

THE USAGE OF THE SCRIPTURES IN THE HOMILY OF MELITO OF SARDIS ON THE PASSION*

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I. The homily of Melito on the Passion.

The homily of Melito on the Passion is one of the most valuable monuments of the christian Apology during the 2nd century of our era, for its rhetoric style as well as for the deep meanings expressed in it.

The author, being influenced from the person of Christ as the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies, gives a full account of the position held by Christ in the thought of all the religious representatives of ancient Israel. Christ is the center of God's revelation, running from the creation of the world and coming to an end at the event of Christ's Incarnation.

As to the rhetorical style of the homily, we would say that the multitude of contrasts (anthesis), the live scenes of the description of the two situations, (the one being that of the type of Christ's passion and the other being the fulfilment of the type in Christ's person), the selection of rhetorical forms, the pure Greek language approaching the form of classical language and the strong arguments, all of them make the homily be one of the scanty monuments of the early christian literature, being able to compete with the writings of classical Greek¹.

What constitutes the main purpose of the author, as we see through the homily, is to present Christ as the Son of God, the subject of the ancient prophecies and the One, whose presence in the world fulfils the history of God's Revelation and the plan for the Salvation of man.

Since this is the attempt of this homily, namely to prove Jesus as the center of religious history of Israel, its author makes large use

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1. In our study we are using the text edited by Bernard Lohse: Die Passa-Homilie des Bischofs Meliton von Sardes, Textus minores, vol. XXIV, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1958.

ge of Scripture, using many and integral passages from both the Old and New Testaments.

The usage of the Scriptures in the homily is justified by the need of the author to establish his arguments upon unshakable witnesses and to show the recipients the connection between the two Testaments and that the first one, the Old Testament, is type of the second, the New Testament, and the New Testament is the fulfilment of the first.

The usage of Scriptures can provide us the form of the biblical text being in use among the Christians of the 2nd century, and also assure us that the homily is addressed to people, being familiar with both Testaments, a fact which witnesses to the existence of a standard form of the Scriptures in usage among the christian circles. This fact does not exclude, however, that the homily is addressed to Jewish christians and tries to overtone the meaning of the New Testament and Christ's sacrifice, the Old Testament being the type and serving as the main purpose of history to Christ's appearance in the world and his representative sacrifice.

2. The Old Testament in the Homily.

In order to secure his arguments and to attract the attention of his readers, probably being Jewish Christians, Melito begins his homily with explicit references to the Old Testament saying, «The Scripture of the Hebrew Exodus has been read,» presumably raising the reader's interest to the fact of the sacrificed lamb, which constitutes the type of the great mystery of Christ's thought.

In his homily, the author tries to prove the continuity and the integrity of the Divine Revelation, throughout the human history, beginning from the world's creation and ending with the Kingdom of God, regarded in the domination of God's will on earth as well as in the restoration of the sinner to Heaven as God's son and co-heir of Christ. (Romans 8:17).

The disobedience of the first couple (Adam and Eve) is considered to be the first step in the rejection of man from the paradisaical situation, (Homily. 271-274), and the beginning of the need for the intervention of God for the human salvation. This rejection establishes the distance between God and man, (Genesis, 3:2-3); and man's life in the world develops in prison of the condemned. The author's idea about man's situation after his rejection from paradise seems to be influenced from the platonic theory of life, with earth being the place for punishment

of the human soul after the revolution against God in the world of Ideas, in Heaven.

For an explanation of this theory, we could assert that the author was influenced by this environment, being places where the hellenistic civilization and, consequently, Greek thought flourished as a sequence of Alexander the Great's conquests.

Another explanation would be the following, according to which the recipients of the homily were more familiar with these theories for the soul, body and world, and he uses this form of expression in order to be more attractive to and understandable by the people. Both of these explanations, however, lead to the same conclusion that author and readers are aware of the platonic theory about human life.

