CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

FROM JEWISH APOCALYPTICISM TO ORTHODOX MYSTICISM

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Scholars of Eastern Christianity give relatively little attention to the Jewish apocalyptic roots of ideas and practices that came to define the Orthodox thought-world. This is unfortunate because Byzantium cannot be understood adequately without considering its important apocalyptic undercurrent. Even more serious is the resulting gap in our understanding of Orthodox theology: on the one hand, it is well known that an "enormous library of pseudepigraphical and apocryphal materials from post-biblical Israel and Christian antiquity... was continuously copied and presumably valued—though seldom quoted—by Eastern Christians, and especially by their monks"; on the other hand, however, "one would be hard-pressed to find a single contemporary Orthodox theologian who devotes any significant space whatever to their consideration." The author of this observation, himself an Orthodox monk and American academic, suggests that scholars interested in the mystical and ascetical tradition of the Christian East should build on the achievements of the scholars associated with the "neo-patristic synthesis," but "with much greater attention devoted to an area where we believe their work was lacking: the patrimony of biblical and postbiblical Israel." He argues that the study of apocalyptic literature, of the Qumran Scrolls, and of later Jewish mysticism "throws new and welcome light on the sources and continuities of Orthodox theology, liturgy, and spirituality" (Golitzin 2007a: xix). For better or for worse, this synthesis of theology, liturgy, and spirituality in the Christian East is often referred to as "Orthodox Mysticism."

ORTHODOX MYSTICISM

Despite the venerable usage of the noun "mystery" and of the adjective "mystical" in early Christianity, in reference to the church ritual, to the sacraments, to the interpretation of scripture, to the angels, to the Christian life of prayer, etc., the phrase "Orthodox Mysticism" is not very felicitous. As has been noted (Louth 2005; Fütschen 2008), it relies on the unproblematized assumption of "mysticism" as a universal category applicable to any number of Christian or non-Christian phenomena (e.g. "Orthodox mysticism," "Franciscan mysticism," "Jewish mysticism," "Sufi mysticism," "Tantric
mysticism”). The noun mystique appeared in seventeenth-century France as a designation of the “new science” of the inner life, through a substantivization of the adjective “mystical,” which, since the thirteenth century, had increasingly come to designate “what had become separate from the institution” (De Certeau 1992: 79–112). It was used “within and in reference to groups that were furthest removed from the theological institution; like many proper nouns, it first took the form of a nickname or accusatory term” (De Certeau 1992: 107). Evidently, then, “mysticism” (the usual English term since the nineteenth century [McGinn 1991: 267]) was not coined as a neutral descriptor, but as a polemical tool (and later as a theological concept) designed to grasp and illumine certain phenomena – e.g. Quietism – in the Christian West. If used to describe the Eastern Christian ethos, “mysticism” cannot be, to use the oft-quoted formula, “something that begins with mist, centers on the I, and ends in schism.” Like the phrase “mystical theology of the Eastern Church,” “Orthodox mysticism” also “does not imply emotional individualism, but quite the opposite: continuous communion with the Spirit who dwells in the whole Church” (Meyendorff 1979: 14; cf. Lossky 1976: 7–9). In fact, with the major exception of writings by Simeon the New Theologian, extensive accounts of “mystical” experiences in the first person singular are largely non-existent in Eastern Christianity.

In what follows, “Orthodox mysticism” is used in reference to the synthesis of Christological and Trinitarian doctrine, liturgical practices, ascetic theory, and mystical speculation, which becomes more and more characteristic of the Christian East during the second half of the first millennium. This is a time of great convulsions and self-redefinition for the Roman Empire, marked by a last reassertion of Constantinopolitan rule in the Latin West, under Justinian, followed shortly thereafter by the increasing prominence of Germanic tribes in that part of the world, and by a reorientation towards the East. As pillars of Orthodox mysticism one could point, first of all, to the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus (in turn a theological synthesis of the Macarian homilies, Evagrius, and late Neoplatonism), the works of Maximus the Confessor, ascetic writings such as the Ladder of Divine Ascent or the treatises of Isaac of Nineveh, the apologetic and dogmatic work of John of Damascus, or the legacy of Simeon the New Theologian. Of crucial importance is also the hymnographic tradition, which parallels the articulation of dogma at the ecumenical councils, and develops from fourth-century authors such as Ephrem of Nisibis and Gregory of Nazianzus, to fifth-century compositions in Jerusalem (Leeb 1980; Jeffery 1994; Schneider 2004), to the famous hymnographers Romanos the Melodist, Sophronius of Jerusalem, Andrew of Crete, John of Damascus, Cosmas of Maïuma, and Theodore the Studite, to the codification of the hymnographic material around the turn of the millennium. In the absence of heresies or perceived heresies, the doxological theology of the hymns, whose Sitz im Leben is the community’s liturgical self-actualization, may very well have been the only theology (Bucur 2009b: 168–70).

