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## ***Christophanic Exegesis and the Problem of Symbolization: Daniel 3 (the Fiery Furnace) as a Test Case***

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*Abstract* — Aside from other strands in its rich history of interpretation, the episode of the three youths in the fiery furnace (Dan 3) was interpreted by early Christians as a theophany (or rather, more specifically, a manifestation of the Logos-to-be-incarnate, a “Christophany”), as a foreshadowing of the mystery of the incarnation, and, especially in Byzantine hymns about “the three youths equal in number to the Trinity,” as an allusion to the Trinitarian God. The current scholarly concepts, however, fail to distinguish properly between the various types of exegesis involved in each of these cases and obscure the importance of the earliest and most enduring Christian exegesis of OT theophanies.

*Key Words* — *theophany, Daniel 3, rewritten Bible, Christophany, Christological, Trinitarian, midrash*

The well-known episode of the three youths in the fiery furnace contains much material that early Christian exegetes found congenial to their theological interests: contrast and conflict between virtuous adherents to the biblical faith and religiously oppressive state power, perseverance in faith and victory even at the cost of persecution and death, the fiery furnace that holds the youths but does not consume them, the salutary intervention of a heavenly agent described as having the appearance of an angel or son of God (Dan 3:25 MT: לְבָרִיאִים אֲלֵהֶיךָ; Dan 3:92 OG, ὁμοίωμα ἀγγέλου θεοῦ; Dan 3:92 Th., ὁμοία σὺν θεοῦ),<sup>1</sup> and the fact that there are three men united in thought and action. These strands in our text’s rich history of interpretation have already received significant scholarly attention, most recently in the thorough study by Martine Dulaey.<sup>2</sup> The following contributes to the

1. Greek text in *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Göttingensis editum* 16.2: *Susanna Daniel Bel et Draco*, ed. J. Ziegler (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958), 133.

2. Martine Dulaey, “Les trois hébreux dans la fournaise (Dn 3) dans l’interprétation symbolique de l’église ancienne,” *RevScRel* 71 (1997): 33–59. See also Dennis Tucker, “The



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discussion by focusing on the Christological and Trinitarian use of Dan 3 and, as the subtitle indicates, by raising the question of symbolization.

Some early Christians detected in the triad of Hebrew youths a transparent Trinitarian allusion. Others insisted on the theophanic aspect of Dan 3 and understood the heavenly agent in the furnace to be none other than the Logos-to-be-incarnate. I argue that scholars have generally failed to apply a sharp enough focus to the multilayered exegetical tradition and its diverse strategies of appropriating the HB as Christian Scripture, so as to distinguish adequately between the Christological exegesis of OT theophanies and other strands of interpretation. Indeed, neither “allegory” nor “typology” nor the more recent terms *figural* and *figurative* capture the epiphanic dimension of the texts under discussion, as these are understood by many exegetes in late antique and medieval, especially Byzantine, Christianity. A recent proposal, similarly critical of the current scholarly terminology—namely, the categorization of this kind of exegesis as an example of “rewritten Scripture” literature—is also unwarranted. I conclude that, for the time being at least, the term *Christophanic exegesis* might be serviceable in highlighting the type of symbolization at work in Christological interpretations of OT theophanies.

#### CHRIST IN THE FIERY FURNACE

Early Christian writers, from Irenaeus to Romanos the Melodist and from Tertullian to Prudentius, consistently identified Christ, the Logos, as the heavenly agent (whether “son of God,” for the majority who use Theodotion, or, for the few who use the OG, “angel”—understood, via Isa 9:6, as “the angel of great counsel”) who entered the furnace and saved the three youths. A large dossier of relevant passages has already been assembled by Dulaey.<sup>3</sup> I will only add a few observations.

First, when the episode of the fiery furnace is referred to, it is usually as part of a constellation of theophanic passages that are all understood, despite their obvious differences, as similar manifestations of the Logos-to-be-incarnate, Jesus Christ: the three visitors of Abraham, Jacob’s dream of the ladder, Moses at the burning bush, the giving of the Law on Sinai, and prophetic visions such as Isa 6, Ezek 1, and Dan 7. A telling example occurs in Hippolytus’s *Commentary on Daniel*, in a section that opens with the question “who was this angel?” and continues with a litany of biblical references: it was none other than the one who rained fire on Sodom, drowned the Egyptians, appeared to Isaiah and to Ezekiel, the “the angel of the Lord” and “angel of great counsel,” who remains unnamed in Dan 3 “because Jesus had not yet been born of the Virgin” (οὐδέπω γὰρ ἦν ἐκ τῆς

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Early *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Daniel 3: Representative Examples,” *JTI* 6 (2012): 295–306, who discusses mainly martyrdom.

3. Dulaey, “Les trois hébreux dans la fournaise,” 42–46.

Παρθένου γεγεννημένος ὁ Ἰησοῦς).<sup>4</sup> More specifically, it was the Logos prior to his incarnation (ἄσαρκον) who pricked King Nebuchadnezzar's heart and enabled him to perceive that luminous entity, "like a son of God," in anticipation of the time when the Gentiles would see the Logos incarnate (ἔνσαρκον).<sup>5</sup> The second observation concerns the endurance of the "Christophanic" exegesis along the centuries.

#### HYMNOGRAPHIC AND ICONOGRAPHIC EXEGESIS

This interpretation of the fiery furnace was eventually absorbed into the theology popularized by the hymnography of Romanos the Melodist,<sup>6</sup> so that it is not surprising to encounter it in numerous hymns that remain in use today in communities of the Byzantine tradition:

Ineffable wonder! He who in the furnace delivered the holy youths from the flame, is laid in the tomb a lifeless corpse for the salvation of us who sing, "God, our Redeemer, blessed are you!"<sup>7</sup>

He who delivered the Young Men from the flames took flesh and came upon the earth. Nailed to the Cross, he granted us salvation, the God of our fathers, alone blessed and greatly glorified.<sup>8</sup>

The Offspring of the Mother of God (ὁ τόκος τῆς Θεοτόκου) saved the innocent Youths in the furnace. Then he was prefigured, but now in reality he gathers the whole world which sings, "Praise the Lord, his works, and highly exalt him to all the ages."<sup>9</sup>

The Lord who protected the Youths in the flame of fire of the burning furnace, and came down to them in the form of an angel (ἐν μορφῇ ἁγγέλου συγκαταβάντα τούτοις), praise and highly exalt to all the ages.<sup>10</sup>

Master, who delivered the Holy Youths from the fire . . . you smash all the bonds of death, and you raise all who from every age were among the dead, who worship, O Christ, your eternal Kingdom.<sup>11</sup>

4. Hippolytus, *Commentary on Daniel* 2.32–34 (GCS n.s. 7:118–28).

5. Hippolytus, *Commentary on Daniel* 2.33 (GCS n.s. 7:122).

6. See Romanos, *Kontakion on the Three Youths* 26, 29 (SC 99:396, 398, 402): "This is not an angel, but rather the God of the angels. He showed himself in the form of an angel, who is to come into the world. . . . He shows himself now and point us to the image of things to pass."

