

TEO, ISSN 2247-4382
76 (3), pp. 123-142, 2018

Epiphany of Christ in the Pastoral Epistles. **Worship and Eschatology**

Adrian MURG

Adrian MURG

“Hilarion V. Felea” Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Arad, Romania

Email: adrian.murg@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study presents first some passages from the Pastoral Epistles that shed light on the development of the Christian worship, and then deals with the relationship between Christ’s epiphany and the worship of the Church. For this, a brief analysis of the epiphany vocabulary, which is so characteristic to the Pastoral Epistles, is done. Coming next are some comments on two texts of particular importance: one belonging to the hymn genre (I Tim 3, 16), and the other being a liturgical acclamation (I Tim 2, 5-6). Thus it will be seen how the worshipping community celebrates the glorious coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ in anticipation.

Keywords

Pastoral Epistles, epiphany of Christ, worship, anticipation, mission

I. Introduction

Although the Pastoral Epistles are often neglected and regarded by the exegetes as an expression of an “altered Paulinism” we cannot deny their documentary importance for the Christian worship in the second half of

the first century, due to the abundance of liturgical fragments they contain. The purpose of these writings is to defend “the sound instruction” (II Tim 4, 2; Titus 1, 9; 2, 1) against the threats of an alleged Gnosis (I Tim 6, 20). On the doctrinal level, we will not find significant developments here; St. Paul’s interest is only to preserve the “treasure” (*paratheke*, a certain good entrusted to someone; I Tim 6, 20; II Tim 1, 12.14) of the Christian truth. We may regret in particular the fact that instead of describing the heresies that disturbed Asia Minor and refuting them punctually, the Pastorals confine themselves to their deprecating rejection: “some have wandered away from these things, missing the mark, and turning to vain discussions. They desire to be teachers of the law, although they do not understand what they are talking about or what it is that they so strongly affirm” (I Tim 1, 6-7; 4, 1-3; 6, 3-5; II Tim 2, 14-18; 3, 1-9; 4, 4; Titus 1, 14-16).

In order to defend the inheritance of faith, St. Paul frequently appeals to universally accepted statements, often introduced by the formula *pistos ho logos*¹ (I Tim 1, 15; 3, 1; 4, 9; II Tim 2, 11; Titus 3: 8) which has almost the same value as the formula which introduces biblical quotations: “as the Scripture says”. Here is the first occurrence: “This saying is faithful, and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save the sinners; of whom I am the first” (I Tim 1, 15). In addition to this statement that has the appearance of a confession of faith, in these epistles we will also find fragments of the liturgical treasure of the Church. This already confirms the ancient saying *lex orandi, lex credendi*.

In the first part of the study, we will present some passages from the Pastorals that shed light on the development of the Christian worship, and then we will deal with the relationship between Christ’s epiphany and the worship of the Church. For this, first we will have to do a brief analysis of the epiphany vocabulary, which is so characteristic to the Pastoral Epistles. Then we will be able to comment on two texts of particular importance: one belonging to the hymn genre (I Tim 3, 16), and the other being a liturgical acclamation (I Tim 2, 5-6). We will see how the liturgical community celebrates the glorious coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ in anticipation.

¹ ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM shows that by this expression, “worthy of faith is the word”, the Apostle wants on the one hand to emphasize the truth of Christian teaching, and on the other hand to combat those, especially the Greeks, who took in derision this teaching (*Tâlcuiri la Epistola întâi către Timotei a Sfântului Apostol Pavel*, Nemira, București, 2005, p. 48). In turn, OECUMENIUS interprets this formula as follows: “It is completely true what the word says” (*Pauli Apostoli ad Timotheum prior epistola*, PG 119, 144).

II. Presentation of the liturgical data

The numerous doxologies in the Pastoral Epistles² illustrate how Christian worship is rooted in the synagogue worship. Two doxologies from I Timothy³ emphasize the transcendence of God, shrouded in his own mystery: “Now to the eternal King, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honour and glory unto ages of ages. Amen.” (I Tim 1, 17). And: “Who is blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, alone possessing immortality, and dwelling in unapproachable light; whom no one has seen, nor can see: to him be honour and eternal power. Amen.” (I Tim 6, 15-16). In these texts, we find the proclamation of God’s uniqueness, which is so self-evident to the Jewish faith. The apocalyptic representation of God also draws attention: an inaccessible Sovereign, isolated from his subjects on a distant throne. The picture refers to the description of the ceremonial court from the book of Esther. None of his titles can express sufficiently the majesty of the King of kings. He does not reign only over men, but also over time, being “the King of the Ages”. As in the book of Daniel, where God assigns to each kingdom a determined time (Dan 2; 5; 7), the Pastoral Epistles speak too about certain appointed times (I Tim 2, 6; 6, 15; Titus 1, 3). Thus, both the first and the second coming of Christ are determined exclusively by the Father’s will and plan.

The fundamental confession of Judaism is based on the famous Deuteronomic verse: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord” (Deut 6, 4). There is no doubt that the early Christians continued to recite *Shema Israel* every evening and morning, just as Jesus himself did (Mark 12, 29). The acclamation *Heis Theos*⁴ is found in I Tim 2, 5; as in I Cor 8, 4-6, it is accompanied here by a proclamation of the role of Christ in salvation. We will return to this aspect.

The Christian faith does not consist merely of an inner conviction; it should be formulated in clear terms and in unanimously recognized formulas.

² R. DEICHGRÄBER, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus in der frühen Christenheit*, St-UNT 5, Göttingen, 1967, pp. 25-40, 101.