Among older sources, of primary importance is the massive and continued presence of Gregory of Nazianzus, whose orations were the most copied of all Byzantine manuscripts (excluding the Bible), “cited, plagiarized, and plundered thousands of times” (Noret 1983: 265; Nisbet 1983; Brubaker 1999: 285; Galavaris 1969: 9–12); further still, the towering figure of Origen, whose heritage continued to shape the Christian East well into the sixth and seventh centuries.
APOCALYPTICISM AND THE "OTHER BYZANTIUM"

Apocalypses—"a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world" (Collins 1998: 5)—flourished in Byzantium and continued to enjoy great popularity in the post-Byzantine societies of the Balkans, Russia, and the Near East. One category of apocalypses that need not concern us here are works like the late seventh-century apocalypses of Pseudo-Ephraem and Pseudo-Methodius (Alexander 1985; McGinn 1998: 70–76), which provide a general interpretation of history in response to the political crises of the Byzantine Empire. More relevant for the topic of Orthodox mysticism are writings such as the Apocalypse of the Theotokos, the Apocalypse of Anastasia, the Life of Andrew the Fool, or the so-called Letter of the Lord that Fell from the Sky, which furnish an oft-neglected glimpse into the symbolic world and religious interests of the Byzantine populace, "those anonymous citizens and villagers who occupied the broad social middle" (Baun 2007: 322). It has been argued convincingly that these writings were composed or commissioned by lay confraternities or pious associations (adelphotes; eusebes systema) "for use in a lay parish setting, to convict the consciences of lay sinners, and to revitalize the moral life of the local community" (Baun 2007: 89, 372–85). These writings circulate in parallel with, and are reworking, older models that emanated from ascetic and monastic circles. Specifically, the Apocalypse of Anastasia and the Apocalypse of Theotokos depend on the third-century Apocalypse of Paul—"the great patriarch of late antique and early medieval apocalypses"—as well as on still older pseudepigrapha such as 1 Enoch, 2 Enoch, the Testament of Abraham, and 3 Baruch (Baun 2007: 78, 100). These writings, excluded by rabbinic Judaism, were copied and translated by Christian monastics; the notorious difficulty in distinguishing between "Jewish" and "Christian" elements in these pseudepigrapha (Davila 2005: 2–11) indicates how deeply embedded these writings were in the Byzantine world view.

The lack of scholarly interest in Byzantine apocalypses bespeaks the (theological) assumption that the extra-canonical compositions attributed to, or associated with, biblical characters such as Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Melkizedek, Noah, circulated mostly among heretics (e.g. the Bogomils) and uneducated monastics before eventually being degraded into religious folklore, and that this sort of literature is theologically inept and therefore irrelevant. This approach leads one either to disparage the mysticism of the Christian East as theologically dubious (verdicts to this effect being passed by critics of Pseudo-Macarius, Simeon the New Theologian, or Gregory Palamas), or to simply ignore these writings as sources of the Orthodox mystical tradition (see Golițin’s observations, above). To better understand Orthodox mysticism it is important to inquire why Eastern Christians found Jewish pseudepigrapha so appealing as to copy and translate them alongside biblical and liturgical commentaries, sermons, hymns, and various works of spiritual guidance for the ascetical and mystical life. To this end, one must consider the symbolic world of these writings.
ACCESS TO HEAVENLY MYSTERIES

Jewish apocalyptic literature assumes the possibility of a “direct revelation of heavenly mysteries,” and expresses the conviction “that certain individuals have been given to understand the mysteries of God, man, and the universe” (Rowland 1982: 14, 76; cf. Collins 1998: 12–13). Indeed, many such writings purport to be copies of the so-called heavenly tablets containing the “secrets of creation,” written down with angelic assistance by elect apocalyptic visionaries such as Enoch, Moses, or Abraham. The heavenly secrets to which visionaries have been given privileged access include elements of sacred uranography and angelology, accounts of the beginning of the world, the history of God’s interaction with his creation (usually supplementing, or presenting alternative versions to, the canonical biblical narratives), and various eschatological scenarios.

