“It is time for the Lord to make”: Thoughts on translating liturgy with an “I” toward being made

Pr. Silviu N. Bunta

—keynote talk at the International workshop “The Lived Byzantine Liturgy between Local Context and Standardized Tradition” at the University of Vienna, Austria (January 25, 2024)—

Allow me to begin this contribution to our workshop with some observations on how I see the Byzantine liturgy.[1] I do not wish to steer our focus away from the issue of translation, but my points on translation will be informed by what I think the Byzantine liturgy is. And this must be prefaced by a disclaimer: I am not a liturgist, but a researcher of the scriptures. Nevertheless, about ten years ago I was emboldened to translate the Byzantine liturgy—specifically the liturgical books of the monastery of Simonopetra and the Psalter—by a sense that from the perspective of this liturgy, even in all its fluctuation, itself and the scriptures are one and the same thing. In most of my translation efforts I have had collaborators, especially my friend Fr. Matthew-Peter Butrie and His Eminence Archbishop Alexander (Golitzin), my bishop and former professor and academic adviser in my studies of early Christian mysticism. I know that they, too, see things quite similarly to the way I do, if not even identically, but I can only speak here for me. And my personal translation philosophy and practices have always drawn on my sense that the Byzantines who gave us the liturgy saw scripture and liturgy as one and the same thing.

The scriptural character of the Byzantine liturgy has been highlighted for many decades and studies on this are being published every year.[2] In a book which will appear soon, I am arguing that the Byzantine liturgy in all its dimensions—words, architecture, gestures, times, orientation, iconography, etc.—presents itself as the real time of the scriptures.[3] In worship, it is not that the participant brings to mind things of old, informs himself of what the scriptures say, or even re-actualizes the past and anticipates a distant eschatological future. On the contrary, from the vantage point of the Byzantine worship the scriptures have no life of their own as a past reality. Rather, there is no past; in the liturgical here-and-now, history and space

---

[1] In this paper I use the following abbreviations for English liturgical translations:

AA–*The Liturgikon* (4th edition; Grand Rapids: Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, 2010);

Dmi–*The Priest’s Service Book* (trans. Archbishop Dmitri of Dallas and the South, Orthodox Church in America, archived online at https://web.archive.org/web/20070629010630/http:/www.sspeterpaul.org/priest.html, accessed on November 24, 2023);

GOaus–translations of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia (Sidney: St. Andrew’s Press, different years);

GOusa–translations of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, on their website;

OCA2014–*Hieratikon Vol I: Office Book for Priest and Deacon* (South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon’s Monastery, 2014);

OCA2017–*Hieratikon Vol II: Liturgy Book for Priest and Deacon* (South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon’s Monastery, 2018);

Thya–*The Divine Liturgy of our father among the saints John Chrysostom* (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[2] Stefanos Alexopoulos, “The Use of the Bible in Byzantine Liturgical Texts and Services,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in Orthodox Christianity*, ed. Eugen Pentiuc (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022) 243-260.

[3] *The Life of Our Fathers. An Introduction to the Bible in the Orthodox Church* (preface by Michael Legaspi; Yonkers: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, forthcoming).

are exposed *and* increasingly removed—as one goes through the liturgical experience—as mere veils over the perennial singular and sudden reality which is Christ; and in this liturgical reality one lives all the scriptures and the entire life of the world at once.[4] The liturgy is the actual space-time of the scriptures and of all reality. It seems to me that this is true to the point that, if we ceased to serve vespers, the rite which contains the creation of the world, the world would not have been created in the first place. In a converging move, recent studies on the Byzantine sacred space and iconography have pointed out that these are not conceived as flat message-givers, but rather as spaces of identity-unraveling.[5]

What does this mean for the liturgical text itself, especially when it is approached with concerns for meaning? Allow me to return once more to the scriptures. Others before me have drawn attention to the fact that the principal questions which we tend to ask of the scriptures—"what does this text mean?" and "what is the method by which I arrive at what it means?"—depart from the questions and concerns governing the earliest interpretations,[6] which—it must be pointed out—are also the interpretations that have generated the Byzantine liturgy. These can be summarily gathered under the question "how is this text-space containing and transforming my life?" I have already argued elsewhere that the self-referential hermeneutic of this radically different question comes out of the scriptures themselves in one bidirectional move: the scriptures do this experiential-referential hermeneutic in the manner in which they interpret themselves, in which later texts interpret earlier texts or traditions, and also in the manner in which they want to be interpreted. The first, retrospective direction has already been noted in recent scholarship and has been aptly called "inner exegesis." I proposed that we call the prospective direction "outer exegesis."

It seems to me that *the liturgical text, too,* reveals the same referential outer hermeneutic, as speech in search of speaker. To put it simply, the liturgical text has a hermeneutical pressure of self-referential appropriation and wants to be "read" as a space in which one's life is contained and made. Not as a text

---

[4] It is as if the scriptures are a speech in search of a speaker, and the speaking itself is the liturgy. This recognition is the reason for which I favor the language of scripture and liturgy as "speech" and the liturgizer as "speaker," rather than the more formal and distant language of use/user or read/reader.

[5] These studies are truly a breath of fresh air after decades of studies governed by doctrinalist interests and categories. Indeed, the old scriptural and patristic point speaks to reason, that the human being has a meta-hermeneutic, a manner in which it perceives all things; one reads the scriptures as one looks at an icon, as one stands in worship as one prays, and as one sees the world around oneself—fundamentally all these are done as a matter of one's manner of being. These days we are finally assisting at the unraveling of the history-centered reading of the scriptures and of what turn out to be corresponding readings of the Byzantine icon. The latter, incapable of overcoming an intellective approach governed by historicism (or, more fundamentally, by limitations of time and space), hold the ancient iconodules under doctrinalist and aesthetic lenses which are essentially foreign to them. Reading them through formal methods equally anachronistic, these perspectives are bound to understand the icon in terms which are by and large void of the deep mystagogy which transcends bordering, an image-viewer disjunction, directionality, flatness, messaging, and distance, both spatial and temporal, the mystagogy which integrates and surpasses apocalyptically and transformatively all time and space, and which is the ultimate mark of the so-called "Byzantine" theology, enshrined, in my opinion, in the Byzantine icon, liturgy, church architecture, exegesis, etc.