³ For exegetical comments on them, see Pr. Sabin VERZAN, “Epistola întâi către Timotei a Sfântului Apostol Pavel. Introducere, traducere și comentariu”, in: *Studii Teologice*, seria a II-a, XL (1988) 3), pp. 58-60, and in: *Studii Teologice*, seria a II-a, XLI (1989) nr. 1, pp. 30-38.

⁴ A fundamental study of this subject is E. PETERSON, *Heis Theos. Epigraphische formgeschichtliche und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen*, Gütersloh, 1926.

Thus, in I Timothy there is a good testimony (*ten kalen homologian*) which Timothy has given before many witnesses, and whom Jesus gave to Pontius Pilate in his turn (I Tim 6, 12-13). In these passages we can note the specific use of the terms *homologeïn*, *homologia*, analyzed in detail by V. H. Neufeld⁵. In classical Greek *homologeïn* means “to get along with”, “to agree” (for example: on the price in the case of a sale), “to engage in”. In the Septuagint, the group of words *homologeïn*, *exhomologesthai* translate the Hebrew verb *yadah*, under the influence of which they acquire new connotations, very important for the liturgical language. So because in the *qal* mode the verb *yadah* means “to confess” (a mistake), and in the *hifil* mode, “to praise” (God), the Greek terms mentioned above came to be used in these two semantic directions. This lexical issue leads us to one of the characteristics of the Jewish prayer: the confession of sins is part of God’s praise, because the sinner who acknowledges his mistakes confirms that God is right⁶. We will not detail this matter, but we will return to the fragment I Tim 6, 12-13 to emphasize its importance for any research on the origins of the ancient Christian creeds. The mention of those many witnesses denotes the public character of the confession of faith⁷ and the fact that clinging to Jesus Christ also means entering into a confessional community. This is not about expressing opinions or impressions of the Christian faith in public, but about the open assumption of the official proclamation of the Church, which is the fundamental bond of its unity. We see that the confession of faith is here bipartite: the first article refers to God-Creator (*tu theou tu zoogonountos ta panta*), and the second, to Jesus Christ, “Who before the Pontius Pilate confessed the good testimony”. Generally, the old Christological testimonies speak of the Birth, Passion, or Resurrection of Jesus; but here the emphasis falls on his testimony before Pontius Pilate. Oscar Cullmann considers that this particularity alludes to the fact that the public confession of Saint Timothy’s faith took place in a time of persecution⁸. Other authors assert that the text has a baptismal background, and others, like Ernst Käsemann,

⁵ V. H. NEUFELD, *The Earliest Christian Confessions*, Leyde, 1963.

⁶ G. BORNKAMM, “Lobpreis, Bekenntnis und Opfer”, in: *Apophoreta. Festschrift für Ernst Haenchen*, Töpelmann, 1964, pp. 46-63; R. J. LEDOGAR, *Acknowledgement, Praise-verbs in the Early Greek Anaphora*, Rome, Herder, 1968.

⁷ S. VERZAN, “Epistola întâi către Timotei...”, in: *Studii Teologice*, seria a II-a, XL (1988) 6, p. 108.

⁸ O. CULLMANN, *La Foi et le Culte de l’Église primitive*, Neuchâtel, 1963, p. 62.

Epiphany of Christ in the Pastoral Epistles. Worship and Eschatology

that it is an ordination ceremony⁹. Not claiming to be able to resolve this debate, we limit ourselves to specify that the formula *epi Pontiou Pilatou* - in front of or in the days of Pontius Pilate - was introduced in the symbols of faith¹⁰. The reason for this was to fit the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ into the concrete history of humankind, and to show that it is not a timeless myth, but an event accurately placed in time and space¹¹.

Based on past events, the Apostle looks to the future: “You keep the commandment undefiled and blameless, until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Tim 6, 14). Before developing the theme of appearance, or epiphany, so characteristic to the Pastorals, we will report certain elements that can be found later in other articles of creed: “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word (...)” (II Tim 4, 1). The criterion of judgment will be our faithfulness to Christ, as shown in a typical Pauline expression from another hymn of the second Epistle of Timothy:

“The saying is sure:
If we have died with him, we shall also live with him;
If we endure, we shall also reign with him;
If we deny him, he also will deny us;
If we are faithless, he remains faithful —
For he cannot deny himself.” (II Tim 2, 11-13)¹².

The verbs composed of particle *syn* (*synpaschein*, *syzein*, *synbasileuein*) all send us to St. Paul’s thoughts about our participation in Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection. The pair of verbs *arnesthai* și *apistein* sends us to an evangelical logion (Mt 10 32-33): “Whoever confesses me before men,

⁹ E. KÄSEMANN, *Essais exégétiques*, Neuchâtel, 1972, pp. 111-119.

¹⁰ Already in ST. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH, *Magn.*, IX, 1; *Tral* IX, 1, *Smir.* I, 2; ST. JUSTIN THE MARTYR, *Apol. I*, XIII, 3; LXI, 13.

¹¹ S. VERZAN, “Epistola întâi către Timotei...”, in: *Studii Teologice*, seria a II-a, XLI (1989) 1, p. 26.

¹² Prot. Dr. Ioan BUDE thinks it is a baptismal hymn. The hymnic character is given by the introductory formula - „This saying is sure” - and the rhythmic arrangement of the phrases, and the baptismal one, by exposing the conditions of salvation: death and resurrection with Christ (*Conotații biblice despre „Jertfa vie” și limbajul imnic-euharistic*, Editura Alma Mater, Cluj-Napoca, 2007, p. 116).