The Christian revelation has from the very beginning been articulated in a complex dialectic with the apocalyptic theme of heavenly mysteries. According to Jean Daniélon, some of the traditions ascribed to the apostles and circulating among early Christian teachers during the first three centuries of the common era represent “the continuation within Christianity of a Jewish esotericism that existed at the time of the Apostles,” which concerned in large measure the mysteries of the heavenly worlds; more precisely, starting as early as the apostles themselves, the concern was to relate the mysteries of the heavenly world – angelic ranks, etc. – to the central and commanding mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection (Daniélon 1962: 214). We find strong echoes of this delicate balance in the New Testament, for example in 2 Corinthians or John 3. In confronting the “superapostles” (2 Cor. 11:5) who boast of visions and charismata, Paul does not challenge the validity of either, but writes to correct a visionary practice that he judges to be misguided, and to reaffirm what he understands to be the authentic type of Christian spirituality: one more radically patterned on the incarnation, and one whose visionary component is shaped by concern for the ecclesial community and by principles of spiritual pedagogy (Humphrey 2007: 31–48). In John 3, the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus concerns precisely *τα ἐπουρανία*, “heavenly things” (John 3:12), ascending to heaven (John 3:13), entering the kingdom of God (John 3:4), and seeing the kingdom of God (John 3:3). The Gospel’s authoritative reply to such interests is not a dismissal *in toto*, but a redirection of the search for vision towards an incarnational and communitarian context (Greer 1979, 1988). In the early second century, Ignatius of Antioch deals in a similar manner with challenges to his leadership posed by various charismatic visionaries: “Am I not able to write to you about heavenly things [*τα ἐπουρανία*]? But I fear that I could cause you harm, since you are infants ... I am able to comprehend heavenly things [*τα ἐπουρανία*], both the angelic locations and the archontic formations – although it is not on account of this that I am already a disciple” (Tral. 5.1–2). The point of Ignatius’ critique is, first, that his opponents embody the wrong kind of vision; second, that knowledge of *the arrays of the angels and the musterings of the principalities*, although not a bad thing, is not what makes one a Christian; and, third, that such knowledge of “heavenly things” is not to be disclosed carelessly. Ignatius might have had in mind, as has been suggested (Hall 1998), the views espoused by the famous pseudepigraphon *Ascension of Isaiah*; the work is denounced in Athanasius’ Festal Epistle of 367, but its account of heavenly
ascent seems to have been used by his contemporary Abba Ammonas to describe the spiritual stature of Christian ascetics (see Golitzin 2001: 127, 139n47). A similar description of a “celestial hierarchy” occurs in T. 12 Patr. (Testament of Levi 3), a Jewish pseudepigraphon that enjoyed great popularity in early Christianity.

It is on the basis of such apocalyptic traditions that Clement of Alexandria furnishes a detailed description of the spiritual universe, featuring, in descending order, the seven angels “first created” (the protoktistoi), the archangels, and finally the angels. The similarity between Clement of Alexandria’s “celestial hierarchy” and the classic treatise by Pseudo-Dionysius is only seldom addressed in scholarship. In Byzantium, by contrast, the sixth-century scholiast of the Corpus Dionysiacum, John of Scythopolis, tried to bring into harmony the Dionysian and the Clementine angelic hierarchies, by identifying Clement’s “protoktists” with the highest triad of beings in Dionysius’s Celestial Hierarchy (Patrologia Graeca [PG] 4:225, 228). It is well known that the complex celestial hierarchy of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus – nine heavenly choirs arranged in three triads – is one of the most enduring and widespread elements of the ancient and medieval Christian world view. It should be noted, in any case, that the centrality of the hierarchically ordered universe and its heavenly inhabitants is an important “archaizing” feature of the Pseudo-Dionysian work, subordinated to one of the likely goals of this “New Testament pseudepigraphon” – namely the subversion of similar apocalyptic imagery (and associated doctrines) among competing groups in Christianity (Golitzin 2003: 178).

