Stay-five Orthodox women from the three western provinces of Canada (British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan) enjoyed another beautiful weekend in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains September 16–18, 2016, at the Entheos Retreat Centre, Alberta. Of these, there were ten mother/daughter pairs, two matushkas, one presbyter and one abbot. Women from twenty different Orthodox parishes attended, and two from Roman Catholic churches. Eleven women were first-time attendees; they were given special stickers on their name tags to help identify them, so we could make them feel welcome.

Entheos Retreat Centre is located 20 kilometers west of Calgary on the country bordering the Elbow River. I have been told many times that we are so fortunate to have this facility available to us, as it is unique. I have been told many times that we are so fortunate to have this facility available to us, as it is unique. I have been told many times that we are so fortunate to have this facility available to us, as it is unique. I have been told many times that we are so fortunate to have this facility available to us, as it is unique. I have been told many times that we are so fortunate to have this facility available to us, as it is unique. I have been told many times that we are so fortunate to have this facility available to us, as it is unique. I have been told many times that we are so fortunate to have this facility available to us, as it is unique. I have been told many times that we are so fortunate to have this facility available to us, as it is unique. 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It is true that this kind of language appears less scandalous when considered within the context of Byzantine rhetoric, and that the pattern is set by the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible (for example, Micah 6:1–5; Amos 2:9–12). Today, however, these invectives are deeply disturbing, especially since rhetoric of this kind has at times been part of the explosive mix that led to violence against Jews. As a matter of fact, “the Easter season was the traditional time for fights between Christians and Jews, which always had the potential to turn into pogroms,” so that “traditionally the worst time for pogroms was Easter.”

What do we make of all this? If this is how we worship, do we also believe in this manner? Clearly, a discussion is necessary.

HYMNS OF HOLY WEEK AND THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

The roots of Christian hymnography lie in the very distant past. Consider the following passages, taken from Byzantine hymns of the Passion and from the pastoral homily of Saint Melito of Sardis, dated to the third quarter of the Second Century:

The Chrestological proclamation clearly follows a similar pattern in Melito’s rhythmic prose and in the later Byzantine hymns: the lofty identity of the Lord Jesus is united in a paradoxical way with the humility of the New Testament events.

Thus says the Lord to the Jews: O My people, what have I done to you, and how have you repaid Me? Instead of manna, you have given me gall, instead of water, vinegar.

Today the Jews nailed to the Cross the Lord who decided the sea with a rod and led them through the wilderess. Today they pierced with a lance the side of Him who for their sake smote Egypt with plagues. They gave Him gall to drink, who raised down manna on food.

With Moses’ rod the Jews hasted them on dry ground through the Red Sea, yet they nailed Thee to the Cross, Thou hast sucked them with honey from the rock, yet they gave Thee that gall.

Be not desired, ye Jews: for this is He who saved you in the sea and fed you in the wilderness.

We have here no less than the earliest Chrestology of the Church—Kyrioi ethnos, “Jesus is Lord”—(1 Corinthians 12:3; Romans 10:9; Philippians 2:11)—wrapped in the beauty of poetry, and consumed liturgically. Scholars have pointed out the extraordinary diffusion of these kinds of compositions in Syriac, Greek, and Latin liturgical usage. The venerable Christian tradition popularized by the hymns is rooted in the even older tradition of prophetic reproaches of Israel (for example, Amos 2:9–12, Micah 6:1–5; compare also Nehemiah 9:26 for the theme of Israel killing the prophets).

The theological, liturgical, and pastoral considerations that are brought to bear on the hymnographic material must consider the larger context of the Church’s growth from a charismatic, egalitarian, theologically innovative, and administratively schismatic group within first-century Judaism into the increasingly Gentile reality of the Second Century. Indeed, during the early decades of the Christian movement, the context for the vitriolic anti-Judaism found in the Hebrew Bible, in some apocalyptic writings of the Second Temple era, and in the New Testament (for example, “brood of vipers,” “serpent of Jacob,” “sons of the devil”) shifted gradually from harsh intra-Jewish polemics to polemics between the overwhelmingly Gentile Church and “the Jews.” The observations of a prominent scholar of early Christianity, Oscar Skarsaune, are particularly to the point:

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

In all these hymns one encounters the same reading of biblical theophanies, and, by way of consequence, the same type of “YHWH Chrestology,” or “Chrestology of Divine Identity” as some scholars refer to it. Yet the anti-Jewish polemic is largely absent! In my opinion, this absence demonstrates that the anti-Jewish rhetoric is not essential to the theological message of the hymns.