7. Canon of Holy Saturday, Ode 7, Eirmos. For Byzantine hymnographic texts I am using the Greek text printed in the ecclesiastical editions of the *Oktoēchos*, *Triodion*, *Pentēkostarion*, and *Menaia*, and the English translation of Ephrem Lash—the best available today, offered online at [www.anastasis.org.uk](http://www.anastasis.org.uk).

8. Canon of the Holy Cross for Third Sunday in Lent, Ode 7.

9. Canon of Akathist (ascribed to 9th-century Joseph the Hymnographer), Ode 8, Eirmos.

10. Canon for the Sunday of Antipascha (Thomas Sunday), Ode 8, Eirmos.

11. Sunday of the Forefathers, Prosimion at *Lord I have cried*.

The harp of the youths theologized concerning the Almighty, the God of all Who manifestly appeared to them in the furnace as they chanted a hymn, saying: “Blessed is the God of our fathers!”<sup>12</sup>

Having watched as the three youths were cast into the furnace, the king beheld a fourth appear, Whom He called the Son of God; and he cried out to all: “Blessed is the God of our fathers!”<sup>13</sup>

You saved the Youths who hymned you in the furnace of fire; blessed are you, the God of our fathers!<sup>14</sup>

[Y]ou [Mary Theotokos] appeared as the source of joy, since you conceived in your womb him who once appeared in Babylon and beyond all understanding preserved unburned the Youths unjustly cast into the furnace.<sup>15</sup>

Compared to hymnography, which, echoing most patristic exegetes, opted clearly for a Christological interpretation of the fourth figure, visual exegesis is significantly more ambiguous. Daniel 3 is one of the earliest iconographic themes and can be found in frescoes of the Roman catacomb of Priscilla as early as the second (*Capela Graeca*) and third (*Cubiculum of the Velatio*) centuries.<sup>16</sup> The fourth figure, however, is not always part of the composition. When it is, the heavenly agent is either (most often) an angel, or Christ in anthropomorphic or angelomorphic appearance.<sup>17</sup> A shift took

12. Canon of the Three Holy Youths, Sticheron in Ode 7, stanza 2.

13. Canon of the Three Holy Youths, Sticheron in Ode 7, stanza 3.

14. Canon of the Ascension (ascribed to John of Damascus), Ode 7, Irmos.

15. Canon of the Forefeast of the Nativity, Ikos.

16. On the visual exegesis of the fiery furnace episode in Daniel, see Carlo Carletti, *I tre giovani ebrei di Babilonia nell'arte cristiana antica* (Brescia: Paideia, 1975), together with the biting criticism and additions by Marguerite Rassart-Debergh, “Les trois Hébreux dans la fournaise dans l'art paléochrétien. Iconographie,” *Byzantion* 48 (1978): 430–55; idem, “Les trois Hébreux dans la fournaise en Égypte et en Nubie chrétiennes,” *Rivista degli studi orientali* 58 (1984): 141–51; Colum Hourihane, “*De Camino Ignis*: The Iconography of the Three Children in the Fiery Furnace in Ninth-Century Ireland,” in *From Ireland Coming: Irish Art from the Early Christian to the Late Gothic Period and Its European Context*, ed. C. Hourihane (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 61–82; Hans Reinhard Seeliger, “ΠΑΛΑΙ ΜΑΡΤΥΡΕΣ: Die drei Jünglinge im Feuerofen als Typos in der spätantiken Kunst, Liturgie und patristischen Literatur,” in *Liturgie und Dichtung: Ein interdisziplinäres Kompendium II* (St. Ottilien: EOS, 1983), 257–334; Kathleen M. Irwin, “The Liturgical and Theological Correlations in the Associations of Representations of the Three Hebrews and the Magi in the Christian Art of Late Antiquity” (PhD diss., Graduate Theological Union, 1985); Ann T. Walton, “The Three Hebrew Children in the Fiery Furnace: A Study in Christian Iconography,” in *The Medieval Mediterranean: Cross-Cultural Contacts*, ed. M. J. Chiat and K. L. Reyerson (St. Cloud, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 57–66; Kathleen Corrigan, “The Three Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace: An Early Byzantine Icon at Mt. Sinai,” in *Anathemata Erotika: Studies in Honor of Thomas Matthew*, ed. J. D. Alchermes et al. (Mainz: von Zabern, 2009), 93–103.

17. Moreover, in the sixth-century Murano ivory diptych and seventh-century encaustic icon at Sinai, the long staff of the protective angel ends in a cross, “symbolizing and anticipating the saving act of Christ” (Walton, “Three Hebrew Children,” 62).

place in the second half of the first millennium, which inclined the balance toward the latter option. Nevertheless, an overall ambiguity persists in iconography, since in frescoes and illuminations the fourth figure bears different inscriptions: sometimes “angel of the Lord,” sometimes “archangel Michael,” sometimes “Jesus Christ” (IC XC). The same ambiguity occurs, although to a lesser degree, in the visual representation of the related tradition about Abraham in the furnace:<sup>18</sup> most manuscript illuminations show *Jesus* intervening to save the patriarch from the fiery furnace; some, however, show *an angel*.<sup>19</sup>

#### POLYMORPHIC CHRISTOLOGY

The biblical text of Dan 3 is characterized by a certain ambiguity: it is “the angel of the Lord” who comes “down into the furnace” (3:49), but his spectacular mastery over the elements suggests divine intervention; the king refers to him as “man” (3:92, “four men”) but describes his appearance as being similar to that of an angel (OG) or son of God (Theodotion).<sup>20</sup> Exegetes throughout the ages did, in fact, seize on these ambiguities.

Jewish sources debate whether it was divine or angelic intervention that saved Abraham and, later, the three youths in the furnace. In the early decades of the first century AD, 3 Macc 6:2, 6 has no doubt that it was the “king, dread sovereign, most high, almighty God” who rescued Daniel and his companions. The roughly contemporary *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* mentions Nathaniel, “the angel in charge of fire” (*LAB* 38.3).<sup>21</sup> Some centuries later, *Exodus Rabbah* thinks it was Gabriel who came down to deliver Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. *Genesis Rabbah*, by contrast, states that it

18. Neh 9:7, Vulg.: *Tu ipse Domine Deus qui elegisti Abram et eduxisti eum de igne Chaldeorum*; Tg. Ps-Jon. Gen 11; 15:7; *LAB* 6; 23:5; *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* 26; *Gen. Rab.* 34.9; 38.13; 44.13; *Cant. Rab.* 1.13; *b Pes.* 118a; *b. Erubin* 53a; cf. Jub 12.12–15 (Abraham sets fire to the house of idols, and escapes the city); Quran, Sura 21.68–69; 37.95–97. According to Geza Vermes (*Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies* [Leiden: Brill, 1973], 88) the legend arose when readers of Gen 15:7 (“I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans” interpreted “Ur” (אור) as “flame” (אור); see Isa 50:11; Ezek 5:2), and thus “created a legend out of a pun.”