[6] See, for example, the relevant observations in Frances Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (New York, NY: Cambridge University, 1997), 119–38, and Manlio Simonetti, *Lettera e/o allegoria: Un contributo alla storia dell'esegesi patristica* (Rome: Institutum Patristicum "Augustinianum," 1985), 79-80.

which says or means, but as spacetime which creates or rather as spacetime which is life itself. Therefore the program, as it were, of "reading" liturgy is ascetical-erotic in the Dionysian sense of the words. I would even venture to say that this is the case to the point that the methods which needs and inclinations for analytical and definitional clarity can possibly muster will only obscure the language of the liturgy through their promised "clarity," precisely to the extent to which they are successful. And therefore, just as the liturgical text (together with all the other dimensions of the Byzantine liturgy, I may add) solicits this ascetical reading frustrating attempts at nailing it down discursively, or, in other words, just as it creates a certain liturgizer[7] (this creation being its "interpretation"), it also refuses translation approaches which privilege procedure and observational distance.[8] To rephrase this last point in the positive, the Byzantine liturgical text solicits a translation which does not start by asking procedural questions—lexical, grammatical, or conceptual—but rather begins with a willingness to fulfill the liturgy's own outer exegesis, with a willingness to be made or created, or rather to be remade or recreated.[9]

This conviction has led me to my translation philosophy which I am submitting to you today, in a nutshell: a translation which meets the text's own expectation, keeps and does not alleviate the ascetical pressures of the text, the birthing pains through which the liturgy puts its liturgizer.[10] The liturgy ought to *make* in translation what it *makes* in koini, to engender the same life.[11]

Before I begin in earnest to look at particular translation issues, I wish to make a fundamental point. The point belongs here because, although at first glance it may seem that it has little to do with what I will say about translating, it nevertheless informs everything which follows. Namely, a closer look at the scriptures will indicate that the mystagogy which for too long and too often has been seen as an *interpretation* of the Byzantine liturgy, even as something imposed on it from outside (and late, at that), is rather its roots and its bedrock. In our time scriptural scholarship can no longer claim (although very few still hold on to the old perspectives to the contrary) that the Bible is not a mystagogical and liturgical text. Studies after studies have pointed out that creation is described as a liturgical process and place in Genesis 1, that the first scriptures are given on Sinai only after and in light of the setting of the tabernacle and its liturgy, that the entire Book of Revelation is a mystagogy on the Sunday worship, etc. I myself like to point out that in the gospels Christ is described as a walking Holy of holies (christological title which is also found in the Byzantine Matins of Sundays and feasts), that the Gospel of Mark is built as an ascent on Sinai, that the Epistle to the Hebrews is a mystagogy, and that the entire Gospel of John is a prologue to Genesis 1 of overt liturgical

---

[7] I use "liturgizer" not only in reference to the ordained, but to everyone present in worship.

[8] Not that there is only one proper translation, but the one proper approach can create many translations, all within the field of the liturgy's referential outer hermeneutic..

[9] This can also be put in the following way: the impossibility of an objective approach lies in the fact that its translation of the liturgy works only and precisely to the extent to which the liturgy ceases to be liturgy. Just as it translates, this approach vitiates that which it translates; just as it gets closer, it keeps moving it to the horizon.

[10] Anything short of this literalism of which I speak is the equivalent of conveying the experience of a military training camp in the imagery of a kindergarten free-time activity. And this translation reality, it seems to me, goes down to the very substance of language; as semioticians commonly point out, words do not function as definitions and uses, but rather as effects.

[11] This point and what I am saying later on about "spatializing" is what convinced me that the diaconal pointer in the opening of the Divine Liturgy means "it is time for the Lord to create," whence my translation of "it is time for the Lord to make."

overtones, and that the Book of Revelation is an experience and explanation of the Sunday worship. So, it seems to me that it is time to retire—once and for all—the presupposition that the hidden depths of the liturgy are the innovations of late Byzantine imaginations. Quite the opposite seems to be true: mystagogy precedes liturgy.[12]

While mindful of the fact that the Byzantine liturgy puts out this creative process through all its dimensions at once—words, icons, gestures, times, architecture, etc.—the text itself uses for it certain outer-ascetical features, among which, arguably, the most prominent are the following: [read numbers!]

1. incompleteness,
2. bad or non-idiomatic Greek[13],
3. blunt, rough, or inelegant Greek,
4. ambiguity or polyvalence, and finally,
5. spatializing.

It is worth considering, briefly, the fact that, before they employed them in their own liturgical text, the ancients detected these same features—which they often called "difficulties"—in the scriptural text and saw in them the places in which the scriptures are the most scriptural, in which the holy text thickens, or, to put it in a different way, the fattest and juiciest parts of the holy text.[14]

For the rest of my talk I will be analyzing the above five features with an eye (to echo the word-play in the title) toward an English translation, but the points I make here can be made on any other language, even if the particular applications will differ, conceivably greatly so. Each translation effort will have to decide for itself how to keep these—and other—difficulties of the koini text.

I am appealing first to incompleteness as a feature of the liturgy's aforementioned pressure on the liturgizer, for two reasons: first, it is quite rare (and easy to miss), and, second, it is extraordinarily important. A well-known case is the following phrase from John the Golden-mouth's prayer of offering: προσάγαγε τῷ ἁγίῳ σου θυσιαστηρίῳ, bear to your holy altar. There is no direct object for the verb "bear" (προσάγαγε) in Barberini 336 or any of the other early and/or significant manuscripts. So the natural question is, What is God to bear to his altar? Indeed the clause feels incomplete, and, without exception, a direct object is supplied in English translations: Thya and AA have "us," but most English translations have "it" (OCA2017, Dmi, GOusa, GOaus). The latter reproduces the direct object of the immediately antecedent clause, that is, "our sacrifice." The former translation follows Robert Taft and Juan Mateos, and anticipates

[12] And now mystagogy has to be found outside of the generic texts, such as in iconography, in the sacred space, and in the many illuminations of scriptural and liturgical manuscripts (by and large unduly ignored). I am hoping that the time is coming when one cannot write on the significance, meaning, and character of the Byzantine liturgy without first looking at this treasure trove.

[13] Much can be said about the theology which drove the artificial partition of this ancient form of Greek called "koini" into "biblical" (the seemingly proper koini), "patristic," and/or "late Byzantine." The evidence suggests that this incorrect partition was meant to drive theological wedges or rifts between the Fathers and the scriptures. Yet, this is neither the place nor the time to do it.

