THE LITURGY AS SELF DEFINITION AND THE "RELIGIOUS OTHER"

BY
REV. GEORGE PAPADEMETRIOY

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Recently I was invited to participate in a conference at Boston College on Jewish-Christian relations. I was asked to respond to a paper presented by Professor Ruth Langer of Boston College. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Langer for her scholarly paper entitled, "Jewish Liturgy: The State of the Question". It is indeed very impressive. In my present study I will present an Orthodox perspective of the "religious other". My focus will be on an Orthodox Christian view of the "other" as portrayed particularly in the Liturgy. I will make references to Jewish understanding of the "other" as articulated by Dr. Langer in the context of ecumenical dialogue.

As I address the topic, I would, from the outset, like to make the following statement. First I will have to generalize and secondly, I would merely mention that the function of dialogue is to allow participants to describe and witness to their own terms. Thus, I avoid the descriptions of religious other as understood by others, which is the root of prejudice, stereotyping and condescension. I will limit myself to my personal understanding of the "other" as an Orthodox priest and theologian.

After stating the above, I am well aware that my contribution here is provisional, based on my own experiences in worship as an Orthodox Christian and in my participation in inter-religious encounters and dia-

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* This paper was originally presented as a response to a study presented by Professor Ruth Langer at a conference held at the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College June 10-11, 2001.

logues. I will offer some remarks from my Orthodox perspective and hope to engage in a fruitful conversation and dialogue.

My task here, as I understand it, is to respond as an Orthodox priest and theologian.

The critical question is: how are we to live together in our world, in its religious diversity, and to recognize the authentic "other", the recognition of the other as in God's image and the other tradition as participating in the same spiritual and social values such as justice and peace. In brief how do we look at each other?

Regarding the "religious other" I resonate with Dr. Langer that when a community prays the "we" includes primarily its own body. The point she makes is that the other, as the "pagan idolater" is somehow included, has an affinity with the Orthodox Tradition regarding those outside its ambit, threaen believers and non-theists. The basic Orthodox principle is that "all human beings are created in the image of God" and the entire human family is created by God who has providential care over all. Just as the "we" in Judaism is Israel, so the "we" in the Orthodox Liturgy is the Church. What the "other" means is explained in the divine liturgies as distinct from the "faithful", much as the Second Temple had a "Court of the Gentiles" beyond which they could not go. Just before the recitation of the Creed - the deacon or, in the absence of the deacon, the priest - announces the closing of the doors – after the catechumens and the unbaptized have vacated the premises. This is not practiced today wherein so many non-Orthodox accompany spouses and friends to divine services.

The Church is referred to as the *pleroma, the full measure of* passengers who are on their voyage to salvation.

Please allow me to make a quick explanation of the Liturgy in the Orthodox Church. When we speak of the Liturgy or Divine Liturgy, we mean the Eucharistic synaxis (gathering) where the community gathers and participates in the worship of God in Christ and the Holy Spirit. In this Liturgy, which is above all a communal act that unites all the faithful to Christ in the Spirit, the "we" is definitely the Church. The Liturgy begins with a set of petitions for "peace", "mercy", "salvation", "for the peace of the whole world". It does not say anything about the "other". It self-defines "us" as a comminity and all others as being "outside". The Liturgy always communicates the faith and practice of the community.

"Ritual is pre-eminently a form of communication"[1].

Dr. Langer makes the following point that strikes me as applicable to my tradition. She says: "there is a fine line between defining group identity, fear of the outsider, and demonization of the outsider". In some Orthodox services, as in Holy Week – especially Holy Thursday – the Liturgy certainly does use offensive phrases, even though it is not based on fear or demonization of the "other". In 1960 Professor Hamilcar Alevizatos proposed steps to correct the liturgical Holy Week "texts that are offensive and detrimental to the Jewish people"[2]. This proposal has regrettably not yet been implemented. Regarding this issue the Orthodox participants at the Fourth International Jewish-Christian dialogue held in Jerusalem, on December 15, 1998 issued the following response:

"1. The Orthodox Church's hymns frequently reflect and describe events from the history of the Old and New Testaments. Hymnographers reproduce the sacred chronicles (histories). Despite an apparently anti-jewish semiology –in certain cases– the character of these texts remains pedagogical, not polemical, and aims toward the spiritual edification of the faithful. It is evident that poetical texts are often not devoid of elements of rhetorical exaggeration.

2. Within the context of Christian catechism and interpretation of hymnographic texts, any interpretation of an anti-jewish slant is avoided.

3. It should be noted that the hymns in question have not affected the Orthodox mind in the least, have not cultivated a polemical attitude or mentality against Judaism and in no way lessened the Christian universal understanding of salvation.

