days have special Gospels, either the narration of the feast being celebrated or an appropriate passage characterizing the saint being celebrated. These Gospels often depend on key verses. An example is the common reading for the Mother of God, Luke 10:38-42, combined with 11:27-28, from the passage, "Mary has chosen the better portion" (v. 42), even though it does not refer to Jesus' mother. The lesser saints' readings are arranged in commons for classes. In theory, both cycles should be read each day, which may be done in monasteries, but usually the movable reading is preferred.

Analysis of the Gospel Cycle

The system for the reading of the Gospel did not develop all at once. The Saturday and Sunday cycles are clearly the more ancient. The earliest anyone has dated them is the fourth century.²² The Pentecostarion readings are a special case, and the whole reading of St John probably also dates to about the same time.²³ For the

22. Allen Wikgren, "Chicago Studies in the Greek Lectionary of the New Testament," *Biblical and Patristic Studies in Memory of Robert Pierce Casey* (Herder, 1963), 120-121.

23. Harry Merwyn Buck, Jr., "The Johannine Lessons in the Greek Gospel Lectionary," *Studies in the Lectionary Text of the Greek New Testament II*, 4 (University of Chicago Press, 1958), 1-2.

liturgist, this represents a very early period, before the main development of the rite and of the church year; but for the Scripture scholar, this is rather late. Metzger has observed: "No doubt the lectionary in its present form is a monastic creation, and can hardly be earlier than the time of St Basil."²⁴ The development of the immovable series of readings depends, of course, on when the feast or the saint was introduced into the calendar. The weekday cycle of readings is certainly from a later period, and includes all the material not read on Saturday or Sunday. The *Typikon of the Great Church* (Constantinople) from the tenth century still does not give the daily readings,²⁵ though it may not be inferred from this that it did not yet exist. The Saturday and Sunday cycles, as well as the Pentecostarion readings, therefore, have a venerable tradition in the Byzantine Church. In the fourth century, Saturday (the Sabbath) and Sunday were still vying for honor in the Christian life. As St Gregory of Nyssa witnesses, "With what eyes will you, in fact, be able to look Sunday in the face after having dishonored the Sabbath? Do you not know these two are brothers and to do injury to one is to assail the other?"²⁶ Their two series of readings are of almost equal value, therefore, but with differences that will be noted below.

However, the fourth century does seem to be too early a date for the completed Sunday and Saturday cycles. Because of points of contact with the readings indicated in the Homilies of Severus (512-518), the transfer of the gospel of the Annunciation from the Sunday before Christmas to March 25,²⁷ a coincidence of epistle readings between the Roman and Byzantine Churches on the fifth

24 B M Metzger, *The Saturday and Sunday Lessons from Luke in the Greek Gospel Texts* (University of Chicago Press, 1944), 13

25 Juan Mateos, *Le Typicon de la Grande Église* (Pontificum Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, OCA 165, Rome, 1963)

26 *De Castigatione*, PG 46,309, quoted in C S Mosna, S C J, *Storia della Domenica dalle Origini fino agli Inizi del V Secolo* (Libreria Editrice dell'Università Gregoriana, 1969), 354 Translated here from the Italian

27 Gy cites D M Montagna, "La liturgia mariana primitiva," *Marianum* 24 (1962), 84-128 and Homily 94 of Severus

Sunday of Lent, Gy dates the Saturday-Sunday cycle to at least the sixth century.²⁸ It may be that the correspondence of the Fifth Sunday epistle may be nothing more than a coincidence, and the examples Gy uses from Severus are from the Gospel of John in the Pentecostarion period, which may be independent from the post-Pentecost Saturday-Sunday cycle, with the exception of the reading of the genealogy on the Sunday before Christmas, which is also out of the Saturday-Sunday cycle.

Certainly the Saturday-Sunday cycle predates the Weekday cycle, which, as we have seen, can probably be fixed in the seventh century (Heraclius). Gy concluded that the Byzantine weekday cycle does not predate the seventh century for two reasons: 1) the great role of the feast of the Cross and its connected celebrations in September, which was introduced into the Church after the transfer of the relic of the Holy Cross to Constantinople in 635; and 2) the fact the weekday cycle presupposes the fast of Cheesefare Week (the week before Lent, when Liturgies are not celebrated on Wednesday and Friday), which was also introduced into Constantinople by the Emperor Heraclius. In the first case, what Gy is probably referring to is the fact that the Saturday, Sunday and Weekday reading of the Gospel of Luke begins in the week following the feast of the Holy Cross (September 14). Outside of Great Lent and the Pentecostarion, the Byzantine lectionary divides the year into two equal sections: 1) the period of Matthew, from Pentecost to the Feast of the Cross; and 2) the period of Luke from the feast of the Cross to Lent. There are some difficulties with Gy's observation. The first is that the Saturday and Sunday cycles, which predate the Feast of the Cross, are also divided into two groups of seventeen weeks each. The second difficulty is that in the present Weekday cycle, only twelve weeks are actually dedicated to the Gospels of Matthew or Luke, and the rest are filled with readings from Mark, since this Gospel is read during the Saturday and Sunday Lenten cycles, when there are no Weekday readings. It would seem, therefore, that this arrangement of weekday Gospels follows