3. Messianic Passages of the Old Testament.

As far as we concern ourselves with the author's attempt to stress the Messianic mission of Christ being subjected to prophecies throughout the Old Testament, we cannot neglect the large usage of these passages by Melito. These passages are taken from the most important books of the Old Testament, parts of which have an undisputed value as Messianic passages, having been accepted by the early christian Church and the Fathers and considered to be as such up to the present time by the conservative criticism of the Bible and the Churches holding the christian tradition through the centuries.

The usage of these passages takes place according to the Greek text of LXX- most of them --or with a little change as Exodus 12:3 (Homily 67...) and Jeremias 5:8 (Homily 320). Since Moses is considered to be the author of the Pentateuch, according to the Jewish and Christian traditions, and is one of the most eminent prophets of Israel as Christ himself confessed (Luke 24:27,44), Melito uses the Messianic references in the historical books of the Old Testament written by Moses, especially Genesis 44:4 (Homily 447), Exodus 12:3 (Homily 67) and Deuteronomy 28:66 (Homily 364ff.), all of which are explicit allusions to the passion and crucifixion of Christ representing the lamb of the Jewish Passover, which was type of the real sacrifice of God's Son for the salvation of man.

From the group of Psalms which have been characterized as messianic, Melito makes definite references to many of them, using words sporadically or definite passages, as the extensive version of the second Psalm (Homily 369-373) and 37, 21. Both of them are held to be examples of the most representative Messianic Psalms by the Orthodox Church.

ch even to the present, used in many ecclesiastical occasions to stress the Messianic nature and mission of Christ.

From the prophets of the Old Testament, who have prophesized the coming of the Messiah rather as a spiritual leader and not as restorer of David's earthly dynasty, Isaiah and Jeremias have been more popular, used not only by the early christian Fathers for proving their arguments about Christ as the expected Saviour of the Jews, and the later writers, but by the authors of New Testament themselves and Christ himself. These prophets are used by name as in Matthew 2:17, 3:3, 27:9; John 1:23; Acts 8:30, or in general in connection with the other prophets or by the words: «as prophet said» or «in connection with the Law».

Passages used by Melito from the prophets mentioned above are referred to the passion and crucifixion of the Messiah: Jeremias 11:18, 19 (Homily 374-379, 447), Isaiah 53:7 (Homily 380-85) and 3:10 (Homily 448). While these references have been made according to the LXX text, there are a few other passages used in the homily, which do not agree to the LXX text, but decline slightly from that, as Jeremias: 5:8, Isaiah 2:3. In order to explain this difference, we could suppose that the text of homily has not been handed down to us as it was written by the author - probably as it must have happened - or Melito used another edition of the LXX text which has been lost, and only by the references to the early christian writers can we conclude about that.

4. Types of Christ in the Old Testament.

Distinguished personalities in the Old Testament were considered to be representative types of Christ, since their life was a prototype of His life or their sufferings regarded as prefigurations of Christ's passion (Homily 350-357).

From the creation of the world to Christ's appearance among men the author distinguishes two groups of types. The one is that in which personalities are considered to be the forerunners of Christ's passion; as Abel, Isaac, Joseph, Moses and David. This consideration of the Divine history reminds us of the epistle to the Hebrews (11:26), where Moses suffers for Christ, and of the belief of early Christians, according to which Jeremias the prophet, suffering, was the type of Christ.

The other group includes those who suffered for Christ in the meaning that they believed in His appearance and the New Creation, given to man by Him; and under influence of this belief, they regarded their passion as preparation of the world for the coming of Christ.

5. Comparison of the Old and New Testaments.

Before proceeding to examine the usage of the New Testament in the Homily, it is necessary to speak about the place which both of the Testaments possess in the homily, respectively. No one can deny that the New Testament possesses a higher position in the mind of the author, as expressed in the homily, since it is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, and points to the Son of God, Whose only type was the Lamb of the Jewish Passover in the Old Testament.

There is a sharp distinction in the homily between the two Testaments according to their purposes, to which each of them referred in their age and people. The Old Testament was considered to be the old Law replaced by the Grace (χάρις), although it was in a high esteem and largely used among the early Christians, especially at the times when the New Testament was not formed; and the Old Testament, as it is well known, was the first Bible for the christian communities.