[14] On scriptural difficulties see particularly...

the direct object of the immediately subsequent clause, "enable *us* to offer" (ἱκάνωσον ἡμᾶς προσενεγκεῖν).[15] I disagree with this option for "us" for several reasons, which need not be reviewed here (but I will review them in the printed form of this talk if it will go to press).[16] Yet, even my own preference for "it" is, indeed, on shaky ground; or rather, it makes stable a ground which is unstable. And this is a serious mistake because ultimately—it seems to me—the *instability itself is the point*. At this point it is important that we acknowledge the fact that the koini of our prayer does not read any less incomplete without an explicit direct object than an object-less English translation, "bear to your holy altar." I am not aware of any studies, as of yet, to explore the significance or value of incompleteness in liturgy; so this talk might be the first. Yet, thankfully, the liturgy shares this feature with the scriptures, and in the scriptures the feature is even much more prevalent, and there is increasing attention to it. My point on incompleteness can be made on only one scriptural text, which I also analyzed more at length in a recent article: Ex 19:25–20:1.[17] These verses open and set up the entire Sinai covenant and, in both the Masoretic and Septuagint recensions, they read as follows:

> 19.25. So Moses went down to the people and said to them (ויאמר אלהם; καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς).

---

[15] Taft made this argument on two bases: the prayer is one of *accessus ad altare*, and the Syriac equivalent of the prayer uses "us." Robert Taft, "Translating Liturgically," *Logos* 39 (1998): 155-187, here pp. 171-172; idem, *Great Entrance*, 352-357.

[16] As it is well-known, it is common practice in the Byzantine liturgy for prayers to say to God "because you are A, do A for us." For example, "because you have absolute might and mercy (A), do mercy (A)," as in the prayer of the first antiphon. Therefore the actual petitions of the prayers are set up by these introductory descriptions of God. And in the prayer discussed here, of the offering, God is described as one who receives sacrifice, not people: "who receive the sacrifice of praise." So the A of this prayer is "sacrifice." This initial description of God then sets up four petitions:

-receive our supplication (A) as a sacrifice
-bear ? to your [God's] own altar
-enable us (B) to offer gifts (A)
-count us (B) worthy to find grace so that our sacrifice (A) is well-pleasing.

Taft hangs the weight of his argument on the two occurrences of B ("us"), but he completely ignores the more central A ("sacrifice"). Furthermore, in both occurrences B is only there to serve A. In the first, we are enabled to offer sacrifice, and, in the second, we are counted worthy to offer sacrifice. In other words, in both cases B is not the real direct object or the final objective of the petition. Moreover, the Byzantine Divine Liturgy has an entire complex of *accessus*, not one individual prayer: the prayer (and, also, the hymn) of the cherubikon and the two prayers of the faithful preceding them. In the prayer of offering we no longer pray to be granted access ourselves as liturgizers, but to receive access for our sacrifice. Finally, the expression προσάγω τῷ θυσιαστηρίῳ occurs only once in the entire Septuagint, in Malahias 1:7, and its direct object is the bread of offering: προσάγοντες πρὸς τὸ θυσιαστήριόν μου ἄρτους ἠλισγημένους. As to the Syriac evidence Taft produces, he himself presents one manuscript in Greek that duplicates δέησιν after προσάγαγε, with αὐτήν (Taft, *Great Entrance*, 355-356). Also, at the most basic level, the direct object being carried forward rather than back makes for very awkward Greek. Furthermore, an *accessus* prayer is not necessarily a prayer done for the liturgizers, but also for the sacrifices themselves. And the latter seems to be the case here. As to Taft's argument that "it would be meaningless for the celebrant to pray that his prayer be brought to an altar standing right before him as he is praying" (Taft, *Great Entrance*, 356, referencing Mateos), it applies just as well to the liturgizers themselves: it is equally meaningless for the liturgizers to petition for access to the very altar in front of which they stand. Rather, I myself take Taft's point to be the very nature of *accessus* prayers: they ask for access for something which is already there.

[17] "For a Hermeneutics of Referent: On the Sinai Tradition and a Reinterpretation of 'Covenant'," in *Watering the Garden. Studies in Honor of Deirdre Dempsey*, edited by Andrei A. Orlov (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2023), 23-46.

> 20.1. And God spoke all these words, saying (וידבר אלהים את כל־הדברים האלה; καὶ ἐλάλησεν κύριος πάντας τοὺς λόγους τούτους)...

Both verses are peculiar in the same way, as incomplete. In the entire Old Testament the first verse is the only case in which the Hebrew and koini verbs אמר and, respectively, εἶπον lack a direct object, stated or implicit.[18] Actually, more often than not the Hebrew and koini verbs introduce a direct speech. In regard to the second verse, 20:1, the renowned early Judaism scholar Benjamin Sommer makes the following observation on the Hebrew text, but it is equally valid for the Septuagint:

> This sort of phrasing [namely, "God/Yhwh spoke or said. . . saying"] is exceedingly common; verses with the subject God or Yhwh and the waw-consecutive verb spoke (וידבר) or said (ויאמר) occur 339 times in the Bible [he means the Hebrew Bible]. In every occurrence other than Exodus 20.1, the text uses the word אל or the particle – ל [both of which mean to and introduce an indirect object] to tell us explicitly whom God addressed (thus, "Yhwh spoke to Moses, saying," or "God said to Moses and Aaron, saying"). Only in [this] verse... is there any doubt about the recipient of divine speech. This fact is jarring to an audience whose ears are familiar with the hundreds of cases of the normal form.[19]

Thus, in Ex 19:25 and 20:1 we have two consecutive incomplete texts, lacking a *needed* direct object and, respectively, a *customary* indirect object. Sommer and others have taken this situation as a problem to be solved and proposed different solutions, which they themselves admitted to be unsatisfactory.[20] My contention has always been that the two verses need no solution. Rather, their incompleteness serves a very important function which can be gleaned from how early Judaism (and early Christianity, I may add) understood the covenant or testament between God and his people: the covenant is never a thing of the past, even though it is inscribed in a holy text, but it exists only in the hearer who hears the text anew as his own life story and fulfills it in his own experience of it. The incompleteness of such texts as Ex 19:25 and 20:1 solicits precisely this hearing practice of integration and—I dare say—authorship, a hearing practice in which the hearer becomes the author of the text which is now new and fresh in him. Moreover, incompleteness even serves as a self-destruct safety mechanism which sets up the holy text to collapse, to become nonsensical, in the hands of another life, or—to speak from our vantage point—in the hands of a

---

[18] On this see S. R. Driver, *The Book of the Exodus in the Revised Edition* (Cambridge: University Press, 1911), 168 and 175.