I will also confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies me in front of others, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven”. The faithfulness of Christ that does not take into account our infidelity evokes the history of the Holy Apostle Peter who experienced the richness of divine forgiveness, like St Paul (I Tim 1, 15-16). Inspired by such examples, the prayers of the Divine Liturgy put God’s mercy above all human calculus and prediction: “Your mercy is immeasurable. Your love for man is inexpressible” (*The prayer of the First Antiphon*).

In II Tim 2, 8, we meet a brief liturgical formula that is likely to have an Eucharistic *Sitz im Leben*: “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descended from David, as preached in my gospel”. It is clear that this text is inspired by the ancient confession of faith used by St. Paul in Rom 1, 3-4. However, while in Romans there is a chronological order of events: Incarnation-Resurrection, here the anamnesis focuses only on the risen Jesus, who is said to descend from David, in order to emphasize his position as Messianic heir. Most naturally, remembering the risen Jesus is placed within the Eucharistic ceremony. The mention of King David in such a context has a parallel in an Eucharistic prayer contained in *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles (The Didache)*: “We thank you, our Father, for the holy vine of David your servant, which you made known to us through Jesus your Servant” (9, 2).

A more developed study about the liturgical elements from the Pastoral Epistles will also have to focus on the composition of chapters 2 and 3 from I Timothy, where we encounter the seeds of the first apostolic constitutions. The urge to prayer “for all” (2, 1-7), which we will come back to, is followed by some prescriptions for men’s prayer (2, 8), and then for women’s outfit (2, 9-15). Then there are criteria that the different levels of the church hierarchy must meet: bishops (3, 1-7), deacons (3, 8-10), and deacons’ wives (or deaconess; 3, 11). The section is crowned with a hymn that glorifies Saviour’s Incarnation and Ascension (3, 16).

III. The double epiphany of the Saviour Jesus Christ

In addition to the widespread use of traditional formulas, the Pastorals are also characterized by the frequent use of derived words from the root

Epiphany of Christ in the Pastoral Epistles. Worship and Eschatology

epiphain-, quite rarely encountered in the rest of the New Testament¹³. In classical Greek the verb *epiphainein* (in the medium voice *epiphainesthai*) literally indicates “the beginning of the visibility of an object either by entering it in the observer’s sight or by changing the amount of light diffused or reflected by this object”¹⁴. For example, the verb appears with this meaning in Acts 27, 20: during the storm, the sun and the stars did not show up (*mete epiphainonton*) several days. At Luke 1, 79, it is shown that the Messiah, the Dawn from on high, will illuminate (*epiphanai*) those who lie in darkness and in the shadow of death. Therefore, his Epiphany brings salvation from sin.

In Hellenistic Greek, the epiphany of a god does not mean his appearance, as we are tempted to believe, but his salutary intervention, especially on the battlefield¹⁵. The first attestation in this respect is an inscription found on Kos Island: due to Apollo’s *epiphany*, the Gauls were defeated near Delphi. Another example: people thought the healings done at Epidaurus were *energeis epiphaneiai* of Asclepius. For the Seleucids, starting with Antioch I, the adjective *epiphanes* becomes an epithet that denotes the deity of the king, who is said to be *theos epiphanes*.

The appearances of the root *epiphain-* in Septuagint are few. The text of the priestly blessing is among them: “May the Lord make his face shine upon you (*epiphanai Kyrios to prosopon sou epi se*) and be gracious unto you!” (Num 6, 25). We can find this image of the benevolent face of God several times in the Psalms. For example: “Make your face to shine (*epiphanon to prosopon sou*) upon your servant, save me for your mercies’ sake (*en to eleei sou*)” (Ps 30, 16)¹⁶.

Besides Pastorals, the term *epiphaneia* is associated with *parousia* in II Thess 2, 8. Curiously, *parousia* is missing from the Pastoral Epistles, its content being taken up by *epiphaneia*, which designates the glorious coming of Christ¹⁷ at the time decided by the Father (I Tim 6, 14-16; cf. Mark 13, 32; Acts 1, 7). Christ will come with angels (I Tim 5, 21) to

¹³ C. SPIQ, *Notes de lexicographie néotestamentaire*, Fribourg-Göttingen, 1978, vol. I, p. 284-287.

¹⁴ Ch. MUGLER, *Dictionnaire de la terminologie optique des Grecs*, Paris, 1964, p. 165.

¹⁵ D. LÜHRMANN, “Epiphaneia”, in: *Tradition und Glaube. FS K. G. Kühn*, Göttingen, 1971, pp. 185-199.

¹⁶ See also Ps 66, 1; 79, 4.8.20.

¹⁷ L. OBERLINNER, “Die Epiphaneia des Heilswillens Gottes in Christus Jesus”, *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 71 (1980), pp. 192-213.

establish his kingdom definitively (II Tim 4, 1). Although Psalm 109 is not quoted here, it is understood that this coming of Christ will also mean the definitive defeat of all his enemies, and especially death (I Cor 15, 25 sq).