4. In any case, any liturgical change within the Orthodox Church would be a case for a Panorthodox Council to decide on and, consequently, lies beyond the scope and the competence of an interreligious dialogue". The Orthodox added to the statement the following: "That is what we can say for now, without this meaning necessarily that it was the final word on the matter. Even though these texts are of a symbolic na-

1. Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 20. For self-definition see the three volumes by E. P. Sanders, *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, Philadelphia: (Fortress Press 1980-1982).

2. (*Orthodoxos Skepsis*, vol. 1, pp. 5-8. See also George C. Papademetriou, *Orthodox Christian-Jewish Relations*, p. 100).

ture, the matter remains uppermost in our minds and is of concern to us because it is of concern to you (the Jews). Time may perhaps provide further prospects". The above statement was presented at the Conference of Orthodox Christians and Jews. I am grateful to the secretary, Dr. Gary Vatsikouras, who provided this statement to me and is here published for the first time.

Dr. Langer speaks of the interpretation of, the "they" rather than naming "Christians" or "Muslims". The communities make the appropriate translations to accommodate the situation, that is, to avoid offensive language. I am reminded of an Arab Orthodox priest who departed from the wording of the wedding service where the phrase "and glory to your people Israel" occurs, despite its appearance in the Christian Bible and Liturgy –because his people were Arabs and this would be more than offensive– he chanted "and glory be to the people of God". Also in some prayers that refer to the male individuals "him" some priests add "her". In the closing prayer with which all –clergy and laity– close their private or public prayers is "through the prayers of our holy fathers, Lord Jesus Christ have mercy upon us and save us" – some priests change it to "through the prayers of our holy fathers and mothers".

Furthermore Dr. Langer makes mention of the "anti Christian" statements in the Jewish Liturgy that are "include explicit refutations of the Trinity, especially any view of an incarnation of God; the claim that the New Testament and its covenant supersedes the Old; divine revelation through Jesus (and Muhammad); and that the Messiah has come". These statements are to protect its members from outside influences. We also find statements that appear in Orthodox Christian Liturgical texts against Muslims and Jews who deny the Trinitarian nature of the one God[3]. One particular phrase that the Emperor Manuel of Byzantium (March-May 1180) proposed to eliminate from the prayer book are the

3. In the Prayer Book in the event a Jew converts to Christianity he publically declares that he rejects the Judaic beliefs and practices. See *Euchologion to Mega, Athens, Greece (Aster Publishing House 1970), pp. 678-683.* See also Isabel Florence Hapgood, *Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic Church.* Third Edition (Brooklyn: Syrian Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese 1956), pp. 467-469.

following words: "anathema to the god of Muhammad" because this was offensive to the Muslims[4].

Professor Langer also points out the recitation of the "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Sabbaoth" as a praise to God. This hymn is chanted in the Divine Liturgy and is included in the Roman Mass as it was received from the Septuagint.

The section on the "Jewish chosenness" difinitely Dr. Langer points to the self-identity of the Jews. This might give the impression that Jews of today look down on the gentiles as they did in a religious context in previous ages. This would lead some people to take on for themselves the claim of chosenness that is to replace God's chosen people, and attribute condemnation of the Jews. On this I would like to quote my venerable professor, the late Dr. Jacob B. Agus, who said: "To put one community outside the pale of humanity charged with a metaphysical {favoritism or} sin and condemned to an inscrutable fate is to lay the groundwork for the madness of mythological anti-Semitism. Here is the root of Hitler's 'non-Aryanism'"[5].

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople states, "At the basis of both Jewish and Orthodox ontology, we find the primacy of the person, rather than the intelligible essence. Man exists as the image of God, i.e., as personal existence, to the measure that he is named and called by God". Especially in the mystical tradition, the Patriarch points out, there is an affinity of Jewish and Orthodox experience of God in creation not as "cause" but rather as "experience"[6]. Thus the person as image of God is a constant theme in Orthodox theology, as expressed by the contemporary theologian, John Zizioulas.

The point that I wish to accent particularly at this time is that regard-

4. *The Annals of Niketas Choniates. Beginning with the Reign of John Komnenos and ending with the Fall of Constantinople,* trans. Harry J. Magoulias (Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1984), p. 121.