[19] Benjamin Sommer, *Revelation and Authority: Sinai in Jewish Scripture and Tradition* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2015), 38. A further point should be added to Sommer's observation: it is also peculiar that up to this verse God has addressed "the sons of Israel"—which, incidentally, does not usually mean the people present at the theophany, but their descendants—but in Exodus 20, after the initial unparalleled neglect of the indirect object, God gives the commandments in the second person singular. Ex 20:2-3 I am the LORD your [m.s.: אֱלֹהֶיךָ; σου] God, who brought you [m.s.: הוֹצֵאתִיךָ; σε] out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 3. You [m.s.: לְךָ; σοι] will have no other gods before Me.

[20] The most common solution (and Sommer's own) is that the first verse introduces the second as Moses' speech (see Sommer, *Revelation and Authority*, 39). Yet, as Sommer himself admits, the second verse shows no markers of direct speech. Even more importantly, this would be the only place in the scriptures in which a Hebrew direct speech would begin with a waw-consecutive or a koini direct speech with a *καί*.

disjointed, observational or analytical approach.[21] In other words, only one whose life is already the covenant, will understand the covenant. I would suggest that incompleteness serves the same function in the Byzantine liturgy, which learned it from the scriptures, and that the Golden-mouth's prayer of offering is a case in point. By the way, to date I am not aware of any English translation of Ex 19:25–20:1, from Hebrew or from Greek, in which the original incompleteness is preserved. Rather, it is always "fixed."[22]

Let us move on to the second difficulty on my list. In contrast to incompleteness, in the Byzantine liturgy examples of bad or non-idiomatic Greek abound. I should mention at this point that I do not use "koini" and "Greek" to indicate the same thing, but rather I take "koini" as the language of the Byzantine liturgy, among many other texts, including the Septuagint, and I take "Greek" to indicate the general character, or Greekness, if you wish, of the still extant language whose roots lie in the Proto-Indo-European of pre-history. In other words, "koini" is the actuation of this living language in a particular time and place, and "Greek" is its enduring although ever changing essence. Now, despite the frequency of bad Greek in the Byzantine liturgy, surprisingly but not counterintuitively, the more one is imbued in these koini texts and the more one uses them on a regular and familiar basis, together with the koini scriptures, the more one is at a disadvantage in recognizing their bad Greek.[23] An obvious solution here is to look at the texts for recognition of what does not belong there naturally, especially to look at them from the vantage point of other forms of Greek (particularly Attic and forms of demotic contemporary to the long life of koini), but also from the vantage point of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Latin, and any other languages that had an impact on the koini scriptures and liturgy.

Allow me to focus here on only one example of bad Greek, which is particularly significant for two reasons: it is scripture and it has a striking presence in liturgy. I am referring to the expression, "to do" or rather "to make mercy," ποιεῖν ἔλεος. As in English, in Greek, too, mercy is not something that is "done" or "made"; that is the case only in Semitic languages.[24] The roots of the presence of this non-Greek phrase in the Byzantine liturgy lie in the choice of the Septuagint translators to render a Semitic expression word for word, and of the New Testament and other early Christian authors to preserve intact this peculiar choice.[25] Yet, we can tell that the phrase ποιεῖν ἔλεος remained strange to an ancient ear and remained entirely foreign

---

[21] To this end see the now classical insights in Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion. An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1985), esp. 38-39.

[22] More often than not with another solution: the "said" of 19:25 is translated with "told," the implication being that Moses reported a previous divine speech. When it comes to the prayer of offering, I myself have given in and provided "it" for the missing direct object, although I am convinced that the lack of it speaks the loudest: "Lord, bear to your holy altar."

[23] One is especially disadvantaged if one serves with the koini text on a regular basis or indulges in the koini scriptures on a regular basis.

[24] It seems to me that the thinking of the Semitic mind in this regard is evidenced by the peculiar, intransitive use of the causative Hiphil: when one is merciful, he creates the reality of mercy.

[25] In the Septuagint the phrase translates word-for-word the very common Hebrew phrase עשה חסד עם (e.g., Genesis 24:12; Judges 1:24), and from the Septuagint it makes it into key New Testament texts, such as in James 2:13 and Luke 10:37. Moreover, just as in the liturgy, the phrase appears in the scriptures accompanied by "with," μετά.

to the inner logic of Greek: it entered neither demotic speech nor high speech, nor did the ancient Christian writers use it outside of scriptural exegesis or allusions to its scriptural occurrences.[26] Therefore, it is especially significant when the phrase appears in the liturgy. I would submit that the liturgy uses this bad Greek in order to point the liturgizer to the scriptures, or rather to have the liturgy as one and the same spacetime as the scriptures. Yet, all the English Ieratika that I have consulted in producing my own have decided for an idiomatic English phrase, such as "grant mercies" (Dmi, AA, GOaus, GOusa), "bestow acts of mercy" (Thya), or "impart mercy" (OCA2017). Even worse, to my knowledge without exception, translations of the scriptures have produced similarly good English. How is one to detect the scriptural-ness of the liturgy with such nice or smooth translations?

Even more common than non-idiomatic Greek are instances of blunt, rough, or inelegant Greek, probably because in this case koini was using its own resources. The example I am presenting to you I brought up in a recent article: the four participles of the Sanctus, τὸν ἐπινίκιον ὕμνον ᾄδοντα, βοῶντα, κεκραγότα, καὶ λέγοντα, which are commonly translated in English as "singing the triumphant hymn, shouting (or exclaiming), proclaiming, and saying."[27] Yet, the beastly connotation of the second and third participles is quite obvious since they are onomatopea: βοάω imitates the bellowing of oxen and κράζω the crying of birds. I argued in my article that the participles are a testimony to the ancient visions of Christ's chariot-throne as made of tetramorphic cherubim (visions patterned after Ezekiel 1). Each of the four faces of the cherubim—lion, ox, eagle, and human—offers praise in its natural sound: roaring, mooing, crying, and speaking.[28] Ancient testimonies to this meaning of the participles abound, both textual and iconographic. I reviewed many in my article, so here I'll offer only a few examples. One of the most explicit is the later text-form of Germanos' famous commentary on the Divine Liturgy:

> "The triumphant hymn roaring": "roaring" is the eagle, "lowing" is the ox, "crying" is the lion, and "saying" is the human (ᾄδοντά ἐστιν ὁ ἀετός· βοῶντά ἐστιν ὁ βοῦς· κεκραγότα ὁ λέων· καὶ λέγοντα, ὁ ἄνθρωπος).[29]

The author felicitously confuses the sounds of the lion and the eagle. This is felicitous because this mistake attests to the wide and early circulation of this interpretation since the same confusion appears in many

[26] The *Apophtegmata* literature of early monasticism is the only notable exception.