28. Gy, 259.

more the Saturday-Sunday system, and does not rely on the Feast of the Cross. However, Gy's second reason is compelling, since the whole structure of weekday readings does presuppose the Cheesefare week fast, which was introduced by Heraclius.²⁹ The reading of the epistles finishes exactly in Cheesefare Week, and the passion according to Luke is assigned to this week. This completes the Lukan section, even though there had been an interruption of seven weeks to complete Mark.

As mentioned above, Wikgren dated the Saturday-Sunday cycle to the fourth century,³⁰ and Buck also suggests, from indications in Egeria, that the Pentecostarion cycle of Acts and John could date to the fourth century.³¹ However, these estimates are based on only a few Gospels that could have been in place long before the complete cycle. Particularly, Buck's evidence comes from a Jerusalem document and concerns Gospels (John 20:19-25, for example) which would have been placed on their particular day from intrinsic chronological considerations. During the Pentecostarion, there are a number of Gospels of John out of sequence (second and third Mondays, all Sundays, Ascension and Pentecost) that could have been in place before the whole system was formulated. This is also true of the Gospel of Mid-Pentecost (the 25th day of the Pentecostarion), with its incipit of John 7:14. As noted above, it is certainly curious that this Gospel is found right in sequence and on the right day for such a "key phrase." Perhaps it was in place first, and the rest of the pericopes arranged around it and around the other Gospels that had assigned days (such as Thomas Sunday, the Feast of Mary on Monday of Week 2,³² Ascension, *et al.*).

Some of the elements of the present lectionary may well have

²⁹ Gy, 256.

³⁰ "Chicago Studies in the Greek Lectionary of the New Testament," *Biblical and Patristic Studies in Memory of Robert Pierce Casey* (Herder 1963), 120-121.

³¹ Harry Merwyn Buck, Jr., "The Johannine Lessons in the Greek Gospel Lectionary," *Studies in the Lectionary Text of the Greek New Testament II*, 4 (University of Chicago Press, 1958), 1-2.

³² Ms. Holy Cross no. 40 (10th century), edited by Juan Mateos, *Le Typicon de la Grande Église*, Vol. 2 (Rome: OCA 166), 232v, Mateos II, 110.

been in place by the fourth century, but the present system, the semicontinuous readings of Saturday and Sunday and the course readings on Weekdays did not become a part of the Byzantine Liturgy until the sixth century. Yvonne Burns notes, "no evidence of the Byzantine lection system has been found prior to the seventh century, neither in the form of rubrics beside a continuous text, nor as lections. This is consistent with a system beginning in the sixth century and undergoing rapid development."³³ Like Gy, she assigns the formulation of the lectionary to the time of Justinian.³⁴ The Byzantine Church has an extensive hymnography connected with the lectionary, which can be called a "sung gospel." However, none of this hymnography is connected with the course readings developed after the sixth century, but with lections for particular commemorations that were in place earlier. We exclude here the sanctoral material, which is connected not with the readings assigned to their feasts, but with the events of saints' lives. These have no formal connection with the Church Year, except as dates—anniversaries—on which to hang an annual commemoration. Since the Church now has a complete office for every day, and sometimes two or three, this is an enormous amount of material, but all clearly dated and formalized. Of greater interest is the hymnography of the system of feasts occurring over the church year, such as the Birth cycle of Annunciation-Christmas-Encounter (Candlemas) or the Paschal cycle of Lent-Easter-Ascension-Pentecost, which are essentially connected with the readings. The hymns of the latter cycle are found in the two liturgical books called the *Lenten Triodion* and the *Paschal Triodion* (or *Pentecostarion*). The principal compilers were the brothers Theodore and Joseph of Stoudion (the largest monastery in Constantinople) in the ninth century,³⁵ but probably containing earlier

33 Yvonne Burns, "The Historical Events that Occasioned the Inception of the Byzantine Gospel Lectionaries," *16 Intern. Byz. Kongr. Akten* II/4 (Vienna 1982), 119-127 at 124.