But with the passing years and the increased usage of the New Testament in the second century, and because of the need to eliminate the Jewish heretics overstressing the Old Testament, the Fathers of the Church were inclined to contrast the New Testament with the Old Testament and to stress, as it was, the higher value of the former. This tendency is manifested in Melito's homily, almost in every page, since the main purpose of the author is to prove that the Old Testament is the type and the serving instrument until the coming of the New Testament, which, being sufficient by itself, could teach and lead the people to all the truth. In many places, the Old Testament is characterized as Law, old Law, contrasting to the Grace, the New Law.

We cannot exclude the fact that this contrasting happens in order to stress the Lord's passion and crucifixion of which the lamb in the Jewish Passover was typical. Also, we cannot but recognize the superiority given to the New Testament by the Christians from the second century, causing it gradually to become the Bible of the Church with the current usage of the Old Testament, but in lower climax from then on.

6. The New Testament in the homily.

In the homily, the New Testament is used not in a certain way, that is to say, in integral passages taken from the various books of the New Testament. The usage happens in many ways, as by passages

or by using certain words witnessing the knowledge of the text of the Bible by the author or by meanings indicating biblical use or references.

Throughout the homily there are definite expressions which have influenced Melito so that he could not avoid their usages. One of these is the expression «beloved», «ἀγαπητοί» used twice by him. This form of expression occurs in many places in the New Testament as characteristic of Christ as well as of the Christians, by Paul or by the authors of the Catholic epistles. Where ever this expression occurs in the Gospels, it is referred to Christ as the Beloved Son of God, while in the Epistles it is used for Christians in general. The use of the term in the homily obtains the second meaning, that is to say, that of addressing the Christians. In order to make the Divine Nature of Christ more concrete and the reality of His earthly life and His condemnation and Passion a historical event-he is probably against those who considered Christ's Passion taking place in the heavens, not on earth (Docetic Doctrine of Heavenly Christ), - is referred to three historical events:

1) The resurrection of Lazarus (John 11:1-44).

2) The natural events happening during the crucifixion (Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44); and

3) the washing of Pilato's hands after the condemnation and the time when the condemnation took place. (during the Great Feast) (Matthew 27:44).

The verses 223-224 of the homily, where the author speaks about the Gospel's creeds (dogmata), allude the Acts 15:4, Ephesians 2:15 and Colossians 2:14, where the word is used in the meaning of the Christian teaching and not as dogmatic doctrine as it was formed later by the Ecumenical Councils. Also the word Gospel (Εὐαγγέλιον) in the meaning of the Bible's books is used very frequently by Melito and is an indication of the existence of a definite collection among the local churches of several books of the New Testament, generally accepted. The word Church (Ἐκκλησία) occurs here in both meanings, as the totality of people and as the Divine institute established by Christ and His Disciples for transmitting the Salvation to the people. The Church is the bank of truth, in which the Apostolic tradition is kept. The meaning of the Church as the deposit of Truth and Divine Grace is one of the three factors- the other two are the Apostolic succession of the priesthood and the Canon of the New Testament-which constitute the true christian community against any heretic movements, as this theory was formed during the second century of our era,

In the verses 258-259 Melito must know, and refer to John 1:14, where he is talking of the Incarnation of Christ. The form of the verb having been used in John 1:14 differs only by the addition of the preposition (kata) (κατεσκήνωσεν) substantially expressing the same meaning as that referring to the fact of the human appearance of Jesus, regardless whether the author uses the official text of the New Testament or not. The only difference between these two passages is that John is speaking in general for the Incarnation of the Word; while Melito does not say exactly the same thing, but that through Christ God Himself appeared in flesh on earth.

The difference must be due to the different circumstances under which each author writes, expressing the christian teaching about the the Holy Trinity. The heretic teaching that stressed the superiority of God over Christ or that Christ was some intermediary between God and man perhaps enforced Melito to express his teaching in such a way. Christ was the first-born of all creation. He, who was born before Satan (Ἐωσφόρος). This belief of the Church exists from the beginning, and this confidence expressed in Homily (525-526) alludes to Romans 8: 29 and Colossians 1:15.