[27] "The Voices of the 'Triumphant Hymn': The Orthodox Sanctus as a Christian Merkabah Text," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 64/1-2 (2020): 93-127.

[28] Let me also point out that the metallic sound of the asterisk against the disk adds to the non-humanness of the situation. One could hear in it the clacking of the heavenly technology of the chariot.

[29] My translation after PG 98, 429D.

other texts and also in icons.[30] A thousand years later the Anglican priest and hymn-writer John Mason Neale attests to the enduring and wide presence of this interpretation—even with the same confusion—among the Orthodox of the nineteenth century:

> the Constantinopolitan ritualists explain that of S. Chrysostom, of the four Evangelists: ᾄδοντα, [is] singing, (like the eagle,) βοῶντα, bellowing, (as the ox,) κεκραγότα, crying, (as the lion,) λέγοντα, speaking, (as the man.) And this seems a more natural explanation than another, which represents the four quarters of the globe as referred to in these words.[31]

Despite the simple naturalness of this explanation of the four participles, as soon as we detect in the liturgy such rough language as animal sounds, we are facing a fundamental question, Do we keep the roughness or do we smooth it out? I would not err on the side of producing a smooth translation, because the loss generated by the elimination of the difficulty is far greater than any of its benefits. *The aesthetic must not be preferred over the ascetic!* Or rather, to keep a historical tone, preferring the aesthetic over the ascetic is not in the Byzantine tradition itself. The Byzantine tradition has expressed the exceptional value of inelegant language as early as the Dionysian corpus. Some, says Dionysius the Areopagite, shy away from coarse images for celestial or divine realities. They should not, not only because this crude imaging of heavenly realities is scriptural, but also because it is particularly mystagogical and accurate precisely because it is coarse and improper:

> The sacred descriptions of the Sayings [i.e., the Scriptures] honor with ugliness and do not undermine the heavenly orders, revealing them through representations without likeness, and through these showing them forth as transcending in an over-worldly manner all material things... Wherefore, so that those who do not have in mind anything higher than the seen beauties might not be impassioned, the uplifting wisdom of the venerable theologians also draws down sacerdotally toward unsuitable dissimilarities, not allowing our part which inclines to matter to rest upon

---

[30] As far as I could discover, the earliest mention of the bestial sounds of the liturgy is the Dionysian corpus:

> I think it is necessary to expound... toward what sort of simplicity it is necessary to be led up through those fashioned [in the Scriptures], so that we too do not impiously think—just like the many—that the heavenly and deiform minds are some many-legged and many-faced things, formed according to the animal-form of the oxen or the beastly-form of the lions, and are shaped according to the curved-beaked form of the eagles or the hair-like featherness of birds, and imagine them to be some fiery wheels above the heavens, and material thrones suitable to the source of divinity for reclining, and some multi-colored horses, and spear-bearing commanders, and as many others as are given us by the Sayings [i.e., the Scriptures] in a variety of revelatory symbols, in a divinely-fashioning manner... [One would also suppose] the realms above the heavens to be full of lions, and swarming horses, and bellowing hymnology (μυκητικῆ ὑμνολογία), and bird flocking, and other creatures, and humble material things, as many as the likenesses entirely without likeness of the truly revelatory Sayings draw, as they incline toward that which is out-of-place and corrupt and impassioned. (*Celestial Hierarchy* 2.1, 2.2. This and all ensuing translations of *Celestial Hierarchy* are my own from the text in *Corpus Dionysiacum II. Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita. de Coelesti Hierarchia, de Ecclesiastica Hierarchia, de Mystica Theologia, Epistulae* [Patristische Texte Und Studien 36; G. Heil and A. M. Ritter, eds.; Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2012], 7-59, here pp. 9-10)

[31] Rev. John Mason Neale, *A History of the Holy Eastern Church. Part I: General Introduction* (London: Joseph Masters, 1850), 470.

> shameful images, but making the ascending part of the soul rise up, and prodding it with the misshapenness of the signs, as it is would seem neither right nor true even to the ones who are very much inclined to matter, to think that the beyond-the-heavens and divine sights are truly resembling things so base.[32]

It seems to me that it is this vision attested in the Areopagite which has filled the liturgy with rough Greek, so, in deference to it, I decided to keep the bestiality of the participles and translate with "roaring, lowing aloud, crying out, and saying the triumphant hymn."[33]

The Byzantine liturgy is rough in many other instances. Lexically, particularly noteworthy are phrases such as ἡ ἐμπαθὴς νέκρωσις in the Presanctified's first prayer of the faithful, phrases which, almost without exception, are softened in English translations.[34] I have decided for the equally rough "the rot of the passions." Yet, even more prominent is the roughness of the syntax of the liturgy, which often—for example—produces very long clauses and sentences loaded with distant syntactical links. And in such clauses the participial construction—often multiplied in long chains—is particularly noticeable, especially if, as it is common, it has many words intercalated between the participle and its definite article.[35] There is no clearer indication of the strain that participial constructions place on the koini text than the need for the language to resume the subject of such participial constructions with a pronoun, once the constructions conclude. Here is an example of a chain of participial constructions in my translation close to the original syntax, namely, the beginning of the prayer of the Trisaghion:

> Holy God, who rest in the holy place, who are hymned by the Seraphim with the thrice-holy cry and glorified by the Cherubim and worshipped by every heavenly power, who out of nothing have brought all things into being, who created the human being according to your Image and to likeness and adorned him with every gift of your grace, who give to him who asks wisdom and understanding and do not overlook the one who sins, but instead have

---

[32] *Celestial Hierarchy* 2.3, my translation from *Corpus Dionysiacum II*, 13. For more on the theological justification of images of heavenly realities see Glenn Peers, *Subtle Bodies: Representing Angels in Byzantium* (Berkeley, 2001), 89-125; K. Parry, "Angelology," in id., *Depicting the Word: Byzantine Iconophile Thought of the Eighth and Ninth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 81-88.