34 S. V. Bulgakov, *Nastol'naiia Kniga*, (Kharkov, 1900), 490.

35 *Ms. Grottaferrata X*, 474, edited in T. Minisci, "Le preghiere opisthambonoi dei codici criptensi," *Bollettino della Badia Greca di Grottaferrata*, 3 (1949), 4.

material from other areas (particularly Syria and Palestine).

There are two periods of special importance in the cycle of readings: Great Lent and the fifty days between Easter and Pentecost. During these periods, the readings for Sunday all have a special theme, but those for Saturday usually do not. As we have seen, the four Sundays before the first day of Lent (Monday of the seventh week before Easter in the Byzantine tradition) form a kind of particular pre-Lenten preparation. The immediate two Sundays (and one Saturday) are clearly preparatory for the Great Fast, telling the stories of the Last Judgment and the meaning of fasting. The Last Judgment pericope seems to have the same function here as it did in the Western tradition, of ending the Church year, for in the Western Church the year begins with the first Sunday of Advent, and in the Byzantine Church with the feast of Pascha. The four Sundays before Lent are considered a part of the "period of Luke," but, in fact, they consist of four select gospels, no longer in sequence: 1) Luke 18:10-14 (the tax-collector and the Pharisee); 2) Luke 15:11-32 (the prodigal son); 3) Matthew 25:31-46 (the last judgment) and 4) Matthew 6:14-21 (the word on fasting). The Matthew readings are obviously pre-Lenten gospels, framing the week of the "Cheesefare Fast," the Byzantine adaptation of the Monophysite Fast of Nineveh, the third week before the Great Lent. The third week before Lent, in fact, the Byzantines leave free from fasting, "so that we have nothing in common with the Armenians, who fast throughout the space of this week."³⁶

The other two preparatory Sundays clearly present some problems. The fourth Sunday before Great Lent prescribes the reading of the Gospel of the Publican and the Pharisee, and the third Sunday before the parable of the Prodigal Son. However, in the present *Triodion*, on the Second Sunday of Lent, a Canon is found at Matins on the theme of the Prodigal Son. At the Divine Liturgy, at which the Gospel itself would have been read, the manuscripts contain an Ambon Prayer (dismissal prayer) on the

36 S. V. Bulgakov, *Nastol'naia Kniga*, (Kharkov, 1900), 490.

same theme.³⁷ The Third Sunday of the Great Fast now celebrates the Holy Cross, but the Canon at Matins and the Ambon Prayer from this Sunday in the manuscripts has the theme of the Publican and the Pharisee.³⁸ The Veneration of the Holy Cross was originally assigned to the Wednesday of Mid-Lent in the week following the Third Sunday.³⁹ The present Sunday may be an extension of the Mid-Lent feast of the Cross, from Psalm 73:12 (Septuagint), "God is our King before the ages, he has worked salvation in the middle of the earth" (Alleluia verse, Divine Liturgy). The core reason for the Gospels of the Third, Fourth (Mark 9:17-31), and Fifth (Mark 10:32-45) Sundays of the Great Fast is they all contain predictions of the passion. The Gospel of the Third Sunday is now the common for the Cross, but it does follow the first prediction by only three verses. The Fourth and Fifth Sundays of Great Lent also present echoes of different gospels in the prayers and the Divine Office.⁴⁰ Besides Ambon Prayers on these same themes, there are Canons for the Fourth Sunday on the theme of the Good Samaritan and for the Fifth Sunday on Lazarus and the Rich Man. Here we come to the anomaly: the Second to the Fifth Weeks of Lent do not have hymnography corresponding to the Gospel of the lectionary, but instead have material relating to (2) the prodigal son; (3) the tax-collector and the Pharisee; (4) the good Samaritan; and (5) Lazarus and the rich man. The Second and Third Sundays are obviously doublets of the first and second Sundays of the pre-Lenten cycle, which also have hymnography corresponding to these Gospels.

Kniazeff explains these anomalies by appealing to the readings of the Jerusalem Church as found in the *Evangelarion of Sinai No. 210* (9th-10th centuries), which has a series of reading corresponding to these liturgical texts: the 1st Sunday, Matthew 6:1-15; 2nd Sunday, Luke 15:11-32; 3rd Sunday, Luke 18:9-14;

37 Ms. *Grottaferrata X*, 474, edited in T. Minisci, "Le preghiere opisthambonoi dei codici criptensi," *Bollettino della Badia Greca di Grottaferrata*, 3 (1949), 4.

38 *Ibid.*, 4-5.