5. J. B. Agus, *Dialogue and Tradition* (NY: 1970), p. 599, n. 10. See also Papademetriou, *Essays....*, p. 72).

6. Olivier Clement, *Conversations with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I,* trans. from French by Paul Meyendorff. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997, pp. 198-199). See also the excellent article "The Temple Roots of the Liturgy" by Margaret Barker in *Sourozh: A Journal of Orthodox Life and Thought,* No. 83 (March 2001), pp. 1-20.

ing sacred song in Judaism and Orthodoxy. The Orthodox Churches, –according to some scholars– carried over from the Temple and later synagogue worship important elements such as chanting, various rites, holy days, readings, hymns, the use of water, oil, bread, wine and other practices, all of which give witness to the Judaic influence. "The old synagogue method of chanting the psalms was evidently employed in the West as in the East, until the time of Ambrose. The great bishop of Milan... brought into the worship of his church the new Eastern form of psalmody..."[7]. Music in a special way has a quality that people identify themselves with. The interrelation between Byzantine music and worship forms and Jewish forms as preserved from the days of Temple worship deserves singular and more punctuating scrutiny. The early Christian hymns and canticles were those of the synagogues. The antiphonal chanting of the Psalter by alternating choirs –a common practice in the Orthodox and Western churches today– was, according to Philo, a widespread practice in the Jewish worship of ancient time[8]. The Patriarch also points out that the "Byzantine Liturgy, in fact composed by linguistically Hellenized Semites, express an Israel trembling in fear before the transcendent"[9].

My venerable Professor, Dr. Gerard Sloyan suggested that I emphasize sacred song in this discussion. The music that defines the Orthodox Church is that of the Middle East called Byzantine. This defines the Orthodox person in a sense as an Easterner. Middle-Eastern music especially characterizes Muslims, along with Jews and Christians, and even in their chant the Christians of the West. So, in one way, music excludes and at the same time includes the other. I would like to relate an incident that happened at the Holy Cross Chapel some time ago in 1987. I have been, since that time, involved in the activities of the group known as Seminarians Interacting. The participating seminarians of various traditions including Jews and Christians: Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant and recently Muslim, are required to make a visit to an assigned seminary and participate in the life of that campus. When the Jewish students

7. C. W. Dugmore, *The Influence of the Synagogue Upon the Divine Office.* (London: Oxford University Press), p. 99.

8. Papademetriou, *Essays...*, p. 48.

9. Clement, p. 198.

came to Holy Cross and attended chapel, they were overwhelmed with the chanting: the antiphonal song. That made them included but at the same time excluded as both would have it, from the worship. So, singing is an aspect that I would like to point out as a major element of religious identity and relatedness.

As Eric Werner points out, the *troparion* is a type of poetry that is sung in the Byzantine – Eastern Churches between the verses of psalms or canticles. He also points out that "the Synagogues, too, inspired various types of singable poetry", which correspond "to the poetry of the Eastern Churches"[10]. The Byzantine chant and synagogue song were, and, to some large degree, are without instrumental accompaniment. The emphasis is on the vocal expression of the liturgical hymns by the psaltes-chanter in the Eastern Churches, and the cantor in the synagogue[11]. The worship of the Early and Byzantine Church is based on the psalms and canticles, which was a "treasure of song" in praising God[12]. The Early Church took over many of the practices and song from the Synagogue. Egon Wellesz points this out in the following words: "In the early days of Christianity psalms were sung in the way customary in the Jewish Synagogue. The precentor sang the whole psalm, and the congregation responded after each verse with an interpolated phrase"[13].

The temple music was predominantly choral but there are indications it was also instrumental. Synagogue music in ancient times was "exclusively vocal with a complete absence of instruments except the shofar, which never accompanied any vocalization but only served as a signal in-

10. Eric Werner, *The Sacred Bridge. Liturgical Parallels in the Synagogues and Early Church.* New York, Schocken Books, 1970, p. 178.

11. Werner, p. 318.

12. H. J. W. Tillyard, *Byzantine Music and Hymnography.* (London The Faith Press 1923), p. 8ff. Reprinted New York: AMS Press Inc. 1976).

13. Egon Wellesz, *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography.* (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1949), p. 27. See also Johan Quasten, *Music and Worship in Pagan and Christian Antiquity,* trans. Boniface Ramsey (Washington, D. C.: National Association of Pastoral Musicians), pp. 59-60. See *Music in Early Christian Literature,* ed by James McKinnon (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 18. See also Hanoth Avenary, *Studies in the Hebrew, Syrian and Greek Liturgical Recitative* (Tel Aviv: Israel Music Institute), p. 3.

strument"[14]. This was also the case for the Byzantine music that is still practiced in the Orthodox Church[15]. However, the Temple of Jerusalem employed instruments in the execution of worship[16]. Werner points out when the Temple worship ceased the synagogue took over many of its functions – "...replacing the sacrifice by prayers and the reading of biblical passages referring to the offerings...". At that point the cantor became a predominant figure in the worshipping community and "took charge of many important parts of the Liturgy"[17]. In the Orthodox Church – the Byzantine chant prevails and the chanter-psaltes, namely one who chants the psalms and sings the hymns, remains till today an important figure in the worship of the Orthodox Church. The psaltes is a member of the lower clergy who is trained professionally to lead in the singing in worship. The sacred song both serves as self-definition and also distinguishes the assembly from that of the "other".