19. E.g., German MS 245 at the Berlin Staatsbibliothek, fol. 59v. See Joseph Gutmann, “Abraham in the Fire of the Chaldeans: A Jewish Legend in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Art,” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 7 (1973): 342–52. Christian iconography of Abraham in the fiery furnace only begins in the early 14th century with the *Speculum humanae salvationis* whose text and illustrations revolve around the typological relation between the Old and the New Testament. “Abraham in the fiery furnace,” alongside “Moses leading the people out of Egypt” and “Lot’s escape from Sodom,” is juxtaposed to the antitype of Christ leading the souls of Hades. The text in the *Speculum* reads, “Behold, God prefigured this liberation of man. Once he liberated the patriarch Abraham from Ur of the Chaldeans.”

20. Cf. Dan 6:22: “My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths” (Theodotion); “the Lord has saved me from the lions” (OG).

21. On the dating of these works, see H. Anderson, “3 Maccabees,” *OTP* 2:509–29, esp. p. 515–16; Howard Jacobson, *A Commentary on Pseudo-Philo’s Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum with Latin Text and English Translation*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 199–209.

was the Lord who saved Daniel, whereas Abraham had been rescued by the Archangel Michael. Finally, the Babylonian Talmud (*b. Pes.* 118a–b) has the Lord intervening to save Abraham and sending Gabriel to rescue the three youths (notwithstanding an attempt by “Yurkami, the prince [in charge] of hail” to gain the mission for himself).<sup>22</sup>

As for Christian writers, Romanos the Melodist states the traditional view that the fourth youth was no mere angel but Christ in angelomorphic guise. In stanza 25, however, the Melodist proposes what appears at first a fanciful *midrash* on Dan 3:

Standing as a choir in the midst of the furnace, the children changed the furnace into a heavenly church, singing together with the angel to the maker of the angels (ψάλλοντες μετ’ ἀγγέλου τῷ ποιητῆ τῶν ἀγγέλων), and imitating the entire liturgy of the bodiless ones. When, however, they found themselves filled with the all-holy Spirit from having worshipped (ἐκ τῆς λατρείας), they beheld something else, more fearsome still: the very one they had seen as angel was constantly changing his appearance, so that they saw him now as divine, now as a human, and he was now giving commands, now supplicating together with them (καθ’ ἐκάστην ἡλλοίου τὴν μορφήν, καὶ ὅτε μὲν θεῖος, ἄλλοτε δὲ ὡς ἄνθρωπος ἐωρᾶτο, καὶ ποτὲ μὲν ἐκέλευε, ποτὲ δὲ συνικέτευεν).<sup>23</sup>

The exegetical problem facing Romanos is the following: on the one hand, the fourth youth joins the three Hebrews in their place of suffering and prayer; on the other hand, Christian tradition sees here the divine presence of the Logos-be-incarnate. How, then, can the “Lord” also be a fellow-suppliant? Evidently, the episode of the fiery furnace offers Romanos the

22. *Exod. Rab.* 18.5: “Gabriel came down to deliver Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.” *Gen. Rab.* 44.13: “R. Eliezer b. Jacob said: Michael descended and rescued Abraham from the fiery furnace. The Rabbis said: The Holy One, blessed be He, rescued him; thus it is written, ‘I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees.’ And when did Michael descend? In the case of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah” (Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, 1.369). *b. Pes.* 118a-b: “R. Johanan also said: . . . when the wicked Nimrod cast our father Abraham into the fiery furnace, Gabriel said to the Holy One, blessed be He: ‘Sovereign of the Universe! Let me go down, cool [it], and deliver that righteous man from the fiery furnace.’ Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to him: ‘I am unique in My world, and he is unique in his world: it is fitting for Him who is unique to deliver him who is unique.’ But because the Holy One, blessed be He, does not withhold the [merited] reward of any creature, he said to him, ‘Thou shalt be privileged to deliver three of his descendants.’ R. Simeon the Shilonite lectured: When the wicked Nebuchadnezzar cast Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah into the fiery furnace, Yurkami, Prince of hail, rose before the Holy One, blessed be He, and said to Him: ‘Sovereign of the Universe! Let me go down and cool the furnace and save these righteous men from the fiery furnace.’ Said Gabriel to him, ‘The might of the Holy One, blessed be He, is not thus [manifested], for thou art the Prince of hail, and all know that water extinguishes fire. But I, the Prince of fire, will go down and cool it within and heat it without, and will thus perform a double miracle.’”

23. Romanos, *Kontakion on the Three Youths* 25 (SC 99:396).



opportunity for oblique remarks on the paradox of the incarnation. And it is precisely this point that allows us to connect the seemingly bizarre notion of a polymorphic Christ in this *kontakion* to what Romanos writes elsewhere:

Let us all raise our eyes to God in heaven, as we cry like Jeremiah: the One who appeared on earth, this is our God, who also willingly lived among men [cf. Bar 3:38], and underwent no change, who showed himself in different shapes (ἐν μορφαῖς) to the prophets, whom Ezekiel contemplated like the form of a man on the fiery chariot, and Daniel as a son of man and ancient of days, proclaiming the ancient and the young to be one Lord: The One who appeared and enlightened all things.<sup>24</sup>

In this text, drawn from the Melodist's Second Kontakion on Theophany, Romanos interprets the vision in Dan 7 (the Son of Man advancing to receive universal and eternal authority from the Ancient of Days) as a proclamation of the *one Lord*—specifically, the one-who-would-be-incarnate, Jesus Christ—simultaneously young and old, son of man and ancient of days: ἀνθρώπου υἱὸν καὶ παλαιὸν ἡμερῶν, τὸν ἀρχαῖον καὶ νέον ἓνα Κύριον. Leaving aside the Christological interpretation of the Ancient of Days, which is well established in early Christian tradition,<sup>25</sup> the implicit identification of Christ as *both* Son of Man and Ancient of Days is also nothing new in early Christian literature. It falls, rather, within the category of “polymorphic Christology,” current in scholarship on Christian origins<sup>26</sup> as an apt descriptor of what one encounters, for example, in the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, Justin Martyr's *Dialogue*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*, and other early Christian texts.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps the

24. Romanos, *Second Kontakion on Theophany* 15 (SC 110:288).

25. Bogdan G. Bucur, “The Son of Man and the Ancient of Days: Observations on the Early Christian Reception of Daniel 7,” *Phronema* (forthcoming).