Christ's Epiphany will bring about the Universal Judgment. Taking on an already traditional formula, St. Paul shows that Christ will come "to judge the living and the dead" (II Tim 4, 1; Acts 10, 42, I Pet 4, 5). This perspective of judgment adds gravity to the exhortation that he addressed to Timothy to observe the commandments (I Tim 5, 21; 6, 14; II Tim 4, 1). Although condemnation of the hypocrites and sinners is often evoked in these epistles, hope is nevertheless dominant. It is true that if we deny Christ, he will deny us too (II Tim 2, 12; Matt. 10, 33), but the last verse of the hymn keeps a glimpse of hope: "If we are faithless, he remains faithful". A last verse - which, of course, was not originally part of the hymn but was subsequently added by the Apostle - underlines this idea: "For he cannot deny himself" (II Tim 2, 13).

Faced with the perspective of his own death, St. Paul is confident that the crown of righteousness has been prepared for him even from even now and he will receive it from the Righteous Judge "on that day". However, this reward will not be his alone, but of "all those who have loved (*tois egapekosi*) his appearance" (II Tim 4, 8)¹⁸. We understand that the love of Christ has a future-oriented component, and a bold and responsible expectation of his epiphany.

But Christ's first coming to earth is also portrayed in the Pastoral Epistles as a saving epiphany. Two important texts in the Epistle to Titus are significant in this respect: "the grace of God has appeared (*epephane gar he charis tou theou*) bringing salvation to all (Titus 2, 11); "when the kindness of God our Saviour and his love toward humankind appeared (*hote de he chrestotes kai he philantropia epephane tou soteris hemon theou*)" (Titus 3, 4). In these two solemn statements, the subject of the predicate *epephane* is not Christ himself, but the attributes of God of the covenant, as they are listed in Ex 34, 6. However, as Father Sabin Verzan¹⁹, the manifestation of these attributes is closely related to the Incarnation of

¹⁸ The phrase is unique in the New Testament. C. SPIQ (*Agape dans le Nouveau Testament*, Paris, 1958, vol. I, p. 298 sq) opposes this love for the appearance of Christ to the love for the world (II Tim 4, 10).

¹⁹ Pr. dr. Sabin VERZAN, *Epistola Sfântului Apostol Pavel către Tit. Introducere, traducere, comentariu și teologie*, EIBMBOR, București, 1994, p. 245.

Epiphany of Christ in the Pastoral Epistles. Worship and Eschatology

Christ. The long waiting and prayer of Israel is now fulfilled: God whom no one has seen (I Tim 6, 16) has now become known in his love of mankind and in his saving mercy. The mystery is now uncovered: “(He) saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago, and now has manifested through the appearing (*phanerotheisan de nun dia tes epiphaneias*) of our Savior Christ Jesus.” (II Tim 1, 9-10). The continuation of this text makes it clear how the gospel fits into this action of revelation: “Christ (...) abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. For this gospel I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher” (II Tim 2 10-11). This word that “brings to light” and enables people to discover the true face of God is entrusted to the Apostle and, through him, to his disciples and their descendants (II Tim 2, 2), as a preparation for the coming of the Saviour.

We can feel the tension between “already” and “not yet” in the Pastorals, just as in the other epistles of the Holy Apostle Paul. The worship is meant to anticipate this “not yet” and to maintain the love for the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ in the believers’ souls.

IV. Worship, means of anticipating the epiphany of Christ

The anticipation of Christ’s manifestation is expressed in a liturgical form in the Judeo-Christian hymn fragment found in I Tim 3, 16²⁰: “Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion:

God was manifested in the flesh,
vindicated in the Spirit,
seen by angels,
preached among the nations,
believed on in the world,
taken up in glory.”

²⁰ Among the valuable analyzes of this hymn are: A. T. HANSON, *Studies in the Pastoral Epistles*, London, 1968, p. 5-28, R. H. GUNDRY, “The form, Meaning and Background of the Hymn Quoted in 1 Timothy 3, 16”, în W. W. Gasque, R. P. Martin (ed.), *Apostolic History and the Gospel: Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F. F. Bruce on His 60th Birthday*, Exeter, 1970, pp. 203-222. In Romanian Biblical literature: S. VERZAN, “Epistola întâi către Timotei...”, in: *Studii Teologice*, seria a II-a, XL (1988) 4, pp. 103-117; I. BUDE, *Conotații biblice...*, pp. 107-109.

In order to decipher the theological significance of this hymn, we will first have to see how it fits in context, more precisely how it links to verse 15. Then we will have to delimit its semantic units and to determine its antecedents.

IV.1. Link to the context

As we have mentioned in the preceding section, chapters 2 and 3 from I Timothy contain the instructions for the community prayer and criteria to be met by Church ministers. In the conclusion of this section, St. Paul points out that these guidelines were intended to set the coordinates of Saint Timothy's ministry: "But if I am delayed, I want you to know how the people should behave in the house of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth" (I Tim 3, 15).

The phrase "if I am delayed" not only refers to the apostle's delay in arriving at Ephesus, but also to the period after his death, when his disciples would have the task of taking over the leadership of the Church. Through a widespread metaphor in the apostolic age, the Church is presented as a house (*oikos*) of the living God. This expression can have two meanings: on the one hand, it might indicate those who live in the house, i.e. the family, the household. On the other hand, in the Old Testament the expression *oikos theou*, with or without article, frequently designates the sanctuary (for example: Ex 28, 17.19.22; II Kings 12, 20). Since the "pillar" is mentioned in the text, we incline to choose this second interpretation.