In addition to the influence on the psaltes, the Hebrew prophet (nabi) and Old Testament events inspired various other Christian liturgical arts. One of the most beloved icons is the one depicting the Hospitality of Abraham (Gen. 18) where Abraham gives hospitality to the three angels. The icon or mosaics of Moses and the prophets are included in Churches. Another Old Testament event is the dedication of the seven Maccabean Martyrs that the Orthodox Church commemorates on August 1st every year. It must be noted that the Maccabeans are held in special reverence by the Greek Orthodox faithful because they are associated –especially after the fall of Constantinople– with their own sufferings and martyrdom for their religious beliefs[18]. In fact very interestingly, according to tradition, the relics of Salome, one of the Maccabean women, are encased in the Patriarchal Cathedral Church of Saint George for vener-

14. Edward Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music. The Music of Pre-Constantinian Christianity.* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1996), p. 57.

15. Constantine Cavarnos, *Byzantine Chant.* (Belmont MA: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1998), p. 21.

16. Abraham Idelsohn, *Jewish Music: Its Historical Development* (New York: Dover Publications, 1992), p. 8. See Psalms 33:2; 57:8; 81:2; 1 Chr. 13:8; 2 Chr. 5:12 and passim.

17. Werner, p. 25. See also W.O.E. Oesterly, *The Jewish Background of the Christian Liturgy* (Gloucester, Ma: Peter Smith, 1965), p. 87.

18. Papademetriou, p. 149.

ation. This I have personally experienced during my visits to Constantinople.

The contemporary Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas speaks of "Communion and Otherness" as self-definition of the "other". He speaks of "fear of the other", as fear of otherness, *xenophobic*, when we come to the point of identifying "difference with division". He speaks of the Eucharist as Communion, which affirms exclusion but also affirms and sanctifies "otherness". The Person is "otherness in Communion and Communion is Otherness". That is, he emphasizes, "the person is an identity that emerges through relationship (schesis). The "I" exists only as long as it relates to a "thou" which affirms "its existence and its otherness"[19]. It is love that binds persons together, both man and God. Saint Paul exalts the power of love in his sublime hymn (1 Cor. 13: 1-11). "The love which Paul glorifies, should not only bind man to God, but also man to fellow-man, and even to fellow-creatures"[20].

It is the contention of some that the Eucharist has its roots in the synagogue. The Christian prayers of the Eucharist belong to this class of Jewish prayer called *berakhah, which gives praise,* and thanks to God for God's gifts[21].

I would like to conclude these remarks with words spoken by the prominent Jewish promoter of interreligious dialogue, Will Herberg. He writes:

> As you receive the Incarnate Word in proclamation and sacrament, remember too that the kingship of Christ is not restricted to the visible confines of his church. In a very real sense, all mankind, the entire cosmos, is in the church, for they are within the scope of God's redemptive activity. Every human being anywhere is your

19. John Zizioulas, "Communion and Otherness" in *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly.* Vol. 38, No 4, 1994, p. 350.

20. Eric Werner, *Three Ages of Musical Thought: Essays on Ethics and Aesthetics* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1981), p. 114.

21. Sharon Burns, "The Beginnings of Christian Liturgy in Judaism" in the *Jewish Roots of Christian Liturgy.* Ed By Eugene J. Fisher. New York: Paulist Press, 1990, p. 41. See also W.O.E. Oesterly, *The Jewish Background of the Christian Liturgy.* Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1965, p. 146. See also the older work, but classic by F. Gavin, *The Jewish Antecedents of Christian Sacraments.* New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc. 1969, pp. 59-97, Reprinted from the first edition of 1928.

> fellow church member, even though his membership in the Church of Christ still remains merely latent and implicit. The communion which you enter into through receiving the Incarnate Word in proclamation and sacrament is communion with all men and women everywhere. The woes of all mankind are your woes; the injustices that afflict men anywhere are injustices inflicted upon you. As you enter the community which is the Church of Christ –and you enter it anew every time you receive the Incarnate Word in Holy Communion– you undertake the responsibility never to rest so long as there is evil in the world - which there always is! The Church of Christ, to which you have been admitted by the grace of God, in not a rest home for the weary; it is rather the Church Militant, commissioned and empowered to wage unceasing war in the cause of Christ against the demonic powers of the world[22].

This clearly defines both the Christian and the "other" as neighbors and children of God.

22. Will Herberg, *Faith Enacted as History. Essays in Biblical Theology.* Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976, p. 97.