[33] By the way, it seems to me that an essential aspect of comprehensibility is the avoidance of archaic language which today would be not only unintelligible, but also formal (beseech, vouchsafe, hallow). Liturgicality means that it flows well as a spoken text, in its entire liturgical context (gestures, orientation, etc.). As a side note, let us get rid of Latinized Greek, such as the masculine name final "–us." It makes no sense to pass one ancient language through another in order to transliterate it for a contemporary audience; and indeed, transliterated they are from Latin.# And a side note to the side note: in my opinion the time has come to get rid of Erasmian transliterations. Let us go back to the western tradition which itself sang *Kýrie eléison*, and not *Kýurie eléeson*.

[34] AA paraphrases with "death-dealing carnal desires," Dmi and OCA2017 switch the terms to "deadly passions," GOusa has "killing passion" and Thy has "the death of the passions." Νέκρωσις is the quality of being dead ("deadness"), or rather the process of being dead, or—to be more specific—decomposition. Therefore, I found the English "death" not to be specific enough, although it is being used with the same meaning.

[35] The prayer of the third antiphon is a good example of such abilities and practices: *ὁ τὰς κοινὰς ταύτας καὶ συμφώνους ἡμῖν χαρισάμενος προσευχάς, ὁ καὶ δυσὶ καὶ τρισί, συμφωνοῦσιν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί σου, τὰς αἰτήσεις παρέχειν ἐπαγγειλάμενος.*

> established repentance for salvation, who have counted us, the lowly and your unworthy servants, worthy to stand in this hour before the Glory of your holy altar and to offer you due worship and praise—yourself, Master, receive even from the mouth of us the sinners...

In my opinion, as a matter of a fundamental viewpoint, in front of this syntax we ought to be aware that at the opposite pole from its complexity is not the idiomatic, but the prosaic, or, what a dear friend, fellow priest and professor called very aptly and colorfully the "meteorological bulletin." As an example of such prosaicism, here is the same prayer of the Trisaghion in a translation which has fixed the syntax:

> Holy God, you dwell among the saints. The Seraphim praise you with thrice-holy voice, the Cherubim glorify you, all the powers of heaven adore you. You brought all things into being out of nothingness, and created us according to your image and likeness. You grant wisdom and understanding to those who request them...[36]

The translation misses some nuances and elusive but important features in the original text,[37] but, even more importantly, this prosaic breaking of the long sentence requires very little or no effort of concentration. And—I would venture to say—the ieratic character of liturgical speech lies precisely in this effort requirement, in this asceticism, as I call it. The ieratic manner of speech which belongs in front of the holy table,[38] or I should rather say the manner of divine speech, because the Byzantine liturgy recognizes this speech as both being addressed to God and being spoken by God himself,[39] again, this ieratic manner of speech is not merely a matter of vocabulary or grammar (since both vocabulary and grammar are rarely peculiar in their own right), but rather it is first and foremost a matter of fluency: of attitude and of how vocabulary and grammar are put together. In its fluency, the liturgy expects attentiveness and concentration of both clergy and laity, in a process of self-denial which is ultimately the self-denial of God alone, the self-denial of which only he is capable, and which is by him and in him embodied in his people. This

---

[36] Taft, "Translating Liturgically," 160.

[37] Such as, the fact that "your" determines only "image" (a Christological title) and not also "likeness" (κατ' εἰκόνα σὴν καὶ ὁμοίωσιν), which is a peculiar feature of the LXX Gen 1:26, feature from which the Fathers extracted the Christological character of "Image."

[38] I am of the opinion that "ieratic" does not mean old or archaic. Specifically, in the Anglophone world I see no justification for using the so-called Elizabethan English. First, the argument that it is a more formal and respectful language is just incorrect. The language was the common language of most people for centuries and *it still is*. To this day the seemingly special (or "hieratic") thou's and didst's can be heard in common speech in some parts of England (Yorkshire) and of the United States (such as in northern Alabama). Elizabethan English sounds to us as more "proper" or "elevated" (as some of the arguments I have heard put it) simply due to its archaism. Second, the argument for its benefit I can see extended only to one aspect of it: the distinction it makes between the singular "thou" and the plural "you." Yet, if we are to understand language not as moments arrested in time but as a continuous dynamic, it becomes immediately obvious that English would not have adopted "you" for the singular if it could not have preserved the distinction from the plural in other ways. Third and practically, the Elizabethan I have heard in liturgical use has never been pure, but rather a concoction of Elizabethan and contemporary. This looks to me as an admission on the part of its advocates that it is disposable when it is too peculiar or unpronounceable.

[39] And in all this he liturgy is again scriptural. When the Lord speaks, what follows is this divine speech which now stands in front of his own altar. The complex fluency of the Byzantine liturgy is a continuation or rather an actuation of this very divine speech.

asceticism of God and of his liturgizers is essential. It seems to me that it is a central focus of the composition of the original koini text and, in my opinion, it should also be a focus in the work of translation; the translation itself must elicit it.[40]

My first example of ambiguity or polyvalence comes from an area of language to which our post-modern culture shows increased sensitivity. We all know the discussions which are taking place around the issue of gender inclusiveness. It seems to me that in these discussions the ancient Christian texts (and also ancient Jewish texts, for that matter), including the scriptures, are not always understood well. Also, in current debates on the issue I detect a treatment of language which can only be anachronistic and wrong in relation to these ancient texts, namely, that language is flat and always means what it says. In contrast to this presupposition, a growing number of studies has recently shown that in ancient Christian (and Jewish) perceptions one of the main characteristics of sacred language is that it is not flat at all.[41] Thus, even if one takes issue with the linguistic reality of the masculine being the default gender in koini, one cannot ignore the many ancient texts which, on the one hand, point out the avowed arbitrariness and impropriety of the use of masculine language for God, and, on the other hand, emphasize that masculine language can be used inclusively in relation to people.[42] It seems to me that the latter is the case with the use of "sons" in liturgy. For example, the fourth prayer of Matins asks God that all those present—therefore, women included—be shown as "sons of light and of day and heirs of your eternal good things."[43] Both phrases are scriptural,[44] yet, despite their scriptural foundation, there is a clear tendency in recent English translations to render "sons" in inclusive ways, whether this change is seen as turning inclusive something which is exclusive or as spelling out an intrinsic inclusiveness. Thus, more often than not, "sons" becomes "children" (OCA2017) or "sons

---

[40] And this elicitation must be done with recitation in mind: it is useful to remember that what does not flow well on paper can be made to flow better or well enough out loud. Of course, if the text is read in a certain manner; and Byzantine liturgy means to be read in a certain manner and prevents other manners of reading, particularly that aesthetic which can so easily stand counter to the ascetic. For this to happen, these prayers must not be sung. The liturgy is not a concert, neither a show. Rather, the prayers must be chanted, recited with stresses over essential words, and must be chanted quite quickly, so that the syntactic relations over many intercalated words are not lost.