THE VERY HEART OF OUR TRADITION

The Chrestological interpretation of Old Testament theophanies, which lies at the heart of much Holy Week hymnography, constitutes one of the most potent, endur- ing, and versatile “ingredients” in the gradual crystallization of a distinct exegesis, doctrine, liturgy, and spirituality from the earliest stages of apostolic Christian identity and throughout the first millennium of the common era. The New Testament often alludes to the divine Name (Exodus 3:14, epē tēn hēmōn, Exodus 6:3, Kyrioi), and proclaims Jesus Christ as “Lord” (Kyrioi)—obvi- ously a reference to the Old Testament “Lord” (Kyrioi in the LXX) seen by the protheses. This sort of “YHWH Chrestology” has been traced back to the New Testament. It figured significantly in catechetical manuals such as Saint Irenaeus’ Proof of the Apostolic Preaching, and was not absent from Clement of Alexandria’s elementary work, the Instructor. It contributed significantly to Justin Martyr’s articulation of the Christian faith in opposition to the emerging rabbinic Judaism, and was part of the anti-Gnostic arsenal deployed by Saint Irenaeus and Tertullian as well as in the anti-modalistic argument of Tertullian, Hippolytus of Rome, and later writers. The notion that the “Lord” who spoke to the patriarch and prophet is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ was, by the end of the first millennium, inextricably linked to Christianity as performed and experienced in liturgy. It irresistibly commanded the gaze of the iconographer, the ready pen of the hymnographer, and the amazing tales of the hagiographer. It finds its visual counterpart in numerous Byzantine icons and manuscript illuminations; and in fourteenth-century Byzantium, it was yet again the chrestological exegesis of biblical theophanies that provided the exegetical infrastructure for the
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“The Master has been profaned, God has been murdered, the King of Israel has been despoiled.”

The Christological proclamation clearly follows a similar pattern in Melito’s rhythmic prose and in the later Byzantine hymns: the lofty identity of the Lord, unveiled to the worshippers by recourse to biblical statements about the God of Israel, is united in a paradoxical way with the humility of the New Testament events. Thus says the Lord to the Jews: O My people, what have I done to you, and how have you repaid Me? Instead of manna, you have given me gall, instead of water, vinegar. …

“Today the Jews nailed to the Cross the Lord who saved Jews in the sea and fed eggs in the wilderness. Today they pierced with a lance the side of Him who for their sake smote Egypt with plagues. They gave Him gall to drink, who raised down man na on food. With Moses’ rod Thou hast led them on dry ground through the Red Sea, yet they nailed Thee to the Cross; Thou hast sucked them with honey from the rock, yet they gave Thee that gall. Be not desirous, ye Jews: for this is He who saved Jews in the sea and fed eggs in the wilderness.”