AS IN HEAVEN, SO ALSO ON EARTH: TEMPLE AND WORSHIP

Following a general Near Eastern pattern, passages in the Bible depict the God of Israel as the ruler of a heavenly world: seated on a fiery throne of cherubim in the innermost sanctum of a heavenly temple, and attended by thousands upon thousands of angels, who perform their celestial liturgies according to precisely appointed times and rules (Weinfield 1972: 191–209; Mettinger 1982; Elior 2005: 40–62, 82–87). Throne-imagery looms large in prophetic visions such as Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1, which offered the basis for rich developments in the apocalyptic literature of Second Temple Judaism (de Jonge 1999). Scholars have exhaustively documented the correspondence between the heavenly world of Jewish apocalyptic literature and the imagery of the Jerusalem Temple (Elior 2005; Morray-Jones 1992; Morray-Jones 1998; Himmelfarb 1993). Thus, the summit of the cosmic hierarchy is the innermost chamber of a heavenly temple, where the enthroned anthropomorphic Glory of God (see Fossum 1999), guarded by the “angels of the presence,” makes itself accessible to a few elevated figures. This sheds light on the roots of Jewish apocalypticism: the explosion of interest in heavenly temple speculations during the Second Temple era was fueled, to a large extent, by conflicts between various priestly factions over issues of calendar and priestly lineage, which led to the formation of the disenfranchised priestly circles who produced the vast library of Enochic writings. Similarly, the destruction of the second temple in the year 70 led to the articulation not only of rabbinic Judaism and its Mishnaic and Talmudic literature, but also of Hekhalot literature, whose interest in the heavenly temple, and the angelic worship before the divine throne has been labeled merkavah mysticism – that is, “mysticism of the

The numerous elements of continuity between Jewish apocalyptic speculation about the heavenly temple and the possibility of ascending to join in the angelic worship before the throne of God, on the one hand, and developments in later Jewish Hekhalot mysticism, on the other, are quite clear (Gruenwald 1988; Morray-Jones 1992; Morray-Jones 1998; Orlov 2005; Elior 2005). It stands to reason that similar threads should link Jewish apocalypticism and early Christian spirituality. Indeed, as will become evident in what follows, the road “from Jewish apocalypticism to Orthodox mysticism” largely describes early Christianity’s articulation of Christological and Trinitarian doctrine, its view of church and sacred ritual, and its understanding of what is in store for Christians heeding the Gospel’s radical call to perfection (cf. Matt. 5:48).

WORSHIP IN THE SPIRIT GIVEN TO THE ENTHRONED JESUS

Characteristic of much pre-rabbinic literature produced during the Second Temple era, and even more striking in the Jewish mysticism that rabbinic Judaism attempted to suppress (Segal 1977), is the growing tendency towards binitarian monotheism, along with a tendency to speculate on the “elevation” of patriarchal figures (Adam, Enoch, Abraham, Melchisedek, Jacob, Moses), who are said to undergo a process of glorification and are transformed into angelic beings (see discussion below). The term “binitarian monotheism” is used in scholarship to designate a certain bifurcation of the divine, featuring a supreme divinity and a secondary more or less personalized manifestation of God: the Glory, the Name, the principal angel, the Son of Man. In this light, the Christological monotheism of the emergent Christian movement appears to be phenomenologically related to other types of Jewish binitarianism (Newman et al. 1999; Boyarin 2004): Jesus is proclaimed as the Lord of Glory (1 Cor. 2:8), the form of God (Phil. 2:6), the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24), the power of God (1 Cor. 1:24), the image of God (Col. 1:15), the word of God (John 1:1), the name of God (John 12:28, 13:31, 17:1). Peculiar to early Christians, however, is the belief that the “second power” – the Logos or Son of God – “became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:14), and the worship offered him as “Lord and God” (John 20:28) in a cultic setting.

Some scholars speak of an early binitarian stage in Christianity as “a primitive effort at what later became Trinitarian doctrine” (Hurtado 2003: 600, 651). In other words, the theology of “two powers in heaven” would be followed, logically, by one positing “three powers in heaven” (Segal 1977, 1999). For early Christians, however, it is the experience of “being in the Spirit” (Rev. 1:10), or being “filled with the Spirit” (recurring in Luke–Acts) that enables the worship of Jesus (“binitarian monotheistic devotion”), and that is retained by Trinitarian formulae of faith (Bucur 2011). According to the biblical witness, “no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3); although the adoption into sonship (huiothesia) has been opened to humans by the incarnation of the Son (Gal. 4:4–5), this “huiothesia through Christ” (Eph. 1:5) is only possible for those who receive “the spirit of huiothesia,” because it is only the Spirit that enables