26. See Gedaliahu Guy Stroumsa, “Polymorphie divine et transformations d'un mythe: l'Apocryphon de Jean et ses sources,” *VC* 35 (1981): 412–34; Paul Foster, “Polymorphic Christology: Its Origins and Development in Early Christianity,” *JTS* 58 (2007): 66–99; Hugues Garcia, “La polymorphie du Christ: Remarques sur quelques définitions et sur de multiples enjeux,” *Apocrypha* 10 (1999): 16–55; idem, “L'enfant vieillard, l'enfant aux cheveux blancs et le Christ polymorphe,” *RHPR* 80 (2000): 479–501.

27. In the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the Son appears in a series of visions under the mysterious μορφή of the “church,” first as an old woman, later as a young maiden who retains, however, the white hair of her former appearance. In the apocryphal Acts, Christ's appearance is adapted to the spiritual abilities and needs of his interlocutors: *Acts of John* 73; 76; 87–90; *Acts of Peter* 5; 20; *Acts of Thomas* 27; 48; 153; *Acts of Peter and Andrew* 2, 16; *Martyrdom of Matthew* 1; 13; 24; 26. Justin describes Christ as an old man in the putative first-person account of his conversion from Platonism to Christianity (*Dial.* 8.1). See Andrew Hofer, “The Old Man as Christ in Justin Dialogue with Trypho,” *VC* 57 (2003): 1–21. Two of the visions in the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* offer descriptions of Jesus as simultaneously young and old. He is, first,

most striking anticipation of the “aged infant” or “infant God” theme of the hymns and icons is the following text in the *Acts of Peter*: “that you may love him, this Great and Small One [lit., “smallest one,” *minimum*] . . . this Young Man and Old Man, appearing in time, yet utterly invisible in eternity; whom a human hand has not grasped, yet is held by his servants, whom flesh has not seen and now sees . . . who was before the world and is now perceived in time . . . to him be praise in all eternity. Amen.”<sup>28</sup>

Let us return to the paradoxical vision of the three youths, as imagined by Romanos—Christ “constantly changing his appearance, so that they saw him now as divine, now as a human, and he was now giving commands, now supplicating together with them”—and compare it to the description of the transfigured Christ in the *Acts of John* 90:

At another time he took me and James and Peter to the mountain, where he used to pray, and we beheld such a light on him that it is not possible for a man who uses mortal speech to describe what it was like. . . . Now I, because he loved me, went to him quietly as though he should not see, and stood looking upon his back. And I saw that he was not dressed in garments, but was seen by us as naked and not at all like a man; his feet were whiter than snow, so that the ground there was lit up by his feet, and his head reached to heaven; so that I was afraid and cried out, and he turned and appeared as a man of small stature.<sup>29</sup>

I submit that, like this NT apocryphon, the hymn of Romanos offers an example of “polymorphic Christology.” The connection between writings of the second and third centuries, sometimes of dubious orthodoxy, and hymnographic productions of later centuries, should not surprise. Apocryphal texts featuring a polymorphic Christ retained their popularity, so that polymorphic Christology was still a real—albeit heretical—theological option in the ninth century, eliciting Photius of Constantinople’s criticism. As Gretchen Krehling McKay puts it, “While Photius mentions these

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“a white-haired man sitting in the middle of it [an enormous garden] (cf. Rev 1:14), dressed in shepherd’s clothes, a big man, milking sheep. And standing around were many thousands dressed in white” (4:8); later (12:1–3), he is “appeared to be an aged man. He had white hair and a youthful face,” seated on a throne (“we stood before the throne”) inside “a place whose walls seemed to be made of light” (cf. Rev 21:18), surrounded by angels who sing an unceasing *Trisagion* (cf. Isa 6:3; Rev 4:8). Clearly, the enthroned Lord and the *Trisagion* are derived from Isa 6, the “many thousands” recall Dan 7:9, and the description of the Lord as both youthful and white-haired owes to Dan 7, filtered through Rev 1. For the Latin text and English translation, see Thomas J. Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 107/127, 114/131.

28. *Acts of Peter* 20; English translation in *The Apocryphal New Testament*, ed. J. K. Elliott (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 414; Latin text in *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, ed. Richard A. Lipsius, 2 vols (Leipzig: Mendelssohn, 1891), 1:68.

29. *Acts of John* 90, English translation in *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 317. Greek text in CCSA 1:193, 195.

texts in order to condemn them as erroneous, his obvious knowledge of them suggests that copies of apocryphal literature were available for Byzantine theologians to study as late as the ninth century.”<sup>30</sup>

“MYSTIC INITIATE OF THE TRIPLE LIGHT OF THE  
ONE LORDSHIP”: TRINITARIAN SYMBOLISM

The prophet Daniel is also remembered liturgically as a Trinitarian theologian *par excellence*, a “mystic initiate of the triple light of the one Lordship.”<sup>31</sup> This characterization owes in part to a Trinitarian exegesis of the apocalyptic vision in Dan 7, but it was also influenced by the Trinitarian meaning derived from the episode of the three youths in Dan 3. One popular and influential text is the Ode 8 Eirmos of the Canon of the Exaltation of the Cross: “Bless, children equal in number to the Trinity (τῆς Τριάδος ἰσάριθμοι), God the Father [and] Creator; praise the Word who came down and changed the fire into dew; and highly exalt unto the ages the all-holy Spirit who gives life to all.”<sup>32</sup> Composed by Cosmas of Maiouma in the eighth century, this hymn is sung several times during the liturgical year as part of the abbreviation of the Canon known as the *katabasias*, and was also incorporated in the *Service of the Furnace*.<sup>33</sup> Its message is certainly Trinitarian, but there is little depth to the connection between the triad of youths and the Trinity. There is perhaps more sophistication to Romanos the Melodist’s description of the three youths as “the three-essence perfume blend” (ἡ τρίμιυρος εὐωδία) and “the three-branched root” (ἡ τρίκλωνος ρίζα), inasmuch as triad and unity are fused so as to suggest the mystery of the Trinity.<sup>34</sup> Other hymns, however, offer more theological substance:

In number and faith of the divine Trinity (ἀριθμῶ καὶ πίστει τῆς θείας Τριάδος) the Youths in the furnace overthrew godlessness and in symbols revealed beforehand to the world the mysteries of God that were to be.<sup>35</sup>

30. Kraehling McKay, “Christ’s Polymorphism in Jerusalem, Taphou 14: An Examination of Text and Image,” *Apocrypha* 14 (2003): 185. See Photius, *Cod. 114* (Photius, *Bibliothèque*, ed. and trans. René Henry, 9 vols. [Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1960], 2:85). See also Éric Junod, “Actes apocryphes et hérésie: le jugement de Photius,” in *Les Actes apocryphes des apôtres: Christianisme et monde païen*, ed. François Bovon et al. (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1981), 11–24.