Following an excellent article by A. Jaubert²¹, there was a lot of discussion about the referent of the expression "the pillar and the foundation of the truth". The designation of some illustrious men such as the Patriarchs or the three personalities of the Church in Jerusalem - James, Cephas, and John (Gal 2, 9) - as "pillars" (*styloi*) would be the strongest argument in favour of identifying Timothy with this "pillar". However, the New Testament image of Saint Timothy does not favour this hypothesis: still young, Timothy needs repeated encouragement (I Tim 1, 18; 3, 15; 4, 7.16; 6, 11.20; II Tim 1, 6; 2:1.22; 3, 14; 4, 5). Moreover, it appears from the whole of the Pastorals that St. Paul alone would be worthy of this designation. He possesses both the qualities of herald, apostle, and teacher

²¹ A. JAUBERT, "L'image de la colonne (I Tim 3, 15)", in: *Studiorum Paulinorum Congressus Internationalis Catholicus 1961*, Rome, 1963, vol. II, pp. 101-108

Epiphany of Christ in the Pastoral Epistles. Worship and Eschatology

of the Gentiles in faith and truth (I Tim 2, 7); he alone represents the entire Apostolic Tradition, no other apostle being mentioned in these epistles²².

The image of the pillar could also be linked to the pillar of cloud (hebr. *amoud*, gr. *stylos*) which symbolized the guiding presence (*Shekinah*) of God in front of his people in the desert. However, this idea of movement does not fit in the Pauline thought, which evokes rather a building. The only reference left are the two bronze pillars that supported the porch of Solomon's temple (III Kings 7, 15-21). One was called *Jachin* (from the verb *kun*, to be strong, stable), and the other *Boaz* (evoking the idea of strength). Both names are meant to highlight and characterize the presence of God in the temple. The term "foundation" (*edraïoma*, *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament) fits well into this context. Formed from the root *edrai-*, the word undoubtedly designates the foundation or the base of the pillar (C. Spiq). The words spoken by Solomon at the consecration of the temple are also significant: "I have built thee an exalted house, a place for thee to dwell in for ever." (III Kings 8, 13). As the Temple of the New Covenant, the Church is the place where the divine presence resides perpetually.

In this symbolism of the temple, the "truth" from I Tim 3, 15 corresponds to the inscription in capital letters on the frontispiece of the ancient temples. Another example of this type is given in II Tim 2, 19 where St. Paul says: "But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: «The Lord knows those who are his» and «Let every one who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity»."

Now it is helpful to point out the connection between the truth and the Church. In the Pastoral Epistles, which are the expression of the Apostle's struggle against all doctrinal deviations, "truth"²³ is specifically understood as the apostolic proclamation revealed by God, or the Orthodox doctrine. The truth can be found only in the Church, the Temple of the Living God. Moreover, the mission of the Church is to make the truth known and to show it to the world, to support it, to define it and to defend it²⁴.

²² F. F. COLLINS, "The Image of Paul in the Pastorals", in: *Laval théologique philosophique*, 1976, pp. 147-173.

²³ See J. MURPHY-O'CONNOR, "La vérité chez saint Paul et à Qumrân", in: *Revue biblique* 72 (1965), pp. 29-76.

²⁴ S. VERZAN, "Epistola întâi către Timotei...", în: *Studii Teologice*, seria a II-a, XL (1988) 4, p. 103.

Verse 16 implies that truth is nothing but “the mystery” of our religion or of godliness which, in turn, identifies with Christ. If the word “mystery” comes from the apocalyptic stream, the term “godliness”, *eusebeia*²⁵, is borrowed from the Hellenistic language and designates a proper relationship with God. Nevertheless, while the ancient religions emphasize the rites, according to the Pastoral, the Christian piety is defined rather in terms of sound teaching. In a striking manner, it transmits the idea that Christ is present in his Church, just as the Shekinah filled the first temple.

IV. 2. The structure of the hymn

The text presents great homogeneity, with six simple sentences, consisting of a verb in the passive aorist and a complement introduced by the preposition *en* (except for the third verse). It is easy to see the presence of some opposition: either in the form of an antithetic parallelism (*sarx-pneuma*), or in the form of a chiasm, having the words “angels”, and “glory” on the outer level and “nations” and “world”, on the inner one.

Can we recognize some progress in the exposition of the ideas? If the Incarnation, spoken of in the first verse, is naturally followed by the Resurrection in the second verse, it is hard to understand how verses 4 and 5 speak of the evangelization of the Gentiles before Ascension (sixth verse). O. Michel²⁶ and J. Jeremias²⁷ offered some of the most interesting explanations. They think our hymn follows the scheme of an Egyptian royal enthronement. 1) Ascension: the new king is divinized in a symbolic ceremony; 2) Presentation: being deified, the king is presented to the court of the gods; 3) Enthronement: the king receives the right to exercise authority. Thus, the hymn would follow these stages: 1) The Ascension of Jesus, his revelation as pre-existing God, and his “vindication” through Resurrection; 2) the proclamation of this Ascension to the angels and the world; 3) the enthronement in glory and the setting up of his Kingdom on earth as in heaven.

²⁵ W. FOERSTER, “Eusebeia”, in: G. KITTEL and G. FRIEDRICH (ed.), G. W. BROMILEY (trad.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 7, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971, pp. 175-185.

²⁶ O. MICHEL, *Der Brief an die Hebräer*, Göttingen, 1949, p. 54. Michel uses this scheme to explain the fragment Heb 1, 5-14.

²⁷ J. JEREMIAS, *Die Briefe an Timotheus und Titus*, Göttingen, NTD 9, 1975, pp. 28-29.