39 G. Bonnet, "Le mystère de la Croix dans le carême orthodoxe," *Irenikon* 52(1979), 44-45.

40 Ms. *Grottaferrata X*, 474, edited in T. Minisci, *op. cit.*, 5-7.

4th Sunday, Luke 10:25-37; 5th Sunday, Luke 16:19-31.⁴¹ Kniazeff feels that these readings are “more expressive and appropriate to the penitential character of this period than the Constantinopolitan system in use today.”⁴² Perhaps this Jerusalem cycle influenced the Constantinople office, which adopted the office of the Holy Land to a great degree.⁴³ He concludes, “This usage disappeared later, and the Byzantine Church adopted the Gospel of St Mark for these Sundays, without doubt from the concern to represent also this Gospel, along with the three others, in its cycle of Sunday readings, in its fidelity to the principle of continuous scriptural reading.”⁴⁴ As support for this position, Kniazeff points out that the Luke 18:10-14 (Pre-Lent Preparatory 1) does not appear until *Evangelaria* of the eleventh century.⁴⁵ However, this is incorrect. In the Typicon of the Great Church of the tenth century, *Ms. Holy Cross 40*, it appears not as a preparatory Gospel, but merely as the Gospel of the 33rd Sunday after Pentecost⁴⁶ Besides, in no Byzantine typikon do we find the Palestinian Gospel series, but only the Markan pericopes for Lent. The Palestinian pericopes are for the Church in Jerusalem, and there is no evidence they were used in Constantinople.

Talley has a different opinion. He sees in the Markan series for Lent a remnant of the ancient post-Epiphany fast in Alexandria. This would require a series of six readings. Since January 1 was the beginning of the year, the Alexandrians would have begun with their primary gospel, Mark (the legend of the Markan apostolate), and would have concluded with Mark 10:32-45, which contained the apocryphal secret gospel of the raising of the youth of Beth-

41 Kniazeff, *op. cit.*, 231-233.

42 *Ibid.*

43 Miguel Arranz, S.J., “Les grandes étapes de la liturgie byzantine: Palestine-Byzance-Russie. Essai d’aperçu historique,” in *Liturgie de l’église particulière et liturgie de l’église universelle* (Conférences Saint-Serge 1975), (Edizioni Liturgiche, Rome, 1976), particularly pp. 45-47.

44 *Ibid.* 233.

45 *Op. cit.*, 228.

46 Ed. Juan Mateos (OCA 166, Rome, 1963), 240r, p. 166.

any,⁴⁷ and baptisms. The framework for this can be found in the Byzantine lectionary today, which has Mark 1:1-8 (the beginning of the Gospel of Mark) on the Sunday before January 6 (Epiphany) and the Gospel of Mark 10:32-45 on the fifth (last) Sunday of Lent, with the canonical parallel (John 11:1-45, the raising of Lazarus at Bethany) to the secret Gospel on the following Saturday.⁴⁸ The primitive Alexandrian Fast would have *followed* Epiphany, while the Constantinopolitan Fast preceded Pascha! This still leaves some questions unanswered: 1) why a 16-week Saturday-Sunday cycle for both Matthew and Luke and only a 12-week Weekday cycle? 2) Why does the hymnography for Lent not correspond to the Markan Gospels? 3) Why do the last three Lenten Sunday Gospels of Mark emphasize the predictions of the Passion if the original Markan cycle followed Epiphany?

I think that to answer these questions adequately will require more hard data. Question (1) can be answered if we assume that the whole course of Weekday reading was conceived at once, on the basis of the preexisting Saturday-Sunday cycle. In the Saturday-Sunday cycle, then, you would have 16 weeks each for Matthew and Luke and six weeks for the shorter Mark. Since the Divine Liturgy was prohibited during the weekdays of Lent, the Weekday cycle compressed the reading of Matthew and Luke to 12 weeks, and filled in the remainder from Mark. This would indicate a separate origin for the different cycles: the Saturday-Sunday cycle would be in place first, and it would be an amalgam of the Jerusalem order and the Alexandrian order (Mark during Lent). The Weekday cycle would be built upon this basis, with the displacement of Mark from Lent. This might make sense of question (2). The hymnography would come from the Antiochian and Hagiopolite traditions, and would not correspond to the Markan Alexandrian gospels. This does not explain (3), except to hypothesize

47 The Mar Saba Clementine fragment. Cf. Morton Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge, MA, 1973).

48 Thomas Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1986), 210-213.

that the Byzantines took the basic concept of the reading of Mark, and then adapted it to the pre-Paschal Lent. The Alexandrian Mark 10:32-45 would have been read on the eve of the fortieth day after Theophany, the day for baptisms, while the Byzantines put it on the last Sunday. At present, we can only formulate hypotheses, with the caution that liturgical history does not always follow straight, logical lines. Velkovska has noted, in regard to the dating of the lectionary, that "such a layering into periods is therefore a bit too simplified, given that, e.g., it does not take into account the Eastern influences on the Byzantine system, in general of primary importance in the formation of the whole rite of Constantinople, and to be studied according to the method of *liturgie comparée*."⁴⁹