[41] I offers an overview of this issue in my article "Reversing Genesis 3,6-7: Adamic Traditions in the Cursing of the Fig Tree (Mk 11,12-14.20-25; Mt 21,18-22)," in *Sfânta Scriptură în Istorie și Tradiție. Volum Omagial Păr. Prof. Vasile Mihoc* [*Sacred Scripture in History and Tradition. Festschrift Pr. Prof. Vasile Mihoc*], (Sibiu, Romania: Editura Andreiana, Colectia Theologia Universitaria, 2019), 111-144.

[42] See my discussion of the Christian and Jewish texts in "Driven Away with a Stick: The Femininity of the Godhead in y. Ber. 12d, the Emergence of Rabbinic Modalist Orthodoxy, and the Christian Binitarian Complex," in *Jewish Roots of Eastern Christian Mysticism. Studies in Honor of Alexander Golitzin*, edited by Andrei A. Orlov (Vigiliae Christianae Supplements. Leiden: Brill, 2020), 66-84. Also, Doru Costache, "Living above Gender: Insights from Saint Maximus the Confessor," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 21 (2013): 261-290; Kari Kloos, "'In Christ There is Neither Male nor Female': Patristic Interpretation of Galatians 3:28," *Studia Patristica* 39 (2006): 239-44.

[43] At the very end of the anaphora of St. Basil we similarly ask God to "receive us all into [His] kingdom, showing us to be sons of light and sons of day." Also, the second prayer of the faithful at the Presanctified refers to "sons of light and of day."

[44] "Sons of light and of day" comes from 1 Thess 5:5, but "sons of the light" are also mentioned in Luke 16:8. If Eph 5:8 is any indication ("you were once darkness, but now [you are] light in the Lord"), the genitive "of light" is meant as a genitive of substance, "sons made of light."

and daughters" (GOusa 2023). Ironically enough, what such inclusive translations obfuscate is what could be called "the Christological inclusivity" of the "son" language. At least according to Gal 3:15-4:7 and Eph 5:8, when people are indiscriminately called "sons," they are incorporated into Christ, the one true Son and Heir.[45] It is in this Christological line that the anaphora of St. Basil calls the Holy Spirit "the gift of sonship." This is why in my opinion it is essential to translate "sons" literally, without any (further) attempts of being inclusive; a (more overtly) inclusive translation, such as "children," can only obscure an inclusion that is already there and is of a higher, truly divine rank.

Before my second example of ambiguity and polyvalence, I must say a few words on the oft-repeated and entirely valid observation that one translates with a target: a translation thinks of the ones whom it serves. I have already decried here and on several other occasions and in different venues the attempts to subject Byzantine theology (by this I understand everything theological—exegesis, doctrine, liturgy, etc.) to formalizations, fixations, and systematizations which are fundamentally foreign to it. These inclinations have gained unprecedented traction in recent years, as they have come to engender and frame a sort of battle over Tradition itself, in a spectralization along a liberal-conservative axis. In this new manner of being, statements are not only favored over experience, but their traditionality is adjudicated in methodical and abstract ways. And this is, in my opinion, the greatest abandonment of the Byzantine Tradition: not simply the replacement of some ideas with others, neither the abandonment of some practices for others. Such changes happen only in consequence of a deeper, more pervasive shift, which is the supplanting of the very being of Tradition—which is internal, physical, ascetical, mystical, soteriological, therapeutic, and eschatological—by formal methods, evaluations, concepts, strategies, arguments, and pronouncements. This pervasive abandonment of the Byzantine manner of being has everything to do with translation. I will give you only one example although examples abound: the word "salvation." Once the word becomes a fixed and formal concept pertaining to heavenly and eschatological realities, within a carefully constructed system of categorical distinctions, how would one not take issue with such liturgical texts as, "All-holy Birthgiver of God, save us"? For all practical purposes, even Fr. Ephrem Lash of eternal memory—who, in my opinion, has produced the most splendid liturgical translations into English—gives in to the formalization and fixation of this word, when he translates "salvation" at the end of the petition for travelers, the sick, suffering, and imprisoned (in litany and in prayers) with two words, as "safety and salvation" (Thya).[46] By the way, I don't think "safety" works the way in which Fr. Ephrem thought it would, because, unlike "salvation," "safety" expresses not a need, but rather the absence of it. I think "help and salvation" would have worked better. Nevertheless, such bifurcation of the koini word "salvation" does not reflect the Byzantine reality of koini, nor, ironically, the reality of the English language itself. After all, someone in danger of physical harm

[45] Admittedly in these texts and in the whole New Testament the imagery son-heir takes its substance from the common social norm at the time that sons are the family heirs. Yet, as these texts and so many others make clear, the imagery has a clear Christological dimension.

[46] Archimandrite Ephrem Lash, "Translating Liturgy," *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 39 (1998): 191-224, here pp. 197-198.

would have a reasonable expectation to be understood (and not be accused of heresy) if screaming: "save me!" The same is true in koini: one is "saved" not only from sin and hell, but also from all kinds of harm. And indeed the same verb, σώζω, is used in the liturgy for all these circumstances. In my opinion, not keeping this koini polyvalence into an *equivalent* polyvalence makes no sense, unless we decide to let go of traditional language in order to accommodate the aforementioned inclinations to fix down and formalize that which is not open to fixation and formalization.