Epiphany of Christ in the Pastoral Epistles. Worship and Eschatology

We have to admit that it takes a lot of imagination to discover these three stages of the enthronement ceremony in our hymn. This theory is further undermined by the fact that the Egyptian enthronement ritual is far from being clarified. Moreover, G. Friedrich subjected to a devastating critique all attempts to reconstitute a ritual of Christ's enthronement in the New Testament, such as that of Jeremias (cf. Matt 28, 18-20; Heb 1, 5-13)²⁸.

As we return to the actual hymn, it is quite clear that verses 3 and 6 are parallel: the manifestation of Christ to angels is the same as his Ascension in glory. As suggested by the critical edition published by United Bible Societies (*The Greek New Testament*), verses 3 and 6 constitute the parallel conclusions of two distichs: one dedicated to Christ's work, and the other to the evangelization of the world. Thus, the structure of the hymn is the following:

God was manifested in the flesh,
vindicated in the Spirit,
seen by angels,

preached among the nations,
believed on in the world,
taken up in glory.

IV.3. The background of the hymn

F. Manns²⁹ devoted a study of great erudition to the Judeo-Christian background of the hymn found in I Tim 3, 16. The author is particularly interested in the symbolism of the number 6 and the teaching about Messiah's concealment and manifestation. For this, he leans on a collection of texts (*Pesikta Rabbati*)³⁰, later than the New Testament, which speak of the pre-existence of the Messiah and of his revelation by God: "What

²⁸ G. FRIEDRICH, "Die formale Struktur von Mt 28, 18-20", in: *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 80 (1983), pp. 136-183.

²⁹ F. MANNS, "L'hymne judéo-chrétienne de 1 Tm 3, 16", in: *Euntes docete* 32 (1979), pp. 323-339.

³⁰ *Encyclopaedia Judaica* dates this compilation in the 6th century AD, but that does not exclude the possibility that the oral traditions behind it may be much older. A critical review of the sources is necessary in each case.

does the verse «in your light shall we see light» (Ps 35, 10) mean? What is the light the people of Israel expect? It is the light of the Messiah, as it is said: «and God saw that *light was good*». This verse proves that the Holy One, blessed be he, contemplated the Messiah and his works before the world, and that afterwards he lifted the Messiah and placed him under the throne of glory until the coming of the generation that will see his manifestation”³¹.

How should this text be interpreted? According to the Midrash tradition, seven things were created before the world: the Torah, the conversion, the garden of Eden, the Gehenna, the throne of glory, the altar and the name of the Messiah (*Pesahim* 54 a). Can we really talk then about the pre-existence of the Messiah or just about a literary way of emphasizing the importance of these realities? The Jewish texts quoted by F. Manns are not enough to prove that, strictly speaking, our hymn presupposes the pre-existence of the Messiah before his manifestation in flesh. However, we will see that the Judeo-Christian apocrypha *The Exaltation of Isaiah* gives us excellent landmarks for the interpretation of this text and allows the unequivocal affirmation of the pre-existence of the Messiah.

Prior to this, we need to specify the value of the opposition between *sarx* and *pneuma* from the first two verses: “God was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the spirit”. The pair *sarx-pneuma* does not designate the two antagonistic forces that are constantly opposing each other in man, as in the writings of Qumran or the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians. Similar to the old confession of faith used by St. Paul in Rom 1, 3-4³², *sarx* refers to the human condition of Christ - according to which he is David’s offspring -, and *pneuma* is the Spirit of God who worked in him in the Resurrection.

This remark helps us understand the meaning of the verb “to vindicate” - *edikaiothe*. In the context of Christ’s judgment by men, vindication means the intervention by which God shows that Jesus is “the Righteous One” (*ho dikaios*) – which is an archaic Messianic title we find in the Acts of the

³¹ *Piska*, 36, according to the translation by F. Manns, “L’hymne...”, p. 328.

³² For clarification on this text, see J. SCHMITT, “Résurrection de Jésus”, in L. PIROT et alii (ed.) *Dictionnaire de la Bible. Supplément*, tom X, Letouzey et Ané, Paris, 1985, col. 502 sq, and L. LEGRAND, *L’Annonce à Marie*, coll. *Lectio Divina* 106, Cerf, Paris, 1981, pp. 181-197.

Epiphany of Christ in the Pastoral Epistles. Worship and Eschatology

Apostles (3, 14; 7, 52). The verb *dikaioo* in the passive voice does not have the meaning of “becoming right” or “being saved” but of being “proven”³³.

We should understand the appearance of Christ to angels in the same context. Let us first notice the translation “was seen by angels” is not entirely correct. If the author wanted to express this, he would have used *hypoton aggelon*. Nevertheless, in the text we have the verb *ophthe* followed by a dative, an expression that has a very precise meaning in the New Testament, under the influence of the Septuagint: “he let himself be seen, he showed himself”. The repeated use of this formula in the enumeration of the Resurrection witnesses in I Cor 15, 5-8 is particularly significant³⁴. Christ appeared to the angels in the same way that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve, etc., and was recognized by them. Therefore, we are dealing here with a different tradition from the evangelical one, according to which the angels from the empty Holy Sepulchre proclaimed the Resurrection of Christ to the holy women. This is a scene of recognition, analogous to that described in the *Ascension of Isaiah*. According to this apocrypha, Christ descended *incognito* through the seven celestial spheres (X, 8 and the following), and after his Passion he ascended again to the Father, making himself known to the angels, who shouted with wonder: “How has our Lord descended upon us, and we have not recognized his glory?” (XI, 24). In this context, one can easily capture the connection between the third verse: “was seen by angels” and the fourth and the fifth: “Preached among the nations, believed on in the world”. Christ shows himself to the angels as their Lord, and takes in his hands the government of the world and the power over the Gentiles that had been entrusted to them. Already present in the book of Daniel, the belief in the angels of nations is well attested throughout Judaism. The Septuagint translation of Deut 32, 8 reflects it: “When the most High divided their inheritance to the nations, when he scattered the sons of Adam, he settled the boundaries of the nations according to the number of the angels of God”. In the Hebrew text, the last words of the verse are “according to the number of the children of Israel”. Pseudo-Jonathan’s Targum combines both traditions, while Neofiti keeps on the Hebrew version³⁵. I Pet 3, 22 also alludes to

³³ S. VERZAN, “Epistola întâi către Timotei...”, in: *Studii Teologice*, seria a II-a, XL (1988) 4, pp. 110-111.