The Paschal season also has particular Gospel readings. The first three Sundays present readings of a resurrectional character. The Gospel on Pascha itself is the beginning of the continuous reading of John (1:1-17), but the Vigil Liturgy for this day contains the resurrection story of St Matthew (28:1-20), concluding the reading of the passion of St Matthew during the Liturgies of Holy Week. In practice, this Vigil Liturgy is often celebrated on Holy Saturday morning, a usage that it is hoped will be discouraged. The Sunday after Pascha naturally recounts the appearance of our Lord to the Apostle Thomas on the eighth day. The third Sunday of the Pentecostarion has the story of the resurrection according to St Mark. The other resurrection stories are read either at Matins on Sunday Morning or on Ascension Thursday. On Monday after Thomas Sunday, the first Miracle at Cana was read. In Constantinople, this was a local feast of the God-bearer at the Church of Chalkoprateia.⁵⁰

The remaining Sundays of the Pentecostarion also have special themes. The fourth to sixth Sundays were designed to accompany the *mystagogia* on the rites of initiation that had been celebrated on Easter itself. The remaining two Sundays of this period celebrate the memory of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicea and the De-

49 "Lo studio dei lezionari bizantini," *Ecclesia Orans* 13 (1996), 259.

50 In *Le Typicon de la Grande Église*, ed. By Juan Mateos (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 166, 1963), Vol. II, p. 110.

scent of the Holy Spirit. The season of Pentecost (lasting fifty days from Pascha) was the most joyful time of the Church year. It was the period that followed the celebration of the Pascha-Resurrection and the baptism of new Christians. It was a time of a deepening entrance into the mysteries of the Church. The Divine Liturgy was celebrated daily and a system of Gospel readings was formulated at an early date. This may have been the most ancient part of the lectionary.⁵¹ The Gospel of John, with its theological christology and mystical character was most appropriate for this part of the church year, particularly the post-baptismal catechesis of the third, fourth and fifth Sundays.

From this we see that a period of about nineteen weeks, or about one-third of the calendar year, is occupied by readings that are integrally connected with the office of the Byzantine Church. On nearly all of these Sundays, the hymns and canons correspond to the Gospel themes. The only exceptions to this rule are the second, fourth and fifth Sundays of Lent. There are also traces of the Gospel of the Publican and Pharisee on the Third Sunday of Lent (the Ambon Prayer at the Liturgy and the Doxasticheron at the Lauds of Matins). The period from the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee until the Sunday of All Saints after Pentecost could not be changed without a corresponding major revision in the office itself.

The Sundays of the periods of Matthew (Pentecost to September 14) and Luke (September 14 to Lent) present a different problem. The hymnography of the Divine Office does not correspond in any way to the Gospels of these Saturdays or Sundays. Instead, the office follows the system of eight tones, repeated as often as necessary. Saturday is dedicated to the memory of the dead and to All Saints (emphasizing the martyrs) and Sunday to the Resurrection of our Lord. The resurrection Gospels read at Matins on Sunday do not follow the system of eight tones, but their own

⁵¹ Harry Merwyn Buck, Jr., "The Johannine Lessons in the Greek Gospel Lectionary," *Studies in the Lectionary Text of the Greek New Testament* II, 4 (University of Chicago Press, 1958), 1-2.

cycle of eleven weeks, and the exaposteilarion and doxasticheron at the Lauds correspond to these gospels.

The Byzantine Gospel Lectionary is divided into sections rather than chapters and verses. Matthew contains 116 sections and Luke 114. The periods of Matthew and Luke both last 16 weeks. If we exclude the four special readings of Matthew (three preparatory to Lent and All Saints) and the two of Luke (preparatory to Lent), this leaves 32 sections of both that comprise the selective continuous readings of these two Gospels on Saturday and Sunday. Though Saturday was at one time of equal significance with Sunday, the liturgical importance of Saturday has greatly declined in the Western world. One question that might be asked is whether the Saturday and Sunday system of readings were independent of one another or composed from the same source. The Chicago studies concluded that the Saturday and Sunday readings of Luke were independent, and that the Matthew series had kinships with the Byzantine and Alexandrian texts for Saturday and with the Caesarean and Byzantine texts for Sunday.⁵²