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believers to act as sons, addressing God as Father (Rom. 8:15). Indeed, before stating that Stephen saw the Son of Man, Jesus, "standing at the right hand of God" and that he prayed to Jesus (Acts 7:59-60: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit... Lord, do not hold this sin against them") - in the same terms that Jesus prays to the Father (Luke 23:34, 46; "Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing... Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit'") - the author of Acts notes that Stephen was "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:55-56). Similarly, in the Fourth Gospel, Christian worship of God is worship "in the Spirit" (John 4:24), which enables one to honor the Father by honoring the Son (John 5:23).

A text such as Ascension of Isaiah (8.17-18, 9.27-40) and its echoes in Irenaeus (Epid. 10) and Origen (De principiis 1.3.4) presents a seeming perfect example of "three powers in heaven" theology: the visionary sees God, the angel of Christ, and the angel of the Holy Spirit as three discrete entities. Nevertheless, the angelomorphic Holy Spirit is first and foremost "the angel of the Holy Spirit who has spoken in you and also in the other righteous" (Asc. Isa. 9.36) and, for Origen (Comm. Rom. 3.8.8) the ground of all theogony. In other words, the Spirit is the guide, the enabler, and the interpreter of the prophetic and visionary experience of worshipping Jesus alongside God. Generally speaking, the texts usually quoted as examples of "early Christian unitarianism" often claim to be rooted in a pneumatic religious experience that the readers are exorted to emulate beginning with the very act of reading. When this mystagogical element is set aside - a matter of professional necessity, because a scholarly reading is by definition one that maintains a critical distance to the text - the ancient writers are often found to lack explicit references to the Holy Spirit, and are thus labeled "unitarian" (Bucur 2011).

This exalted view of Jesus is conveyed through the attribution of traditional Jewish indicators of the divinity: the divine Name, the divine throne, the reception of worship. In the book of Revelation, for instance, all three indicators point to the same theological view: God and, associated with God, the Son or Lamb. The bearer of the divine name is the Father (Rev. 14: 8; 17; 21:22), but the divine Name is also attributed to the Son (Gieschen 2003; see also 1998: 253-55). The divine throne is occupied jointly by the Father and the Lamb (Rev. 5:16), and the Lamb is associated in various ways with the worship received by God (Rev. 5:13-14; 7:10; 14:4; 20:6; 21:22-23; 22:5). Generally speaking, the throne imagery (especially as displayed in Psalm 110:1 and Dan. 7:13) is central to New Testament Christology (Bauckham 1999). The same continues to be true for patristic literature, as well as in the later hymnography (Bucur 2009b) and iconography. Icons featuring "Christ in glory" or "Christ as end-time judge" often depict a throne equipped with fiery wheels and wings, surrounded by seraphim and cherubim. This iconographic exegesis of Old Testament throne-theophanies effectively proclaims Christ as the very rider of the merkavah.

Aside from its Christological use as a way of identifying the "Lord Jesus" with the "Lord God" of Israel, the "throne" also functions as a code for "bearer of divinity." Ascetic literature and hagiography depict the deified Christian as a throne of the godhead. Similarly, Byzantine hymnography views the Theotokos, the elder Simeon, even the manger of Bethlehem and the donkey on which Christ enters Jerusalem, as "thrones," inasmuch as they are bearing Christ (Ladouceur 2006; Bucur 2009b;
Finally, throne imagery (and its apocalyptic background of the angelic worship before the heavenly temple) is used to highlight the importance of the Eucharist – where the enthroned Lord is accessible here and now – sometimes in polemics against heretical claims to vision, or against Jewish throne-speculation (see Golitzin 2007b, 2007c). All of the above are part of a complex coordination of the angelic liturgy before the heavenly throne of God with the liturgy of the church before the “throne” of the altar, and with the interior liturgy, where God is enthroned on the altar of the heart. The New Testament and pre-Nicene roots of the “three-church” theory, its flowering in the Syriac milieu – Ephrem of Nineveh, the Book of Steps, the Macarian homilies – in Pseudo-Dionysius, and in Simeon the New Theologian, have been studied extensively (Golitzin 2007c: 111, 114–17; 1995: 349–92). The rich deployment of this throne-imagery is evidently dependent on a Christological rereading of Old Testament throne-visions and more generally of Old Testament theophanies.