³⁴ See A. PELLETIER, “Les apparitions du Ressuscité en termes de la Septante”, in: *Biblica* 51 (1970), pp. 76-79.

³⁵ R. LE DÉAUT, *Targum du Pentateuque, IV, Deutéronome*, coll. *Sources Chretiennes* 271, Paris, 1980, p. 266, n. 21.

this submission of angels and powers to Christ, in a vestige of an hymn dedicated to the dead and risen Christ.

The direct consequences of this recognition and obedience of the angels to the risen Christ are the preaching to the Gentiles and the access of the world to faith. In a similar way, the Revelation presents a scene where an Angel proclaims an everlasting gospel to the Gentiles (Rev. 14, 6). Those who actually make this preaching are not mentioned here. However, if we consider the *Ascension of Isaiah*, we will first think of the Twelve Apostles of the Most Beloved. In one of Isaiah's visions, the proclamation of Christ's descend and transformation, after his Passion, is followed by the mention of the Twelve Apostles and the evangelization of the Gentiles (III, 13). A little further, the text talks about the Resurrection: "(Angels) open the grave; and the Most Beloved One himself, sitting on their shoulders, comes out and sends his twelve apostles; and they proclaim the Resurrection of the Most Beloved to all nations and all tongues" (III, 13, 16-18). In a vision from chapter 9, there is a kind of simultaneity between the Ascension to glory and the sending of apostles: "I live until he sends his twelve disciples and ascends" (IX, 22). A similar tradition is found in Eph 4, 7-11, where Ps 67, 19 is used to speak of Christ's triumph and of sending the apostles, prophets, evangelists, etc. to the world.

In the light of this Judeo-Christian mode of expression, the parallelism between the third verse (appearing to angels) and the sixth (Ascension in Glory) is quite clear. The proclamation to the Gentiles and the establishment of faith are the consequences of the Ascension. The thread of thought is analogous to that from the second part of the hymn in Phil 2, 5-11, where the submission of the heavenly powers to Christ and the kneeling of those on earth and under the earth in front of him (v. 9-11) are simultaneous.

Therefore, we see that unlike St. Luke, who adopts a historical and progressive presentation in the Acts of the Apostles, in the Judeo-Christian hymnography, the Ascension of Christ and the conversion of the world are simultaneous. Edouard Schweizer explains:

"The hymn anticipates what only faith understands without difficulty. The author understands by faith and confesses that Jesus is Lord of the whole world. Jesus claims the whole world for himself because he assumed it in his work. God's love extends to the world in the same way that the death and resurrection

Epiphany of Christ in the Pastoral Epistles. Worship and Eschatology

of Christ have fundamentally transformed the world, in all its dimensions. But this truth becomes false if it is turned into a general and doctrinal proclamation which, detached from the glorification of God, is just received and passed on to others”³⁶.

V. Worship’s missionary orientation

E. Schweizer signals a Gnostic trend in the Pastoral Epistles which is however inexistent. Far from promoting a dubious passivity, St. Paul makes numerous exhortations to spiritual struggle (I Tim 4, 10; 6, 12; II Tim 4, 7). The goal of prayer is that all men benefit from the victory gained by Christ. This is the theological justification for prayer for all people, and especially for the authorities: “For *there is* one God and one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus; who gave himself as a ransom for all.” (I Tim 2 5-6). Here we see the union of two contrasting elements: “One” (*Heis Theos*) and “all” (*hyper panton*). This removes the temptation of ethnic particularism within Israel, which came from the affirmation of God’s uniqueness and the election of one people. Thus, in *Antiquities of the Jews*, we find the causal link between God’s uniqueness and the uniqueness of the chosen people: “for the Lord is one - and the Jewish nation is unique”³⁷. According to *The Revelation of Baruch*, the uniqueness of the people is given by the uniqueness of the Torah: “Blessedness shall be always ours, on the condition that we not mix with the Gentiles. For we, who have received one law from the One, are one people”³⁸.

If in the Jewish literature, from God’s uniqueness follows that Israel must live separated from the other peoples, the same premise in the New Testament leads to the idea of the universality of salvation and necessity for mission. St. Paul is asking: “Or is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not the God of the Gentiles too? Indeed, [he is the God] of the Gentiles too, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by means of faith, and the uncircumcised through faith” (Rom 3, 29-30)³⁹.

³⁶ E. SCHWEIZER, *La foi en Jésus Christ*, Paris, 1975, p. 97.

³⁷ FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS, *Antichități iudaice* IV, 8, 5, Editura Hasefer, București, 2000, p. 212.

³⁸ *Baruch syriacque* 48, 23, trad. de P. BOGAERT, coll. *Sources Chretiennes* 144, Paris, 1968, p. 495.