The question that now needs to be posed is whether there were any criteria for the selection of these Saturday and Sunday Gospels, or were they simply chosen at random? Since the infancy and passion narratives are both read at special times in the Church year (predominantly from Matthew in the Byzantine Church), I felt these should be left out of consideration in trying to decide if there was a prejudice for a particular kind of Gospel. Likewise the texts concerning John the Baptist,⁵³ the accounts of the Transfiguration,⁵⁴ the denunciations of the Scribes and Pharisees,⁵⁵ and the entrance into Jerusalem⁵⁶ are not read on Saturdays or Sunday. Nar-

52 A. Wikgren, *Chicago Studies in the Greek Lectionary of the New Testament in: Biblical and Patristic Studies in Memory of R. P. Casey* (Freiburg im Br., 1963), 100-101 and 106-107, as reported by Elena Velkovska, "Lo studio dei lezionari bizantini," in *Ecclesia Orans* 13 (1996), 255-256.

53 Matthew, sections 40, 41 and 57; Mark, section 24; Luke, sections 10, 31, 32, 41.

54 Matthew, section 71; Mark, section 38; Luke, section 45.

55 Matthew, sections 94, 95 and 96; Mark, section 57; Luke, sections 60, 61 and 62.

However, Matthew, section 93 is read on the 14th Saturday.

56 Matthew, section 82; Mark, section 49; Luke, sections 96 and 97.

rative sections are of little importance in the Sunday cycle. This becomes more evident when it is realized that two of the three narrative sections employed are the parallel accounts of the call of the first disciples, and are the first Sunday Gospels read in the Matthean and Lukan periods. The final narrative section is read the last Sunday of the period of Luke. It retells the story of Jesus' encounter with Zaccheus, and has received a quasi-acceptance as one of the preparatory Sundays for Lent, even though there is nothing in the office to complement this Gospel. More narrative sections are chosen for Saturday, but still much less than the general average. Of course, some of this can be explained by the reading of narrative sections on the corresponding feast commemorating the Gospel event. A large block of narrative is read for the infancy, theophany and passions feasts, but these have already been excluded from consideration, along with the Feast of the Encounter (February 2), the Annunciation (March 25), and the Holy Cross (September 14). However, merely the addition of the Sunday after Theophany (the first preaching of Jesus), the Transfiguration (August 6), the Beheading of John the Baptist (August 29), and the Common for the Mother of God would be enough to bring this type of reading in line with its general distribution in the Gospels.

Leaving the narrative sections out of consideration, we are left with sections of the teachings of Jesus, teachings about Jesus, parables, and miracles. Of course, some sections contain miracles with a teaching, or teachings with narrative, and it could be successfully argued that the miracle stories are, after all, narrative. However, a question that people often ask, in a *prima facie* way, not delving deeply into biblical criticism, is whether the miracle stories predominate on Saturday and Sunday? This is a simple question, and I do not want to take a social stand: namely, that miracle stories are less appreciated by moderns,⁵⁷ or that miracle stories are less true or less important than teachings and parables.

57 In a Gallup Poll taken in 1989, 82% of Americans believed that "even today, miracles are performed by the power of God." John Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, Vol 2: Mentor, Message and Miracles* (New York: Doubleday, 1994). 520.

In fact, virtually all miracle stories are read in the Saturday or Sunday cycles. Of the 17 miracle stories in Matthew, eight are read on Sunday and five are read on Saturday. One of the remaining miracle stories, the man with the withered hand (section 45) is read on Saturday in both the Markan and Lukan cycles. Of the 17 miracles stories in Mark, only two are read on Saturday and two on Sunday. However, Mark, because it is read during Great Lent, has considerably fewer Saturday and Sundays available. Most of the remaining miracle stories are read on Saturday or Sunday in the Matthean or Lukan cycles. The only miracle story not found in the other Gospels, the Blind Man at Bethsaida (section 34), is read on the 30th Tuesday. Three of the miracles stories with parallels in Matthew and Luke are also read in these Gospels on Saturday or Sunday, and one, the healing of a deaf man (section 31) is read on the 4th Saturday of Great Lent, but in the Matthew cycle, its only parallel, on the 7th Friday. Of the 16 miracle stories in Luke, six are read on Sundays, including the raising of the son of the widow of Nain (section 30) and the cure of the stooped woman (section 71), which have no parallels in Matthew or Mark. Six miracle stories are also read on Saturday, including the man with dropsy (section 74), which has no parallel in Matthew or Mark. Of the four remaining miracle stories, three have parallels from Matthew or Mark that are read on a Saturday or Sunday. Even in John, of the seven miracle stories, four are read on a Saturday or Sunday. The story of the multiplication of the loaves is read on a special day, out of sequence, on the Wednesday of the final day of the feast of Mid-Pentecost, as are the miracles at Cana, on the second and third Mondays of the Pentecostarion. The only miracle stories not read on Saturday or Sunday, therefore, are the story of many healings, a short passage in Matthew (section 63), the healings at Gennesaret in Matthew (section 60) and Mark (section 27), and the calming of the sea, in all three synoptics (Matthew, section 27; Mark, section 18; and Luke, section 37). Perhaps the first two are omitted because of their brevity and generality, and the calming of the sea because of its affinities with the story of the walking on water.