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The theological, liturgical, and pastoral considerations that are brought to bear on the hymnographic material must consider the larger context of the Church’s growth from a charismatic, egalitarian, theologically immature movement to a Christological exegesis of biblical theophanies, which lies at the heart of much Holy Week hymnography, constitutes one of the most potent, enduring, and versatile “ingredients” in the gradual crystallization of a distinct exegesis, doctrine, liturgy, and spirituality from the earliest stages of apostolic Christianity and throughout the first millennium of the common era. The New Testament often alludes to the divine Name (Exodus 5:14, epi tons bois ein, Exodus 6:3, Kyrié), and proclaims Jesus Christ as “Lord” (Kyrié) – obvi ously a reference to the Old Testament “Lord” (Kyrié in the LXX) seen by the prophets. This sort of “YHWH Christology” has been traced back to the New Testament. It figured significantly in catherchetical manuals such as Saint Irenaeus’ Proof of the Apostolic Preaching, and was not absent from Clement of Alexandria’s elementary work, the Instruction. It contributed significantly to Justin Martyr’s articulation of the Christian faith in opposition to the emerging rabbinic Judaism, and was part of the anti-Gnostic arsenal deployed by Saint Irenaeus and Terr tunian as well as in the anti-modalistic argument of Tertul lian, Hippolytus of Rome, and later writers. The notion that the “Lord” who spoke to the patriarchs and prophet is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ was, by the end of the first millennium, inextricably linked to Christianity as performed and experienced in liturgy. It irresistibly commanded the gaze of the iconographer, the ready pen of the hymnographer, and the amazing tales of the hagiographer. Its visual counterpart in numerous Byzantine icons and manuscript illuminations; and in fourteenth-century Byzantium, it was yet again the christological exegesis of biblical theophanies that provided the esegetical infrastructure for the
The heavy anti-Jewish rhetoric in some Byzantine hymns raises serious ethical and pastoral problems today. Must non-Orthodox churches have sought to address these concerns by way of liturgical reform. Since the 1980s, the Reproaches are optional in U.S. Catholic parishes, and are usually replaced by other texts, such as Psalms. In Lutheran and other Western Catholic communities have tacitly replaced “Jews” and “Hebrews” with “evil men,” “sinners,” and so forth. A revised version used by Missouri Synod Lutherans replaces all reference to Exodus with verses such as “I have raised you up out of the prison house of sin and death,” “I have redeemed you from the house of bondage.” “I have conquered all your foes,” “I have fed you with my Word and refreshed you with living water.” A Methodist hymnal recommends adding several new verses (for example, “I grafted you into the tree of my chosen Israel, and you turned on them with persecution and mass murder.” I made you joint heirs with them of my covenants, but you made them scapegoats for your own guilt”) and suggests the creation of a contemporary version, using other examples of human abuse of God’s gifts.

Rewriting or eliminating the problematic phraseology of some hymns can itself be deeply problematic if not done in consultation with the ecclesiial body in such cases. The first “fruits” of the new creation (1 Cor 15:20), the “new” or “heavenly Adam” (cf. 1 Cor 15:45 ff.; Rom 5:12 ff.), the beginning of the world to come (Col 1:18). Yet, at least in Orthodoxy, it would be most wrong to emphasize this change, these altered circumstances, as denoting rupture pure and simple with the Israel of the patriarchs, kings, and prophets. True, far and away the majority of Israel did not accept the change, and they carry on to the present apart from the Church, but I would maintain that that separation was and is not so much between Church and Israel, as between two separate and discrete entities, as it is a schism within Israel, a schism which, if we are to believe the Apostle, God — and only God — will heal at the end of days (see Romans 9–11). Christians and Jewish polemics, both in the early centuries of the Church and in more recent times, may have often obscured this fundamental linkage and kinship, but they could not be erased. It is built into the earliest documents of Christianity and reflected continuously thereafter in Orthodox literature and liturgy. Thus for St. Paul, as I read him, the discussion at issue in epistles such as Galatians and, especially, Romans centers not on the rejection of Israel, but rather, through the Messiah, on the expansion of Israel’s boundaries to include the nations.

Liturgical Reform with Faith and Love

If and when liturgical corrections are to be applied, we would do well to avoid some of the well-meaning but, in my view, theologically inept solutions adopted by our separated brethren in particular. Specifically, it is of the utmost importance to avoid replacing concrete references to God’s presence in the Old Testament (Passover, the Law at Sinai, the manna, the water from the rock) because this would dilute the Christological proclamation of many of whom remain the strong pro-Israel convictions of their earlier (pre-Orthodox) Christian formation. For all of us there is much to rediscover from the mind of the Church, starting perhaps with Saint Paul’s 1 Thessalonians, among others: “God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” If we deplore the actions of Judas, we do so not with vindictive self-righteousness but conscious al- ways of our own guilt. In general, all the passages in the Triodion that seem to be directed against the Jews should be understood in the same way. When the Triodion denounces those who rejected Christ and delivered Him to death, we recognize that these words apply not only to others, but to ourselves: for have we not betrayed the Saviour many times in our hearts and crucified Him afar off? If we have not betrayed the Saviour many times in our hearts and crucified Him afar off?