And on this topic I would like to advance a second and related point: the distinction between secular and religious use has no place in Byzantine liturgy. Both salvation from a bug (crawling or microscopic) and salvation from sin have everything to do with God, at all times, and God has everything to do with life overall.[47]

Now finally, on to "spatializing." What do I mean by this? Succinctly put, I have in mind two aspects of the Byzantine liturgy: first, the entire reality we call "liturgy" is in all its dimensions—words, gestures, time, location, direction, chant, icons, candles, etc.—not a flat sum of harmonized but discrete elements, but an integrated and all-encompassing spacetime. And, second, all the elements of the liturgy, even if also present somewhere else and historically "taken from" somewhere else, come together in every moment of the liturgy as into their life, as to the moment for which they are meant and outside of which they have no existence and meaning.[48] The liturgizer's integration in this reality means that he or she will experience liturgy as the only real spacetime of the entire history of the world and of all locations, at once, and will not relate to liturgy as to an ultimately discrete and flat reality, as to a conveyer of meanings and teacher of practices. Arguably, this Byzantine liturgical reality is nowhere more visible than at the center of it, in the

---

[47] The linguistic and theological distinctions and sensibilities voiced in Fr. Ephrem's option for bifurcating the one word, depending on its uses, come from a theology which is fundamentally formal, definitional, categorical, and systematic, and has little or rather nothing to do with the Byzantine theology voiced in the liturgy. More can be said on the fact that between us and the liturgy stands a world of difference, or, rather, stands the world as difference. I mean this in terms of the manner in which the human psyche works and thinks: the liturgizer is a pre-medieval person—informal, asystematic, internalized, favoring the spiritual experience—while we all are, to varying degrees, formed by the Middle Ages and everything which followed them; we passed through the formalization of thought, through the intellectualization and systematization of the faith, through the individualization of the self, through the invention of nature and science as realities parallel to God, we turned to doubt, the development of a technological self, through the placement of our humanity in the center of experience, through the privileging of volition, through the modern turning of our lives into self-mastery project, and have now been exposed for long to the post-modern pressure to process ourselves in fluid terms. In light of this, I can further sharpen the fundamental point I made at the beginning of the talk: a good translation holds the post-medieval liturgizer to the pre-medieval pressures of the original text. As much as it is human, nevertheless the liturgy moves the human being out of time and culture, to what could be called in one word—the gospel.

[48] My thoughts on the Byzantine liturgy follow but take further the ideas already espoused in Panayiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ. On the Nature of the Human Person* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987), 168-170. Also, the scholarship of Alexei Lidov merits a special mention, for providing an unprecedented wholesome and three-dimensional understanding of the Byzantine liturgy. Yet, I go one step further from these wonderful insights by postulating that what happens in the liturgy is the only real time of history and the only location of all space, ultimately because the world is sustained in the life of the One in whom there is no time and space. For more of these arguments, see my forthcoming *The Life of Our Fathers*.

Eucharist. And the lesson is as old as the Gospel itself and the pauline letters: even though the Eucharist is ultimately Christ, a partaker does not relate to the Eucharist as to something distinct from his or her self, and all the partakings of the Eucharist in all times and places are not distinct from each other, are neither pieces of one larger experience nor multiplications of the same experience, but rather all partakings *are one and the same*, the same partaking as the one given to the apostles by Christ himself, the one single partaking with the entire and same Christ by the entire human self.

In my teaching I often compare the vantage point that this liturgical reality affords the liturgizer to the point-of-view technique in cinematography: the liturgizer no longer watches any scriptural-liturgical event from a distance, as if he were a discrete and observational presence which is ultimately extrinsic to the scene itself, in a position to draw meanings and lessons from it, but he is all its characters and all its space and all its narrative at once.

When it comes to how one translates in view of this reality, this de-flattening of a text or story into a three-dimensional space in which the liturgizer finds his life, will afford perspectives which otherwise can only be missed. I cannot think of a better example of this "spatializing" than what happens with the prayer of Symeon, the prayer the righteous old man says when he takes the baby Christ in his arms in front of the temple, prayer which is not coincidentally placed at the end of a Byzantine rite. For now, let me quote it in the King James Version:

> Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

I wrote on this prayer in a small collection of my talks titled *'Your Life Will Be Hung Before Your Eyes': Meanings of Our Life in Orthodox Liturgy*.[49] I will not repeat here all the historical evidence presented there in support of my reading of this prayer. Rather, I wish to explain the logic and mechanism behind my reading, which I did not do in that small book. The three-dimensional presence of the scriptural-liturgical event to the liturgizer as a first-hand experience, as his own life, beyond all boundaries of time and space, means that the liturgizer is doing with this prayer precisely what Symeon *does* (and it would be improper to say "did"). At the very moment of this utterance the liturgizer-Symeon looks at Christ and asks Christ to bring him death, to let him die. Life after this vision, this encounter, is an unbearable shackling and the liturgizer-Symeon wants to be free of it. This is a staring at the God-man who is now in humanity's arms, a truly final and fulfilling act of living, act which—it must be repeated—is at once Symeon's and the liturgizer's, between whom now there is no distinction. Given the point which I just made about spatializing, the question of whether this is scripture or liturgy is moot. Thus, in this experience "Salvation," "Light," and "Glory" are obvious titles of Christ, not theological concepts, as most of the parishioners in churches of Byzantine tradition would hear them today, due to such translations as the King James. The

[49] *'Your Life Will Be Hung Before Your Eyes': Meanings of Our Life in Orthodox Liturgy* (Dayton: Cherubim Press, 2022).

Byzantine liturgical tradition inscribed this understanding in its hymns, such as in the following hymns which belong to the Feast of the Meeting dedicated to this scriptural-liturgical moment [and which is coming up soon]:

> O Symeon, in your embrace receive as a small child the Lord of glory and the Salvation of the world. (little Vespers, aposticha)
>
> [In the words of Symeon himself:] Now set me free, O Master, as you have promised me before: for I have seen you, the pre-eternal Light, the Lord and Savior of the people bearing the name of Christ. (Vespers, aposticha)[50]

In light of all this, I propose that the meaning of Symeon's words is something along the following lines, which are my translation:

> Now set free your servant, Master, according to your word in peace, for my eyes have seen your Salvation, whom you have prepared before the face of all peoples—Light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the Glory of your people Israel.

Instead of an abrupt conclusion, allow me to make a point which undergirds everything I have said so far: despite the temptations of our minds to cross—at our own peril—into formal theological thought, into methods, definitions, and conceptualizations, in the Byzantine world in which all of us present here are interested and to which many of us belong, there are no such things as the distinct territories of liturgy, scripture, patristics, spirituality, etc. This is not immediately obvious when one undergoes academic studies for a degree in Scripture, nor, I assume, in liturgy, or when one endeavors to tackle liturgical translation set up by such formal preparations, *but this is the only view from the vantage point of the liturgy itself*. It cannot even be said that the liturgy *combines* the scriptural, the patristic, the doctrinal, the spiritual, etc., as if they were discrete realities and the liturgy were a mere point of intersection and/or collection. Rather, the liturgy is a massive monument to the fact that there are no such discrete realities. And in this liturgical spacetime in which Christ is all things, one is made or remade.

[50] Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware, *The Festal Menaion* (South Canaan, Pennsylvania: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1998), 407, 416.