Miracle stories may have been especially preferred on Sundays because of the theme of this day, the resurrection of our Lord. Miracles are seen as a breaking in of the divine power in the lives of all whom Jesus touched, raising them up in their illnesses and prefiguring the final and great sign of Jonah. Many of the miracles of Jesus also took place on the Sabbath, challenging the strictures of the Jewish law. The fourth century fathers often stressed the passages of the Gospel that revealed the newness of the Christian message in comparison to the Old Law. Whatever the reason for the emphasis on miracle stories, they are included at the expense of the teaching and parable sections.

The continuous readings on both Saturdays and Sundays are interrupted for three feasts during the Church year: Christmas, Epiphany and the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Each of these feasts is solemnized by the lectionary readings on the Saturdays and Sundays preceding the feast. These readings are taken from the narrative sections of the Infancy/Theophany part of the Gospels for Christmas and Theophany, from Matthew except for the Saturday before Christmas (Luke 13:18-29), and the Sunday before Theophany (Mark 1:1-8). The second Sunday before Christmas is also solemnized as the "Sunday of the Forefathers." Winkler has shown that this Sunday is a duplication of the Sunday before Christmas, called "of the Holy Fathers," since the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 25:1-25) was read.⁵⁸ The Gospel for the Sunday of the Forefathers (Luke 14:16-24) is actually taken from the Sunday course reading of St Luke (the 28th Sunday after Pentecost).

The Possible Reform of the Gospel Lectionary

There is, at times, a certain dissatisfaction with some aspects of the Gospel lectionary, for example, that the teachings of our Lord are not given enough attention on Sundays. Under the pressure of modern life styles, the community experience of liturgy has become more limited. The parochial offices of Vespers and Matins

⁵⁸ Gabriele Winkler, "Die Interzessionen der Chrysostomusanaphora in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 36:2 (1970), 316-319.

are often less attended, and weekday feasts are less popular. Today the most important real contact with the Gospel is the Sunday Liturgy and homily, which exposes the average faithful to only a small part of the New Testament. Even on Sundays, there are many repetitions of parallel gospels: the story of the expulsion of demons into the pigs (Fifth and Twenty-Third Sundays after Pentecost); the story of the paralytic whose sins are forgiven (Sixth Sunday after Pentecost and Second Sunday of Lent); the story of the blind man (men) on the roadside (the Seventh and Thirty-First Sundays after Pentecost); the story of the Possessed Boy (the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost and the Fourth Sunday of Lent); the story of the Rich Young Man (the Twelfth and Thirtieth Sundays after Pentecost); and the story of the king's banquet (the Fourteenth and Twenty-Eighth (Sunday of the Forefathers) Sundays after Pentecost). The Saturday cycle is also a rich source of Gospel proclamation, but this day has become virtually aliturgical. For these reasons, some would hold that some reevaluation of the Byzantine Gospel cycle is desirable. Some say that the purpose of the Sunday Gospel is not to teach, but to proclaim the power of the Lord. The Sunday cycle should be kept as it is, in the wisdom of tradition. I would tend to favor the first opinion, not to avoid miracle stories, but simply to open more of the whole message of the gospel in a liturgical setting, as a community of faith that feasts on the Word of God, as well as on His body and blood.

The Byzantine Lectionary is not compatible with the Western lectionaries, because for much of the year, the Gospel reading is integrated with the Divine Office. This connection cannot be broken without losing the meaning of many of the liturgical texts. This dimension of the liturgy should not be lost, even if it is only minimally experienced by the average faithful. In order to open more of the Gospel for the hearing of the faithful, it will be necessary to make a new arrangement of the continuous reading of the four Gospels while leaving intact those that are intimately bound with the Church year.

The Gospel sections during the periods of Matthew and Luke

could be reformed without distorting the character of the Church year. This would mean the abandonment of the criteria of the original arrangers in favor of the principle of opening as much of the whole Gospel text to the faithful as possible. Western lectionaries are now on a three-year cycle. To extend the reading of the Gospels over more than three years would, it seems to me, make the whole experience more ponderous. The traditional readings for Saturday and Sunday should also be respected and given a special place. Perhaps the best option to examine would be the reading of the present Saturday and Sunday cycles in a period of two years, eliminating the parallel passages that are repeated. The third year can then be composed of those gospel sections in Mark and John that are not read on Sunday. Some selection among the pericopes would be necessary. The decision as to which readings to be chosen must be made by the authorities of the Churches involved, as the presentation and proclamation of the Gospel are their most important responsibility.