The restoration of Christ in Heaven (Homily 715) after this triumph against death and Satan (Homily 686-89 cf. Colossians 2:14) and after the deliverance of man from Evil and the world's destruction (Homily 397-98 cf. Luke 14. 21; Titus 2:14; I Peter 1:18) reminds us of Romans 8:34; Hebrews 10:12; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; I Peter 3:22.

The only difference existing between these New Testament passages and homily's verse is that the New Testament authors used the expression «at the right hand of God», while Melito uses the expression «at the right hand of Father», an expression not occurring in the New Testament books. No one can deny that the expression «at the right hand of Father» makes a closer relationship between God as Father and Christ as Son and composes a more developed theology of the Triune God in the Apostolic Fathers' times.

In the homily (408-415) we have explicit witnesses to the New Testament teaching and belief of the christian Church as to the two situations of man; slavery and freedom. The first one is the consequence of sin, needing a Savior, who was Christ, leading man from slavery to freedom and creating a new spiritual world and pushing away sin's power through His Grace, being effected in the Church. The author explicitly referred to the New Testament theology and particularly to the

respective passages; Romans 8:24; Galatians 4:24; 5:1; I Peter 2:5, 9; Titus 2:14 using the same words and sometimes the exact verses.

The enumeration of the vices and of sin's fruits contained in homily 295-299 must be referred according to Romans 2:29, 13:13, Galatians 5:19; II Corinthians 12:21; Ephesians 4:19; I Peter 4:3. II Peter 2:7, 18, even though their use here does not occur as in the respective New Testament books. The author, in his attempt to describe the two different situations existing between the two conditions, pre-christian and christian, and seeking to find and quote the most striking words and passages of the writings, does not refer to a definite verse, but gathers all the passages referring to the same meaning and the very exact substance of his purpose.

Finally, the keystone: «Οὐτός ἐστιν Ἰησοῦς ὁ Χριστός, οὗ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, Ἀμήν». (Homily 58-59, 259-260, 387-88, 716) reminds us of the usual end of many letters of the New Testament, as well as the very similar expression occurring in the writings of all the early christian authors and composing a developed and clear theology about Christ's person and His importance in God's plan of salvation. Christ is God, equal to the Father, glorious and eternal.

As a conclusion, we could summarize:

- 1) Melito uses both Testaments largely.
- 2) His purpose is to secure his theology and teaching with definite witnesses from the Old and New Testaments.
- 3) While using the Old Testament, he quotes integral passages, mostly according to LXX, that is happening as to the Messianic passages. In his references to the New Testament, Melito does not use verses as they occur in the New Testament, except for a few. This cannot lead us to any suspicions, that the author does not know a certain collection of New Testament books. On the contrary, his familiarity with New Testament books, used in Church, is obvious and he refers to them freely.
- 4) It is obvious that Melito regards the Old Testament as the sacred book preparing for the New Testament, which is the New Law under the meaning of Grace, given us through Christ's sacrifice. From this point of view, it is apparent that Melito stresses the superiority of the New Testament over the Old Testament without any hesitation.

7. Christ as God.

In many passages the author does not make any distinction between God as distinguished in person and Christ as His Wisdom or Sophia or Logos (Word) or at least, as the Son pre-existing eternally.

This course of his thought, being exaggeratedly Χριστοκεντρική (Christ-Central), urges him to consider Christ as the only God appearing through the Divine history and acting as Ruler and Governor of the worldly order. The suffering Christ is not simply man but God, who delivered His people from the slavery of Egypt and punished the Egyptians for their pressures against the beloved people. (Homily 360-361).

So he points to the active appearance of Christ in the history of the chosen people and indicates the increased responsibility of the Jewish people for His condemnation and crucifixion. Christ is the life of the Jewish people, which has been hanged by His people's approval, as the author tries to prove, by using the passage of the Old Testament stated by Moses, «And you will see your life hung in front of your eyes.» (Homily 364-67).

The author's attempts can be explained in two ways. First, that by so doing he tries to secure the Divinity of Christ and His acceptance by Jewish Christians, who perhaps hesitated this teaching, since they could not understand the multiplicity of God, being against Mosaic monotheism.