THEOPHANIES

Golitzin (2007a: xviii) has noted that

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

Early Christians typically identify the second power with Jesus Christ. The New Testament often alludes to the divine Name (cf. Exod. 3:14, “egò eimi,” sc. ho ón; Exod. 6:3, kurios), and proclaims Jesus Christ as “Lord” (kurios), obviously in reference to the Old Testament “Lord” (kurios in the LXX) seen by the prophets. This sort of “YHWH Christology,” or “divine Christology,” has been traced back to the Gospel of Mark, the Gospel of John, the Pauline corpus, and the Catholic Epistle of Jude (Ellis 1999; Binni and Boschi 2004; Capes 1992; Fossum 1987; Rowe 2000; Gathercole 2006). It was prominent in the pre-Nicene era and continued to underlie the Christology of the conciliar era (Legeay 1902–3; Romanides 1959–60; Golitzin 2007b: 53–57). Byzantine (as well as Syriac and Latin) hymnography explicitly identifies Jesus Christ as the author of the revelatory and saving acts recorded in the Old Testament: the Lord of Paradise, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the one who led Israel out of captivity, the Lawgiver on Sinai, the object of prophetic visions (Bucur 2009b). This Christological interpretation of theophanies also underlies the Byzantine theology of icons (Giakalis 2005: 59 and n23), and finds its visual counterpart in numerous Byzantine icons and manuscript illuminations. An alternative view – theophanies as created manifestations of the divine nature – was advocated by Augustine of Hippo and was gradually adopted as normative in Western Christianity (Studer 1971; Barnes 1999; Bucur 2008a). Advocated in Byzantium by the adversaries of Gregory Palamas, this notion was rejected as heretical in the aftermath of the Hesychast debate (Romanides 1960–64; Bucur 2008b).
ANGELOMORPHISM OF THE SON AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Christological interpretation of Old Testament theophanies resulted in the identification of Jesus with one of the three angelic visitors enjoying “the hospitality of Abraham” (Gen. 18:1–8), with “the angel of great counsel” (Isa. 9:5 LXX) and “the angel of the covenant” (Mal. 3:1). Following a distinction between nature and function already insisted upon by patristic exegeters, scholars have come to designate such cases as examples of “angelomorphic Christology,” where the term “angelomorphic” signals the use of angelic characteristics, while not necessarily implying that Christ is simply one of the angels (Danielou 1964: 146; Fletcher-Louis 1997: 14–15; Gieschen 1998: 4, 349). This exegesis is echoed by the depiction of Christ as an angel in Byzantine icons and manuscript illuminations.

Although less explored than angelomorphic Christology, a similar reworking of Jewish apocalyptic angelology can be discerned in early Christian pneumatology. Of relevance here is another prominent theme in the apocalyptic literature of Second Temple Judaism, namely the select group of angels conducting their liturgy before the heavenly throne. Sometimes called “angels of the Face” (Jub. 2:2, 18; 15:27; 31:14; T. Judah 25:2; T. Levi 3:5; 1 QH 6:13), the supreme angels constitute a select group of heavenly beings – often a group of seven – that enjoys privileged access before God. Passages featuring the group of seven heavenly beings are Ezek. 9:2–3 (seven angelic beings, of which the seventh is more important than the other six); Tob. 12:15 (seven “holy angels” who have access before the Glory, where they present the prayers of the saints); 1 En. (ch. 20, seven archangels; ch. 90.21, “the seven first snow-white ones”); T. Levi 7.4–8.3 (seven men in white clothing, vesting Levi with the [sevenfold] priestly apparel); 2 En. 19.6 (seven phoenixes, seven cherubim and seven seraphim, all singing in unison); Pr. Jos. (the seven archangels, whose chief captain and first minister before the face of God is the angel “Israel”). Among Christian texts, Revelation mentions seven spirits before the divine throne (Rev. 1:4, 3:1, 4:5, 5:6, 8:2), and the Shepherd of Hermas knows of a group of seven consisting of the six “first created ones” who accompany the Son of God as their seventh (Hermas, Vis. 3.4.1; Hermas, Sim. 5.5.3). Clement of Alexandria’s group of seven “protoktists”, mentioned above, is depicted in undeniably angelic imagery, yet it also conveys a pneumatological content. Clement identifies the seven not only with the angels ever contemplating the face of God (Matt. 18:10), with the “thrones” (Col. 1:16), “the seven eyes of the Lord” (Zech. 4:9, 4:10; Rev. 5:6), but also with the seven operations of the Spirit (Isa. 11:1–2 LXX). In short, the seven are not only “first created angels” and “first-born princes of the angels” (Strom. 6.16.142–43), but also as “the heptad of the Spirit” (Paed. 3.12.87). Strikingly similar views are expressed by Aphrahat the Persian Sage, even though no direct or indirect literary connection exists with Clement of Alexandria.