The present cycle of thematic readings (19 weeks) of the year in this system would become an annual series of fixed readings. Therefore, the readings from the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee to the Sunday of All Saints would remain the same each year, because their Gospels are essentially connected with the hymnography of the Triodion and Pentecostarion. Consideration may be given to revising the Sunday readings of the Great Fast to agree with the hymnography of each Sunday, though this would cause difficulties with the preparatory Sundays of the Publican and Pharisee and the Prodigal Son. A final consideration might be the retention of the readings of the eighth and ninth weekends after Pentecost, which occur midway between All Saints and the Feast of the Holy Cross. These two weekends contain Gospels connected with the mystery of the Church: 1) Matthew 12:30-37 (about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and the fruit from good and bad trees); 2) Matthew 14:14-22 (Jesus feeds the five thousand); 3) Matthew 15:32-39 (Jesus feeds the four thousand); 4) Matthew 14:22-34 (Jesus walks on water to the boat caught in the

storm). There is no clear indication if these Sundays and Saturdays were special in the Matthean cycle, but the possibility requires some thought.⁵⁹

In conclusion, I would like to present a possible new cycle of Gospel readings, beginning with Pascha, which usually opens the Church year in the lectionaries: Pascha: John 1:1-17 (opening the continuous reading of John; the resurrection Gospel of Matthew is read at the Vigil Liturgy) Thomas Sunday: John 20:19-31

Sunday of the Myrrhbearers: Mark 15:43-16:8

Sunday of the Paralytic: John 5:1-15

Sunday of the Samaritan Woman: John 4:5-42

Sunday of the Man Born Blind: John 9:1-38

Sunday of the First Ecumenical Council: John 17:1-13

Pentecost: John 7:37-52 and 8:12

All Saints Sunday: Matthew 10:32-33, 37-38 and 19:27-30

Sundays from the Second Sunday after Pentecost to the Second Sunday before the Exaltation of the Cross:

continuous readings based on the traditional cycles,

First Year, Matthew Sunday

Second Year, Matthew Saturday

Third Year, a new cycle from Mark

Sunday before the Exaltation: John 3:13-17

(in alternate years, Matthew 10:37-11:1)

Sunday after the Exaltation, Mark 8:34-9:1

(in alternate years, John 8:21-30)

Sundays from the Second Sunday after the Exaltation of the Holy Cross to the Pre-Lenten period (excluding those Sundays before and after Christmas):

Continuous readings newly selected from the Four Gospels:

First Year, Luke Sunday

Second Year, Luke Saturday

⁵⁹ The Armenian Church, while not having the same series of Gospels, recognizes a division at this point. Possibly based on the cycle of eight tones, the Sundays after Pentecost are numbered to eight, and the following Sundays are called "after the Transfiguration."

Third Year, a new cycle from the gospel of St John

Sunday before Christmas (Dec. 18-24): Matthew 1:1-25

Sunday after Christmas: Matthew 2:13-23

Sunday before Theophany: Mark 1:1-8

Sunday after Theophany: Matthew 4:12-17⁶⁰

Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee: Luke 18:10-14

Sunday of the Prodigal Son: Luke 15:11-32

Meatfare Sunday: Matthew 25:31-46

Cheesefare Sunday: Matthew 6:14-21

First Sunday of Lent: John 1:43-51

Second Sunday of Lent: Mark 2:1-12

Third Sunday of Lent: Mark 8:34-9:1 (repeats the Gospel of the Sunday after the Exaltation)

Fourth Sunday of Lent: Mark 9:17-31

Fifth Sunday of Lent: Mark 10:32-45

Palm Sunday: John 12:1-18.

It is hoped only that such a cycle of readings can help the ultimate purpose for selecting Gospels: to proclaim the fullness of God's word in the preaching of the Church. The aim of such a reform is pastoral, to open more fully the richness of the Gospel to the faithful attending church on Sunday. It is crucial that all hear the Gospel, as St Maximus the Confessor observed, "...consider again how the soul passes beyond this and concentrates on the one and only summit, the holy Gospel, which collects these principles together into one and in which preexist in one form all the principles both of Providence and of existing things in a single burst of meaning."⁶¹

⁶⁰ Possibly Matthew 4:1-11 in alternate years.

⁶¹ St Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogia* 23, translated by George Berthold, *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 205.



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