31. Sunday Midnight Service, Tone 5, Ode 4, troparion 1: “Mystic initiate of the triple light of the one Lordship, Daniel saw Christ as judge going towards the Father and the Spirit who revealed the vision” (Μυεῖται τῆς μιᾶς Κυριότητος τὸ τριφαεὶς ὁ Δανιήλ Χριστὸν κριτὴν θεασάμενος, πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα ἰόντα, καὶ Πνεῦμα τὸ προφαῖνον τὴν ὄρασιν). The Canon of the Midnight Office for Sundays was penned in the ninth century by Metrophanes of Smyrna.

32. Canon of the Exaltation of the Cross, Ode 8, Eirmos. Translation mine.

33. On this topic, see Andrew Walker White, *Performing Orthodox Ritual in Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

34. Romanos, *Kontakion on the Three Youths* 3 (SC 99:366); 21 (SC 99:390).

35. Canon of the Forefathers, Ode 1, stanza 5.

The pattern (προχάραγμα) of your virginity saved those equal in number to the Trinity (ισαριθμούς Τριάδος); for in virgin bodies they trampled down the flame, O Maiden, as they cried: Bless, praise the Lord.<sup>36</sup>

When the spiritual sun of righteousness was yet to shine forth from a virginal womb, the three youths equal in number to the Trinity (τῆς Τριάδος ἰσαριθμοί) shone upon us beforehand out of the fiery furnace, like stars most luminous, prefiguring in themselves the awesomeness of the mystery.<sup>37</sup>

“The three youths, equal in number to the Trinity”: because the Bible speaks of *three* young men in the Babylonian furnace, the Trinitarian connection seems pretty straightforward. Nevertheless, the characterization of the three youths as “equal in number to the Trinity” is only a marginal gloss, not at all necessary to the theological coherence and integrity of the statement. What the three youths signify is not the Trinity, but the mystery of the incarnation: “when the spiritual sun of righteousness was yet to shine forth from a virginal womb”; similarly, in the second quotation above, “the mysteries of God that were to be,” which the three youths reveal, are not the mysteries of Trinity, but the “pattern” (προχάραγμα) of the incarnation and of virginity. As a matter of fact, a similar hymn, sung on the Sunday of the Forefathers of Christ, uses the same “core” analogy between the furnace and the incarnation without connecting the three youths to the Trinity,<sup>38</sup> and the Canon of the Three Youths speaks about the Word made visible in the furnace *symbolically*.<sup>39</sup>

In other hymns, the Trinitarian and incarnational associations of the furnace episode are affirmed explicitly and juxtaposed:

By the dew of the Spirit God’s Youths rejoicing as in rain walked mystically in the midst of the flame, typifying in advance the Trinity and Christ’s incarnation (ἐν αὐτῇ προτυπώσαντες, τὴν Τριάδα καὶ τὴν σάρκωσιν Χριστοῦ).<sup>40</sup>

36. Canon to the Theotokos for Sundays in Tone 4, Ode 8, stanza 3.

37. Τοῦ νοητοῦ ἡλίου τῆς δικαιοσύνης ἐκ παρθενικῆς νηδύος ἀνίσχειν μέλλοντος ὡς ἀστέρες παμφαεῖς προλάμπουσιν ἡμῖν ἐκ τῆς καμίνου τοῦ πυρός οἱ τῆς Τριάδος ἰσαριθμοί Νεανία τὸ ζῆνον τοῦ μυστηρίου ἐν ἑαυτοῖς προτυπώσαντες. This hymn was composed by Nicholas Malaksos in the 16th century and is prescribed to be sung in tone 6 at the end of the Matins service on the Feast of the Prophet Daniel (at “Glory . . . Now and ever . . .” of the Matins Aposticha). For unclear reasons, it is now present in the Slavonic and Romanian Menaia, but not in the Greek. See Enrica Follieri, *Initia hymnorum ecclesiae Graecae*, 5 vols. (Rome: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1963), 4:273.

38. Sunday of the Forefathers, Prosimion at *Lord I have cried*: “The faithful, Holy Youths in the furnace of fire, as in dew, mystically prefigured your coming from the Virgin, which shone forth for us without burning.”

39. Canon of the Three Youths, Ode 1, stanza 1 (my translation): “Let us praise the Word without beginning, born from the Father before all ages in a manner befitting God [θεοπρεπῶς], who was made visible in symbol [συμβολικῶς] to the youths in the furnace.”

40. Sunday of the Forefathers, Prosimion at *Lord I have cried*.

The three youths prophetically traced the image of the Trinity (τῆς Τριάδος εἰκόνα) in the flame, dipping the pen of faith in immaterial ink; and they mystically beheld the Word's extreme condescension to earth (τὴν . . . ἄκραν εἰς γῆν συγκατάβασιν).<sup>41</sup>

Once again, the suggested link between the divine presence in the furnace and the incarnation appears distinct from (and, at least in my opinion) more sophisticated than the simple connection between “three youths” and the Trinity. This leads us to the topic announced in the title: the problem of symbolization.

### THE PROBLEM OF SYMBOLIZATION

From the materials presented so far, it seems clear that two broad exegetical avenues can be distinguished in the Christian reception of Dan 3. The first is a reading of the text interested in establishing Dan 3 as a theophany, or rather, more specifically, a manifestation of the Logos-to-be-incarnate, a “Christophany.” This approach is characteristic of the widespread early Christian identification of the Logos-to-be-incarnate as subject of all OT theophanies. A second approach directs the reader's gaze to “the children equal in number to the Trinity” and detects here a transparent Trinitarian allusion.

The Trinitarian interpretation can easily be categorized as an “allegorical” reading in the tradition of Philo and Origen, in that a certain detail of the narrative is interpreted as a textual cue to find a deeper theological meaning. As for the connection between the fiery furnace and the womb of Mary Theotokos, one could call it “typological,” in the older usage popularized by Jean Daniélou, or “allegorical” (in a broad sense) or “figurative,” to use more recent scholarship.<sup>42</sup>

41. Feast of Prophet Daniel (December 17), Kathisma hymn at Matins.

42. Older scholarship (most famously Jean Daniélou) insisted on a sharp opposition between “allegory” and “typology” in order to distinguish between interpretations, such as Philo's, in which the connection between sign and signified does not presuppose and require a link between Old and New Testament, and interpretations for which such a link is fundamental. “Typology” is said to answer to the specifically Christian necessity of relating the OT to the life of the church; it depends on history, gives value to “history” (that is, the biblical account), and respects history and the literal sense. By contrast, “allegory,” which has its origin in the exegesis of Homeric literature (and, later, of Plato's dialogues) and seems to have been adopted by Christians in Alexandria together with the Philonian corpus, evacuates or seeks to obliterate the historicity and relevance of the OT text. See Erich Auerbach, “Figura,” *ArchRom* 22 (1938): 436–89, English translation in idem, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 11–76, esp. pp. 29, 36, 42; G. W. H. Lampe, “The Reasonableness of Typology,” in G. W. H. Lampe and K. J. Woollcombe, *Essays on Typology* (Naperville: Allenson, 1957), 9–38; Jean Daniélou, “Traversée de la Mer Rouge et baptême aux premiers siècles,” *RSR* 33 (1946): 402–30; idem, “Qu'est-ce que la typologie?” in *L'Ancien Testament et les chrétiens*, ed. P. Auvray et al. (Paris: du Cerf, 1951), 199–205; idem, “Typologie et allégorie chez Clément d'Alexandrie,” *SP 4 / TU 79* (1961): 50–57; idem, *The*