It has been determined, overall, that angelomorphic pneumatology, far from being an oddity of Clement’s, constitutes a relatively widespread phenomenon in early Christianity (Bucur 2009a). With the advent of the Arian and Pneumatomachian confrontations, angelomorphic pneumatology was bound to become highly problematic and eventually to be discarded. It is interesting to note, however, that the angelomorphism of the Spirit can be found in the writings of no less a stalwart of Byzantine theology in the fourteenth century than Gregory Palamas (Bucur
Palamas is uninhibited in using some of the biblical verses that had once supported angelomorphic pneumatology. In his Fifth Antirhetikos against Akindynos (chs 15, 17), Gregory Palamas identifies the seven gifts of the Spirit in Isaiah 11 with the seven eyes of the Lord (Zech. 4:10), the seven spirits of Revelation, and the “finger/spirit of God” (Luke 11:20, Matt. 12:28). All of these, he says, designate the divine energies referred to in scripture as seven, and should therefore not be considered created.

TRANSFORMATIONAL MYSTICISM

Arguably the most significant element of continuity between Jewish apocalypticism and the monastic writers of the Orthodox East is, to use a term borrowed from scholars of the Jewish peudepigrapha, “transformational mysticism” (Murray-Jones 1992). The claim to esoteric knowledge about heavenly mysteries, which is at the heart of Jewish apocalypticism, is indistinguishable from the claim to extraordinary experience conveyed by the language of “ascent,” “heavenly liturgy,” “glorification,” and “transformation.” Beholding the mysteries is, in other words, not a matter of intellectual assent to certain esoteric truths, but one of transforming ascent: the visionary becomes what he beholds.

The theme of transformation from a human into an angelic being, or at least of becoming “angelomorphic,” is abundantly present in Jewish apocalyptic literature (e.g. 1 En. 71.11; 4QSb 4.25; 2 En. 28.11; T. Levi 4.2). The covenanters at Qumran, for instance, “expressed profound identification with the angels . . . they envisaged a heavenly cult of angelic priests,” and saw themselves as “partners and counterparts of the angels” (Elior 2005: 58, 171, 99, 93). A perfect example of such “transformational mysticism” can be found in the “Book of the Watchers” (= 1 En. 1–36), written in the third century BCE, decades before the apocalyptic section of Daniel (chs 7–12), and in the later 2 (Slavonic) Enoch, dated to the first century. According to these texts, the patriarch ascends through the heavens and becomes acquainted with the various levels of angelic denizens and their worship. At the climax of his heavenly journey, he gazes on the enthroned anthropomorphic “Glory of God” (Ezek. 1:26), is “anointed,” “crowned,” “robed,” and endowed with the name of God. Being thus transformed into a (semi-)angelic entity, he partakes of the divine glory, knowledge, and majesty, and is conferred upon the authority of mediation and judgment (e.g. 1 En. 71; 2 En. 22). These views, even though usually criticized by the rabbinic Sages (Elior 2005: 201–31), continue to hold sway in certain strands of later Jewish mysticism (3 En. 15.48C), which even depicts Enoch as having become “the lesser YHWH” (3 En. 12), virtually indistinguishable from God.