Secondly, his interest is directed to many theories or heretical movements, which denied the Divinity of Christ, being equivalent to God the Creator, and inclined toward the teaching about Christ as an intermediary between God and man (Gnosticism). Christ, according to Melito, is God, equal to the Father, pre-existing and participating in the salvation of history through the Jews. It reminds us of the prologue of John's Gospel where the Word of God (Logos) existed from the beginning, that participated in the creation of the world and finally became flesh for the rebirth of the world and accomplishment of the Divine Revelation (there is no corruption in God's thoughts).

8. The Homily and Eastern Orthodox Hymnology.

It is true that a few writings of the Church Fathers could be used as the source for the composition of Hymns for christian worship. From these writings, some elements have been taken by hymnographers as useful material around which each of the poets of the ecclesiastical hymnology has woven his products.

If the above is true, it is true also and without any doubts, that a few works of christian literature have been used, to such an extent, as sources for the christian hymnology throughout the centuries from the very beginning of the christian era, as Melito's homily on Passion.

Studying through the homily, anyone being familiar with the Eastern Orthodox hymns, can realise that not only words or meanings or phrases, but entire parts have been taken as the main kernel and as the very content of hymns composed in the same language, expression, ardour and warmth.

The incarnation of God's Son, His miracles, His Passion and death, even His Resurrection and Ascension to the Heavens, His Salvation and Redemption of man from slavery to evil and sin are the main purposes of the Hymns expressing the feelings of people saved from death and transplanted in a new creation. All of these have been described in the homily with strong colors. The most important and overstressed factor in the homily is the Resurrection of Christ and the creation of a new period in contrast to the previous situation of man.

Since then, the spirit and the central point of the Eastern Orthodox Church is the new creation, beginning with the Resurrection of Christ, instead of the Catholic Church's point of view stressing the crucifixion as the central point of Christ's Incarnation, and through the Passion, looking at the Salvation of Man, it is evident that this Homily and other writings of similar content are the main source for the composition of these hymns. Also, this homily is an argument of the early Church spirit and teaching of the Resurrection of Christ as the most important point of Christ's earthly life so that it has been characterized as the Church of the Resurrection, by many scholars of today belonging to different christian denominations and having studied deeply and deliberately the Eastern Orthodox ritual.

We could say that it is very hard to discriminate the homily's contents from the contents of hymnology of the Holy Week, where the christian soul is under the influence of magnificent hymns, participating in the scenes of Christ's Passion and is prepared to receive the joyful messages of His Resurrection with Christ in a new life on Easter Sunday.

We could give a brief account of these parallel verses between homily and hymnology in order to understand how much the homily inspired the hymns' authors and how deeply the christian Worship Community was fed with the spirit of these teachings in the ordinary life so that it could be possible to live in a perpetual unity with Christ and make the possibility easy for the domination of the Kingdom of God among the people.

For showing the similarity between these two sides, homily and hymns below appear in the original Greek language.

HOMILY

RESURRECTION HYMNS

1. Παλαιὸν μὲν τὸ Πάσχα κατὰ τὸν νόμον, καινὸν δὲ κατὰ τὸν λόγον.

11-12.

2. Ἦν τίμιος ἢ κάτω Ἱερουσαλήμ, νῦν δὲ ἄτιμος διὰ τὴν ἄνω Ἱερουσαλήμ.
(252-254)

3. Ὁ δὲ ἄνθρωπος διὰ τῆς τοῦ ξύλου γεύσεως ἐξεβλήθη εἰς τοῦτον τὸν κόσμον.
(274-280)

4. Παρέστησαν οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς καὶ οἱ ἄρχοντες συνήχθησαν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ κατὰ τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ κατὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ Αὐτοῦ.
(368-374)

5. Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἐν Παρθένῳ σαρκωθείς ὁ τεχθεὶς ἐκ Μαρίας.....
(426-434)