Things are, however, more complicated in the case of the straightforward *identification* of the “Lord” who descends in the furnace in human or angelic form with Jesus Christ. Only a few scholars have problematized the distinctiveness of this approach. In a book published in 1965 and met with undeserved neglect, A. T. Hanson argued in favor of a distinction between “typology” and what he called “real presence.”<sup>43</sup> His views were echoed four decades later by Charles Gieschen’s essay on “the real presence of the Son before Christ” in pre-Nicene writers.<sup>44</sup> Today, Larry Hurtado provides the clearest distinction among three exegetical approaches to the OT char-

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*Theology of Jewish Christianity*, 3 vols. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964), 2:237–53; Raoul Mortley, *Connaissance religieuse et herméneutique chez Clément d’Alexandrie* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 39–49: “Symbolisme, allégorie et mythe”; Folker Siegert, “Homerinterpretation, Tora-Unterweisung, Bibelauslegung: Vom Ursprung der patristischen Hermeneutik,” *SP* 25 (1993): 159–71, esp. pp. 170–71.

Most scholars today reject the opposition between the terms “typology” and “allegory” as historically unfounded and therefore misleading, and prefer to view typological exegesis as a species of allegory. See Henri de Lubac, “‘Typologie’ et ‘allégorisme,’” *RSR* 34 (1947): 180–247; Henri Cruzel, “La distinction de la ‘typologie’ et de l’‘allégorisme,’” *BLE* 65 (1964): 161–74; Manlio Simonetti, *Lettera e/o allegoria: Un contributo alla storia dell’esegesi patristica* (Rome: Institutum Patristicum “Augustinianum,” 1985), 24–25 n32; idem, “Allegoria,” in *Dizionario patristico e di antichità cristiane*, ed. A. de Bernardino, 3 vols. (Casale Monferrato: Marietti, 1983–88), 1:140–41; Andrew Louth, *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 118; David Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California, 1992), 15–17, 255–58; John O’Keefe, “Allegory,” and Richard A. Norris Jr., “Typology,” in *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, ed. J. A. McGuckin (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 49–50, 209–11. Frances Young prefers the term “figural allegory” (*Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], 198), and distinguishes between its several subtypes (p. 192). It remains clear, however, that despite the problematic opposition of “typology” and “allegory,” the distinction that Daniélou wanted to account for is real and must be expressed somehow. An excellent study of this problem (Peter Martens, “Revisiting the Allegory/Typology Distinction: The Case of Origen,” *JETS* 16 [2008]: 283–317) concludes with the following recommendation: “first, that we discontinue using ‘typology’ and ‘allegory’ as labels for better and worse forms of nonliteral exegesis respectively; second, that we find alternative labels for these two forms of nonliteral interpretation; and third, that we develop a conversation around the criteria for successful nonliteral scriptural interpretation” (p. 316). Some scholars do, indeed, propose other terms for the same distinction. Dawson (*Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002]) uses “figural” and “figurative,” and ranges Origen’s terms *typos*, *hyponoia*, and *allegoria* under the former. Lewis Ayres (*Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2006], 34–38) distinguishes between grammatical and figurative readings. Acknowledging Dawson’s opposition of “figural” and “figurative” (he describes the latter as “an exegesis that begins with the plain text but loses the link with it” [p. 38]), Ayres writes: “I prefer to speak more simply of figural and bad figural exegesis”—whereas the decision about what makes “good” or “bad” figural reading “is established within a tradition’s development and internal argument” (p. 38).

43. A. T. Hanson, *Jesus Christ in the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 1965).

44. Charles Gieschen, “The Real Presence of the Son before Christ: Revisiting an Old Approach to Old Testament Christology,” *CTQ* 68 (2004): 103–26.



acteristic of “second-century proto-orthodox Christians” (for example, Justin Martyr): first, “proof texts” drawn from the prophets; second, “a wider ‘typological’ reading of the Old Testament as filled with figures and event that foreshadow Jesus”; and, third, “the interpretation of Old Testament accounts of theophanies as manifestations of the pre-incarnate Son of God.”<sup>45</sup> It is the latter approach that requires a more precise designation, because, as Brevard Childs insisted, this manner of reading Scripture, typical of Justin Martyr and Irenaeus of Lyon, is “distinctive from simple typology” and “cannot be identified immediately as allegory.”<sup>46</sup>

Indeed, the current scholarly terms fail to capture the epiphanic dimension of the text as read by many early Christian exegetes. Whether Christological, Trinitarian, or Mariological interpretations, the difficulty consists in understanding what kind of symbolization undergirds these various readings. The main distinction runs, I believe, between the interpretation of Dan 3 as either presenting an “icon” of the Trinity or “foreshadowing” the incarnation, and the interpretation of Dan 3 as a Christophany. In the former two cases, the divine presence is a matter of exegetical and theological convention; in the latter case, by contrast, Christian exegesis sets forth an epiphanic self-evidence—or, as Hanson and Gieschen understood very well, a “real presence.”<sup>47</sup>

To clarify this point further, it may prove useful to resort to the contrast between “conventional” and “epiphanic” presence in Alexander Schmemmann’s analysis of liturgical symbolism. Schmemmann speaks of a shift from one type of symbolization to another—in his words, from *symbol* to *symbolism*, from “ontological/real/eschatological symbol” to “illustrative symbolism.” In the older type of symbolization, “the empirical (or ‘visible’)

45. Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 565–66.

46. Brevard S. Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004): “Justin resorts to an interpretation of the Old Testament theophanies . . . an approach distinctive from simple typology. Accordingly, Christ encountered Abraham at Mamre, wrestled with Jacob at the Jabbok, and spoke with Moses at the burning bush” (p. 38); “Irenaeus is at pains to demonstrate from Old Testament theophanies that the Son of God was actually present and active in Israel’s history, and thus he existed before his incarnation. . . . This inherited exegetical approach cannot be identified immediately as allegory, if understood in its later medieval form. . . . The approach is not dependent upon any specific New Testament citation and clearly was developed before the evangelical traditions took the written form of a New Testament” (p. 50).