Emerging Christianity also describes the eschatological destiny of humankind as a transformation towards an angelic status (1 Cor. 15:51; Matt. 22:30; Luke 20:36; Herm. Sim. 9.24.4, 9.25.2; Vis. 2.6.7; 2 Bar. 51:12). Nevertheless, the notion of an angelic transformation at the end time is recontextualized and made dependent on the Christian kerygma. For instance, according to Phil. 3:20–21, the transformation of the believer is effected by Christ upon his end-time return, and consists of a change that results in a “christomorphic” humanity. It is no wonder, therefore, that Irenaeus of Lyon (Haer. 5.36.3) expresses the conviction that, at the eschaton, humans will even surpass the angels.
A generation later, however, Tertullian still envisages a process of real “angelification” (Marc. 3.9.4, 7). Clement of Alexandria, reporting the views of Christian teachers from earlier generations whom he calls “the elders,” depicts a continuous ascent on the cosmic ladder, marked by an ongoing cyclical transformation of humans into angels, of angels into archangels, and of archangels into the supreme angelic group of protoktists or “first-created” angels (Bucur 2009a: 32–51). Clement, however, is undermining these archaic notions inherited from Second Temple apocalypticism by interpreting the cosmic ladder and the associated experience of ascent and transformation as descriptions of an interior phenomenon. He offers thereby an early example of what scholars have termed “interiorized apocalypticism,” defined as “the transposition of the cosmic setting of apocalyptic literature, and in particular of the ‘out of body’ experience of heavenly ascent and transformation, to the inner theater of the soul” (Goltzin 2001: 141).

In later Christian tradition, the idea of a real “angelification” was eventually discarded, probably out of a concern for the difficulties that a world view such as Clement’s would raise for eschatology (Daley 2003: 46). Despite extensive talk about the ascetical holy man living as an “angel in the body,” and despite the depiction of an angelic life in heaven, the transformed holy man of monastic literature is “angelomorphic” rather than “angelic.” Nevertheless, like the Qumran covenanters described by Ehr, early Christians saw themselves as co-worshippers with the angels. This remains, to this day, one of the chief characteristics of Orthodox Christian communal prayer: “Now the hosts of heaven invisibly worship with us” (Cerubic hymn at the Presanctified Liturgy); “Grant that together with our entry there should be an entry of the holy angels, so that we may minister together [with them], and together [with them] glorify your goodness” (Prayer at the Little Entrance); “Let us, who mystically represent [mu̱stikos eikonizontes] the cherubim, and who sing the thrice holy hymn to the life giving Trinity” (Cerubic hymn at the Liturgy of John Chrysostom).

We know today that “by the time Porphyry first wrote of the philosopher deifying himself, Christians had already been speaking of deification for more than a century,” given that “the first ecclesiastical writer to apply the technical terms of deification to the Christian life” (Russell 2004: 52, 121) was Clement of Alexandria. What needs to be emphasized is that this is the same Clement who reports of the archaic Christian tradition of a real “angelification.” It becomes evident that the interiorized ascent to heaven and transformation before the divine Face, so prominent in Jewish apocalypticism, continued to remain crucial in early Christianity, and, reworked in light of the Christian revelation, is what the Eastern tradition calls, in shorthand, theósis, “deification.” Evidently, therefore, Jewish apocalyptic literature appealed to Christian devotees of the evangelic call to “be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). The presence of Jewish apocalyptic literature in the Christian East cannot be explained simply by pointing to the resident Jewish population, but must also take into account its Christian – especially monastic – readership, editorship, and, in many cases authorship or co-authorship (Patlagean 1991: 162). In Byzantium, as well as in the post-Byzantine era, it was monasticism that preserved the eschatological consciousness of the Church, thus “preventing the Christian Church from becoming totally identified with the Empire, which constantly tended to sacralize itself” (Meyendorff 1979: 6); it was monasticism that resisted the tendency towards
realized eschatology by insisting that the elaborate splendor of Byzantine worship offers not "the true feast, but rather symbols of the feast," and that the true feast is contemplated "in the Holy Spirit ... with those who celebrate ... in heaven" (Simeon the New Theologian, Ethical Discourses 14, see Golitzin 2007c: 121).

To nourish its ascetic practices and mystical contemplation, Eastern monasticism produced, copied, and distributed a vast corpus of ascetic and mystical writings. Alongside such collections as the Philokalia, however, many of the same monks might also have been busy copying apocalyptic writings. If the latter could be read as a witness to their own spiritual aspirations and experiences – ascent to heaven, progressive illumination and transformation, increasing godlikeness – it should not surprise that "the old apocalyptic texts of the Pseudepigrapha continued to be read, copied, and ... valued by the Eastern monks" (Golitzin 2007b: 82; Himmelfarb 1993: 99). The key to understanding the continued presence of Jewish apocalypticism in the very heart of Orthodox spirituality lies hidden with those who embraced the life of the future age here and now, and "neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (Matt. 22:30).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING


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