6. Ὅτι τοὺς χλωροὺς αὐτῶν ἐθεράπευσε, τοὺς λεπροὺς αὐτῶν ἐκαθάρισε, τοὺς τυφλοὺς αὐτῶν ἐφωταγώγησεν, καὶ τοὺς νεκροὺς αὐτῶν ἀνέστησεν, ἀνταπεδώκατέ μοι κακὰ ἀντὶ ἀγαθῶν. Τί ἐποίησας, ὦ Ἰσραήλ, τὸ καινὸν ἀδίκημα;
(441-445-447-451)

7. Τὸ στόμα τὸ ψώμισαν Σε ζωήν, ἐψώμισας χολήν.
(495-497)

8. Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ πρωτότοκος τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὁ πρὸ ἑωσφόρου γεννηθεὶς.
(525-526)

Πάσχα καινόν, ἅγιον, μυστικόν....

...Οὐκέτι εἰς τὴν ἐπίγειον Ἱερουσαλήμ διὰ τὸ παθεῖν... Καὶ συναυψῶ Ἰμάς εἰς τὴν ἄνω Ἱερουσαλήμ ἐν τῇ Βασιλείᾳ τῶν Οὐρανῶν.

«Διὰ ξύλου ὁ Ἀδὰμ παραδείσου γέγονεν ἄποικος.....»

«Ἄρχοντες λαῶν συνήχθησαν κατὰ τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ κατὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ.»

(Holy week hymn)

Σῶσον ἡμᾶς Υἱὲ Θεοῦ ὁ ἐκ Παρθένου τεχθεὶς.

(Christmas Hymn)

Τάδε λέγει Κύριος τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις... Τοὺς τυφλοὺς σου ἐφώτισα, τοὺς λεπροὺς σου ἐκαθάρισα, ἄνδρα ὄντα ἐπὶ κλίνης ἠνωρθωσάμην. Λαός μου τί ἐποίησά σοι καὶ τί μοι ἀνταπέδωκας.
(Holy week Hymn)

«...Ἀντὶ μάνα χολήν, ἀντὶ τοῦ ὕδατος ἕξος.»

(The above Hymn)

«Πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν ἐγένετο...»
«Ἐκ γαστρὸς πρὸ ἑωσφόρου ἐγέννησά Σε....» (resurrection Hymn)

One of the most beautiful and spiritual Hymns said on Holy Friday is the following.

Σήμερον κρεμάται ἐπὶ ξύλου ὁ ἐν ὕδασι τὴν γῆν κρεμάσας. Στέφανον ἐξ ἀκανθῶν περιτίθεται ὁ τῶν ἀγγέλων βασιλεὺς. Ψευδῆ πορφύραν περιβάλλεται ὁ περιβάλλων τὸν οὐρανὸν ἐν νεφέλαις. Ράπισμα κατεδέξατο ὁ ἐν Ἰορδάνῃ ἐλευθερώσας τὸν Ἀδὰμ. Ἥλιος προσηλώθη ὁ νυμφίος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Λόγῃ ἐκεντήθη ὁ Υἱὸς τῆς Παρθένου. Προσκυνουμέν σου τὰ πάθη Χριστέ. Δεῖξον ἡμῖν καὶ τὴν ἐνδοξὸν σου ἀνάστασιν,

The phrases said above are integral throughout the Homily and expressed with the very same words. Homily 531 (ὁ κρεμάσας τὴν γῆν): στ. 493 (κόκκινον αὐτοῦ τῷ σώματι καὶ ἄκανθαν τῇ κεφαλῇ ἐπέθηκας): στ. 613 (πικροὶ σοὶ ἦλοι οὗς ἕξυνας).

The expression «Δεῦτε πατριαὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν.....» is a usual exhortation of the people by the Hymnographers throughout the hymns of all the occasions.

A multitude of other self-same expressions used in the Eastern Orthodox hymnology exists in the homily, which could be able to give someone the opportunity of writing an entire thesis or book examining the place and the role which the homily played in the history of hymnology. But there is limited time and this is sufficient as a very brief and extemporary comparison. Others that are more aware of the topic are going to give themselves in the all-sided study of the relation between homily and hymnology, which is of importance to christian literature.