I have shown above that the core Christological interpretation of Old Testament theophanies is present in hymns in which anti-Jewish rhetoric is absent. I would add that the anti-Jewish overtones are therefore not essential to the theological message of the hymns. Liturgical reform might proceed in accordance with the criterion of maintaining this theological message (that Christ is the Lord of the patriarchs and prophets, the Lawgiver on Sinai, the enthroned Glory) while excising the anti-Jewish “boutries.” In some cases, it might be helpful to switch to the passive voice; in others, to deliberately change the address from “we” to “believers” or “orthodox.” One ought not decontextualize the conversa-

tion at issue in epistles such as Galatians and, especially, Romans centers not on the rejection of Israel, but rather, through the Messiah, on the expansion of Israel’s boundaries to include the nations. Rather than excise this most ancient and effective Christology by way of liturgical reform, it is imperative to emphasize that, far from warranting any sort of anti-

Judaic, the prophetic reproaches against ancient Israel are actualized liturgically so as to address Christians, by calling them to recognize just Who it is that is facing them, to that end, so to speak, to summon themselves, “again and again,” to Christ as “the Lord,” the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the king of Israel. Once their Chris-
tological core is recognized as such, it is much easier to discern the essential ethical implications of the hymns. By “ethical implications” I have in mind the approach suggested by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware:
Hysterical controversy. It is clear, then, that the eugenesis of biblical theophanies, displayed so prominently in Byzantine festal hymns, is not simply one strand of tradition among others, but the very heart of Christian tradition. It goes without saying that today’s Orthodox Christians are to handle the spiritual treasure handed over to them with care and devotion; but, like the Sabbath, worship was made for man, not the other way around.

SOME PASTORAL AND LITURGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The heavy anti-Jewish rhetoric in some Byzantine hymns raises serious ethical and pastoral problems today. Most non-Orthodox churches have sought to address these concerns by way of liturgical reform. Since the 1980s, the Reaparouchis are Optional in U.S. Catholic parishes, and are usually replaced by other texts, such as Psalm 22. Some Byzantine-rite Catholic communities have tacitly replaced “Jews” and “Hebrews” with “evil men,” “sinners,” and so forth. A revised version used by Missouri Synod Lutherans replaces all reference to Exodus with verses such as “I have raised you up out of the prison house of sin and death,” “I have redeemed you with verses such as “I have raised you up out of the prison house of sin and death,” “I have redeemed you for St. Paul, as I read him, the discussion at issue in epitaphs such as Galatians and, especially, Romans centers not on the rejection of Israel, but rather, through the Messiah, on the expansion of Israel’s boundaries to include the nations.

LITURGICAL REFORM WITH FAITH AND LOVE

If and when liturgical corrections are to be applied, we would do well to avoid some of the well-meaning but, in my view, theologically inept solutions adopted by our separated brethren. In particular, it is of the utmost importance to avoid replacing concrete references to God’s presence in the Old Testament (Passover, the sea and fed them in the wilderness) with abstract any conversation related to Orthodox Christian-Jewish relations does, for example, bear in mind that the anti-Jewish overtones are therefore not essential to the theological message of the hymns. Liturgical reform might proceed in accordance with the criterion of maintaining this theological message (that Christ is the Lord of the patriarchs and prophets, the Lawgiver on Sinai, the enthroned Glory) while excising the anti-Jewish “boutriches.” In some cases, it might be helpful to switch to the passive voice; in others, to deliberately change the address from “you” to “believers” or “our separated brethren.”

One ought not decontextualize the conversational references to Jewish people as belonging to the “Hebrew race” by dictatorial states whose inhabitants claimed allegiance to the Christian faith. (After all, many of us know only too well, from our own tragic histories, what it means to be labeled as an enemy of the State and targeted for re-education or extermination.) By the same token, we must have the necessary sensitivity for Orthodox Christians whose relationship with Judaism is shaped by the experience of being marginalized and oppressed within the State of Israel. Michael Azar – a New Testament scholar and Orthodox deacon – articulates this point very well:

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suggesting that "to choose to remove negative references against Jews is not far from this…".

The time has come for the Orthodox Church to excise the anti-Jewish animus lurking at the door, intent on defiling our worship and devouring our souls (Gen 4:7). I close with the very pertinent words of Father Eugene Pentiuc, a scholar directly involved in teaching and advising Orthodox seminarians in the U.S. and the Eastern Orthodox Tradition:

The Orthodox Church is a whole, and especially and more effectively the hierarchs, should revise and discard anti-Judaic statements and allusions from hymnography and from liturgy itself, as a matter of fact. The poetry of Eastern Orthodox hymnology is too sublime to be marred by such low sentiments:

The translation used in the Antiochian Archdiocese has "the He-man of the Law".

The Word 19