47. In the words of Hippolytus, the “angel” who rescued the youths in the furnace was none other than the Lord of the patriarchs and prophets, the God of Israel, unnamed in the OT “because Jesus had not yet been born of the Virgin.” Or, as Clement of Alexandria explains to the broad readership of his *Paedagogue*, the difference between the Logos present in OT theophanies as “that hidden angel, Jesus” (ὁ μυστικός ἐκεῖνος ἄγγελος Ἰησοῦς) and the incarnate Logos is, quite simply, that the incarnate Logos was born (γεγέννηται; τίκτεται [Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 1.7.59.1 (SC 70:214, 216)]).

and the spiritual ('invisible') are united not *logically* (this 'stands for' that), nor *analogically* (this 'illustrates' that), nor yet *by cause and effect* (this 'means' or 'generates' that), but *epiphatically*. One reality *manifests* and *communicates* the other, but . . . only to the degree to which the symbol itself is a participant in the spiritual reality and is able or called upon to embody it." By contrast, "illustrative symbolism" is the sign of something that exists not logically but only by convention, just as there is no real water in the chemical symbol H<sub>2</sub>O.<sup>48</sup> By analogy, it is one thing to say that the three Hebrew youths provide for the reader an image of the Holy Trinity—an allusion, a reminder (or, in Monty Python theology, "*three* youths—nudge nudge, wink wink, say no more!"). It is another to say that the heavenly presence in the furnace "foreshadows"—anticipates, announces, provides a sketch of—the presence of the Logos in the womb of the Theotokos. And it is a different matter altogether to affirm that Dan 3 narrates a real encounter with the Word of God, which also points to the Logos-to-be-made-man. Similarly, in depictions of Abraham in the fiery furnace, the Abraham-Christ parallel ("typology") should be distinguished from the depiction of Christ *as* the angel who rescued Abraham.<sup>49</sup>

#### JESUS IN THE FIERY FURNACE: NOT "REWRITTEN BIBLE"!

The early Christian reception history of Dan 3 is similar to that of other two major theophanies: the divine appearance at Mamre (Gen 18) and the vision of Isaiah (Isa 6). In both cases, an "epiphatic" Christological interpretation—Abraham entertaining Christ and two accompanying angels; Isaiah seeing Christ flanked by two seraphim—later gave way to a reading favoring Trinitarian symbolism. In two recent studies of these passages, and in an older one discussing, more broadly, the exegesis of theophanies in Byzantine hymnography,<sup>50</sup> I have argued (1) that the straightforward identification of the "Lord" in the two OT texts with the "Lord Jesus" is not accounted for by the categories of either "typology" or "allegory," and (2) that such "epiphatic" Christological readings could be viewed as a form

48. See Alexander Schmemmann, "Symbol and Symbolism in the Byzantine Liturgy: Liturgical Symbols and Their Theological Interpretation," in his *Liturgy and Tradition*, ed. T. Fisch (Crestwood, NY: SVS, 1990), 115–28; cf. idem, *The Eucharist, Sacrament of the Kingdom* (Crestwood, NY: SVS, 1983), 38–39.

49. As a matter of fact, it is quite clear that the Christological and Trinitarian interpretations of Dan 3 are distinct layers of interpretation. Fusing these two layers would render a theologically incoherent picture, in which Christ is both "foreshadowed" by one of the three youths, and "truly present" as the fourth.

50. Bogdan G. Bucur, "The Early Christian Reception of Genesis 18: From Theophany to Trinitarian Symbolism," *JECs* 23 (2015): 245–72; idem, "I Saw the Lord: Observations on the Early Christian Reception of Isaiah 6," *ProEccl* 23 (2014): 309–30; idem, "Exegesis of Biblical Theophanies in Byzantine Hymnography: Rewritten Bible?" *TS* 68 (2007): 92–112.



of “rewritten Bible.” This proposal seems to have been well received in scholarship.<sup>51</sup>

My argument was that the Christological exegesis of OT theophanies “follows the logic of ‘rewritten Bible’ literature.” Just as the Wisdom of Solomon identifies the heavenly agent at work in the Exodus events as Lady Wisdom, just as the *Book of Jubilees* has Moses receive the Law from the Angel of the Presence, and just as Philo identifies the theophanic agent as the Logos, so also do numerous Christian exegetical, doctrinal, hymnographic, and iconographic works identify the central character in biblical theophanies as Jesus Christ.<sup>52</sup> As a second relevant element of comparison, I pointed to the claim, implicit in “rewritten Bible” literature, of its being the result of charismatic, performative exegesis.<sup>53</sup> I remain convinced that current scholarly categories are not suited for an accurate description of the exegetical phenomenon under discussion, but I have changed my mind on the appropriateness of using the term *rewritten Bible*.

This term was coined by Geza Vermes in 1961 and used by scholars dealing mainly with Second Temple pseudepigrapha, such as the Book of the Watchers (in 1 Enoch), the book of Jubilees, the *Genesis Apocryphon*, the Targums, Josephus’s *Jewish Antiquities*, or Pseudo-Philo’s *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum*.<sup>54</sup> Although it is true that scholarship has been using this term somewhat ambiguously both for a literary genre and for an exegetical strategy,<sup>55</sup> it is quite clear that, if it is to retain any explanatory power, “rewritten Bible” must refer to the production of actual *texts*—“narratives

51. See Daniel Lynwood Smith, “Questions and Answers in the *Protevangelium of James* and the *Gospel of Peter*,” in *Sacra Scriptura: How “Non-Canonical” Texts Functioned in Early Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. James H. Charlesworth and Lee Martin McDonald (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 183: “While Rewritten Scripture is often associated with Second Temple Jewish works like *Jubilees* and Pseudo-Philo’s *Biblical Antiquities*, we are following the growing trend of investigating its applicability to non-Jewish sources. . . . Perhaps the most outstanding example would be found in Bogdan Bucur’s treatment of Byzantine hymnography as Rewritten Scripture.”

52. Bucur, “Early Christian Reception of Genesis 18,” 270; idem, “I Saw the Lord,” 327.

53. Ibid., 328, quoting David E. Aune, “Charismatic Exegesis in Early Judaism and Early Christianity,” in *The Pseudepigrapha and Early Biblical Interpretation*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth and C. A. Evans (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 126–50 (here, p. 130).

54. For a presentation and discussion of numerous examples, see Geza Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 1961), 67–126; Michael Segal, “Between Bible and Rewritten Bible,” in *Biblical Interpretation at Qumran*, ed. Matthias Henze (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 10–28; idem, *Rewritten Bible Reconsidered: Proceedings of the Conference in Karikkū, Finland, August 24–26 2006*, ed. Antti Laato and Jacques van Ruiten (Åbo: Åbo Academy University Press, 2008).