³⁹ C. H. GIMBLIN, “Three Monotheistic Texts in Paul”, in: *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 37 (1975), pp. 527-547.

We can see that in I Tim 2, 5 a proclamation is added to the traditional acclaim *Heis Theos*, that is nowhere found in exactly the same form: There is one God and one Mediator between God and men (*Heis kai mesites Theou kai antropon*). In the parallels from I Cor 8, 6 and Eph 4, 5 “One Lord” corresponds to “One God”. However, we have here the quite rare term of “mediator” which appears only once in the Septuagint (Job 9, 33) and six times in the New Testament (three times in the Epistle to the Hebrews). It is a legal term which means “arbitrator, witness, and guarantor”⁴⁰. Phylo of Alexandria is the first to attach to this term a religious value. Thus, Moses is the mediator par excellence as we can see from his prayer for the people after they had fallen into the sin of idolatry with the golden calf. “As mediator (*mesites*) and peace-maker (*diallaktes*), he did not immediately descend from the mountain, but first he made requests and prayers on behalf of the people, asking for the forgiveness of their mistakes”⁴¹. Being the image of the divine Logos on the earth, the high priest does a work of intercession by the very nature of his function. “The law expects the high priest to be endowed with a nature more than human, closer to the divine nature, preferably at the border of the two. The purpose is that people have a mediator (*dia mesou tinos*) to be reconciled to God’s grace, and God have a helper to give people his blessings”⁴².

Moses represents on earth the type of the mediator, but angels also fulfil this task in heaven. Thus, the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* call for coming close to God and the angel that intercedes “for you, for he is the mediator (*mesites*) between God and men” (*Test. Dan.* 6, 2). This mediator angel appeared to Levi as the one who removes from Israel the punishments they deserve⁴³.

On this background, we can notice in our text the insistence on the humanity of Jesus Christ: *anthropos Christos Iesous*. It would be interesting here to make a comparison with chapters 1 and 2 from the Epistle to Hebrews, where St. Paul insists on Christ’s superiority to angels, even if he has partaken of the body and blood. Jesus’ humanity is a necessary

⁴⁰ C. SPIQ, *Notes de lexicographie néotestamentaire*, vol. II, pp. 549-552.

⁴¹ “De vita Mosis” I, 166 (*Les oeuvres de Philon d’Alexandrie*, Cerf, Paris, 1961, tome XXII, p. 264).

⁴² “De Specialibus Legibus” I, XXIII, 116 (*Les oeuvres de Philon d’Alexandrie*, Cerf, Paris, 1961, tome XXIV, p. 80). The absence of term *mesites* does not conceal at all the theme of intercession in this passage.

⁴³ The mediator angels appear already in Dan 10, 13.21; 12, 1.

Epiphany of Christ in the Pastoral Epistles. Worship and Eschatology

condition for the sacrifice he has given for all. The words “who gave himself as a ransom for all” is the echo of the well-known evangelical logion about the Son of Man who came “to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10, 45). We are not going into a serious analysis here⁴⁴, but will confine ourselves to remark that instead of the Semitic formula “for many”, St. Paul uses a Greek expression (*hyper panton*, for all) which designates totality. The universality of salvation is an important idea in the Pastorals, as we can see in I Tim 1, 15; 4, 10. It is clear that the Apostle opposes an elitist view of religion, according to which salvation belongs only to a few elected. In the hymn commented in the preceding section he prophetically says: “Preached among the nations, believed on in the world”. This vision of faith is indispensable to prayer since the goal of prayer is not to change the will and the plans of God, but to assimilate them. Thus, if God is a “God of peace” (Rom 15, 33; 16, 20 etc.), he wants us to live a “quiet and peaceful life” (I Tim 2, 2); if he sent the Man Jesus Christ for all men, he expects the Church to participate in this work of universal salvation through her prayers and a courageous testimony. By anticipating the glorious coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and his victory over all opposing powers, the Liturgy does not demobilize the faithful, but motivates them for mission, according to St. Paul’s exhortation who is the paradigmatic missionary: “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, (...) endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry.” (II Tim 4, 1-5).

VI. Conclusions

These latter considerations naturally lead us to the conclusions of this study. From a superficial reading of the Pastoral Epistles, we may get the the impression that the author’s whole interest is directed towards the internal problems of the Church. The struggle against false teachings requires institutional consolidation and vigilant guarding of the inheritance of

⁴⁴ For an analysis of the “has given” formulas, see K. ROMANIUK, *L’amour du Père et du Fils dans la sotériologie de saint Paul*, Rome, 1961, pp. 28-95; K. WENGST, *Christologische Formeln und Lieder des Urchristentums*, Gütersloh, 1972, pp. 55-77.

faith, downplaying the missionary enthusiasm. However, this impression is not entirely correct. Underlining the will of God for everyone's salvation is a welcomed corrective to the apocalyptic tendencies to divide irremediably men into sons of light and sons of darkness. We can also note, as a missionary trait of the Pastorals, the author's inclination to bring the good and noble parts of the Hellenistic civilization in the service of proclamation, prefiguring the grandiose synthesis of the Semitic and Greek spirit accomplished by the Fathers of the following centuries. Moreover and finally, the image of a world pacified around the glorified Christ was meant to sustain the missionary courage, at a time when it turned out that "all who desire to lead godly lives in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (II Tim 3, 12).

The Pastoral Epistles bring to light an important dimension of the Christian worship: praising the glorified Christ anticipates his epiphany and keeps the candles of the eschatological expectation burning in the hearts of the Christians.