55. I am indebted here to the astute and richly documented article by Anders Klostergaard Petersen, “Rewritten Bible as a Borderline Phenomenon—Genre, Textual Strategy, or Canonical Anachronism?” in *Flores Florentino: Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Early Jewish Studies*, FS Florentino García Martínez, ed. Anthony Hiljorst, Emile Puech, and End Eibert Tigchelaar (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 285–306.

following a sequential, chronological order” that “cover a substantial portion of Scripture,” according to a widespread definition of the genre.<sup>56</sup> But this is precisely *not* the case of the Christian exegesis of the fiery furnace episode (or the Mamre theophany, or Isaiah’s vision). In the case of early Christian exegesis, the “rewriting” in question is a metaphor for “interpretation,” because the Christologically “rewritten” episode of the fiery furnace is not a new *text* but a new *reading* of the existing text.

There are, of course, similarities between “rewritten Bible” and early Christian exegesis (and, for that matter, early Rabbinic exegesis). One similarity would be the variety of solutions to the ambiguity of having the salvific agent display divine mastery over the elements but appear “like an angel.” Nevertheless, despite the similar exegetical strategies displayed in the *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (which specifies that the agent was Nathaniel), the Exodus Rabbah (which states that it was Gabriel), and Christian exegesis (which sees Jesus present in the furnace), only the first can be considered “rewritten Scripture,” because it actually constitutes a coherent alternative text. A more apt analogy would be that between patristic “Christophanic exegesis” (the term I would myself propose) and rabbinic *midrash*—which, of course, is not considered “rewritten Bible.”<sup>57</sup>

If Christophanic exegesis is accepted as a form of “rewritten Bible,” then the same would apply to *midrash*. However, it would automatically become necessary to find yet another, more specific, term to designate the kind of literature for which Vermes coined the term “rewritten Bible” in the first place: “a narrative that follows Scripture but includes a substantial amount of supplements and interpretative developments.”<sup>58</sup> This erosion of the descriptive power of the concept derives from its metaphorization. The root problem is to have allowed “rewritten” to stand for “interpreted.”

56. Philip S. Alexander, “Retelling the Old Testament,” in *It Is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture: Essays in Honour of Barnabas Lindars*, ed. D. A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 99–121 (here, pp. 116–17).

57. This is evident for classical *midrash*: “unlike rabbinic *midrash*, [in ‘rewritten Bible’ literature] the actual words of Scripture do not remain highlighted within the body of the text, either in the form of lemmata, or by the use of citation-formulae” (Alexander, “Retelling the Old Testament,” 116). It is true, as Steven D. Fraade observes (“Rewritten Bible and Rabbinic Midrash as Commentary,” in *Current Trends in the Study of Midrash*, ed. C. Bakhos [Leiden: Brill, 2006], 59–78 [here, 62]), that *midrash* “may be viewed as containing aspects of ‘rewritten Bible’ beneath its formal structure of scriptural commentary” (e.g., expansive paraphrase, filling in scriptural gaps, removing discomfiting details, identifying anonymous with named persons and places). Nevertheless, the distinction between *midrash* and rewritten Bible remains true even of *Pirque de-Rabbi Eliezer*, despite the latter’s many similarities with *Jubilees* or *LAB*. See Rachel Adelman, *The Return of the Repressed: Pirque De-Rabbi Eliezer and the Pseudepigrapha* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 5–19; idem, “Can We Apply the Term ‘Rewritten Bible’ to Midrash? The Case of Pirque de-Rabbi Eliezer,” in *Rewritten Bible after Fifty Years: Texts, Terms, or Techniques? A Last Dialogue with Geza Vermes*, ed. J. Zsengeller (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 295–317.

58. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism*, 326.

My observations about the performative character of the Christological interpretation of OT theophanies—perhaps especially about Isa 6—are perfectly applicable to the fiery furnace episode in Daniel. The performative aspect is especially evident in Romanos's *Kontakion on the Three Youths* 25, discussed above. The Christian community at worship is engaged in a performative reenactment and extension of the story in Dan 3, mediated and sustained by ritual, hymnography, and iconography. They recognize their location—the liturgy of the church—as the furnace and the pneumatic experience underlying worship (“they found themselves filled with the all-holy Spirit from having worshipped”) as the dew in the furnace, and, most importantly, they acknowledge and renew their participation in the spiritual “now” of Christ’s saving descent as contemporaries of the three youth. It is this kind of environment that the HB (in our case, Dan 3) was reenvisioned Christologically and appropriated as Christian Scripture.

### CONCLUSIONS

The episode of the three youths in the fiery furnace and its early Christian history of interpretation has received a fair amount of attention in scholarship. The foregoing pages have contributed to this ongoing discussion by focusing on the Christological and Trinitarian usage of Dan 3. The episode of the three youths in the fiery furnace (Dan 3) was interpreted by early Christians as a theophany (or rather, more specifically, a manifestation of the Logos-to-be-incarnate, a “Christophany”), as a foreshadowing of the mystery of the incarnation, and, especially in Byzantine hymns about “the three youths equal in number to the Trinity,” as an allusion to the Trinitarian God.

I have argued that the type of symbolization that undergirds these two exegetical avenues should be more clearly distinguished. If the Trinitarian interpretation can easily be categorized as an “allegorical” reading in the tradition of Philo and Origen, whereas the connection between the fiery furnace and the womb of Mary Theotokos would be an example of what Daniélou used to call “typology,” and which more recent scholarship would see as a form of “allegorical” or “figurative” reading. However, the straightforward *identification* of the heavenly agent who descends in the furnace with Jesus Christ defies the usual categorization. The current terms are unsatisfactory because they fail to capture the epiphanic dimension of the text as read by many early Christian exegetes. This observation opened up the discussion of Dan 3 to a consideration of the exegesis of OT theophanies generally.

The recent proposal to view the Christological interpretation of OT theophanies as “rewritten Bible” literature is not acceptable because it treats the “rewriting” in question metaphorically—it designates the production not of a new text but of a new reading of the existing text—and

thereby erodes the descriptive power of the concept. In short, if Christophanic exegesis is a form of “rewritten Bible,” then so is *midrash*, and it becomes necessary to find yet another term to designate the kind of literature for which Vermes coined the term “rewritten Bible”: “a narrative that follows Scripture but includes a substantial amount of supplements and interpretative developments.”<sup>59</sup>

The lack of an adequate scholarly term is not a trivial issue. Without recognizing the phenomenon and crafting an appropriate concept to designate it, we are blind to a fundamental theological assumption of a large strand of early Christian literature and, therefore, remain unable to grasp an important factor in the development of early Christian theology. For my part, I think that, for the time being at least, the term *Christophanic exegesis* may be serviceable in designating a performative, experientially (liturgically) located exegesis that discerns and affirms the presence of Christ—not a literary reality but an epiphanic “real presence”—in the theophanic accounts of the OT (Dan 3, in the case at hand) and in the very act of exegeting such texts.

59. Ibid.