Apocalyptic Thought in Early Christianity

Edited by
Robert J. Daly, SJ
Thought in Early Christianity

5

PSEUDO-HIPPOLYTUS'S IN SANCTUM PASCHA
A Mystery Apocalypse

DRAGOS-ANDREI GIULEA

Scholars have noticed the presence of mystery terminology and imagery in the ancient paschal homily—a Greek anonymous document—that bears the title Eis to hagion Pascha. In this respect, the following passage pertaining to chapter 62 may be one of the most significant: 1

O mystical choir [ὁ τῆς χορηγίας τῆς μυστικῆς]! O feast of the Spirit [ὁ τῆς pneumatikēs heortēs]! O Pasch of God, who hast come down from heaven to earth, and from earth ascend again to the heavens. O feast common to all [ὁ τῶν ἅλλων heortasma], O universal joy, and honor of the universe, its nurture

and its luxury, by whom the darkness of death has been dissolved and life extended to all, by whom the gates of heaven have been opened [anéóchiísan] as God has become man and man has become God. An antiphonal choir has been formed on earth to respond to the choir above. O Pasch of God, no longer confined to the heavens and now united to us in spirit; through him the gates of heaven have been opened [aneóchiísan]. O Pasch, illumination [phóitíma] of the new bright day [lit. "torch procession," lampadoúchia]—the brightness [aglaisma] of the torches of the virgins, through which the lamps of the soul are no longer extinguished, but the divine fire of charity [lit. "the fire of grace," tês charitos... to pyr] burns divinely and spiritually in all.

Cantalamessa regards the presence of mystery language in the paschal celebration as part of the general Christian polemical response to mystery religions, also manifest in Melito of Sardis or Clement of Alexandria.

In addition to mystery terminology, it is also noticeable that this passage contains biblical imagery and language such as "pascha," "spirit," "angelic choir," "virgins," and "marriage chamber," and references to God's "descent" and "ascension." Nonetheless, in the present essay I would like to direct investigation toward a reading of the text under a different hermeneutical key, namely the Jewish apocalyptic traditions, and in this way to draw the conclusions that the presence of such traditions entails. Another pivotal passage (IP 1.1-12) of the text may be helpful for the opening of this new angle of investigation:

Now is it the time when the light of Christ sheds its rays; the pure rays [phóstéres] of the pure Spirit rise and the heavenly treasures of divine glory [doxa] are opened up. Night's darkness and obscuration have been swallowed up, and the dense blackness dispersed in this light of day; craddled death has been totally eclipsed. Life has been extended [epheplóthe] to every creature and all things are diffused in brightness [Phos]. The dawn of dawn ascends over the earth [anatolai anatolon epechou to pan] and he who was before the morning star and before the other stars, the mighty [megas] Christ, immortal and mighty [polys], sheds light brighter than the sun on the universe.

2. Most likely, the Greek passage Κοσμικῶν παντηγύρωμα, ὁ τοῦ παντός χαρᾶ καὶ τυρί η καὶ τρεφὴ καὶ ἀπαθή might be rendered into English as "cosmic solemnity, the joy and honor, nurture and luxury of all."


4. I would propose a minimal change in Halton's rendering of the expression ἐπεθ' ἤθος αὐξάνει τὴν κατάταξιν διόρισε; from "the blessed light of Christ sheds its rays" into "the light of Christ sheds its sacred rays." Compare with Nautin's solution ("les rayons sacrés de la lumière de Christ resplendissent"—Homélies, 116) and Visona's ("brillano i sacri raggi della luce di Cristo"—Pseudo Ippolito, 231).

5. For the purpose of the present study, it would be significant to mention that Nautin translated the Greek word τὸ πάνω through "Tunivers" (Homélies, 116), while Visona rendered it through "Tuniverso" (Pseudo Ippolito, 231).
Anticipating some of the key conclusions of the present study, one may affirm that *In sanctum Pascha* might be envisaged as a special sort of apocalypse, which I would call “mystery apocalypse.” Since the divine temple extends its presence to the terrestrial world and the celestial king descends to earth, ascension becomes useless and the visionary’s ascent sensibly changes into a mystagogy. Instead of ascension, the visionary needs to cross from the visible to the invisible, from the phanic to mystery, and from the sensible realm to the intelligible one. Pertaining to the same Asiatic tradition with Melito’s homily yet more visible than in Melito, the homily of Pseudo-Hippolytus witnesses to a pivotal synthesis of two traditions in the Christian mind-set, namely mystery and apocalyptic. The application of synthesis to one of the central Christian celebrations—the festival of pascha—was so profound, that it would remain normative for the Christian liturgical life until the present day.

Scholarly Debates over the Origins of the Text

The document has crossed the centuries under the names of two famous Christian theologians: John Chrysostom and Hippolytus of Rome. It is preserved in eight manuscripts found in Greece and ascribed to John Chrysostom. Besides these, the palimpsest from Grottaferrata, the fragments from the Syrian *Florilegium Edessenum Anonymum*, and the *florilegium* added to the Acts of the Council of Lateran ascribe the homily to Hippolytus of Rome. In modern times, scholars became suspicious of these paternities and proposed various substitute hypotheses. One of the most significant hypotheses came from Cantalamessa, who placed the homily in the second century Asia Minor. He advocated his position especially on internal theological and linguistic grounds (which Melito of Sardis would have shared as well in his *Peri Pascha*), and also on various theological positions typical for the second century.

To the contrary, Gribomont, Stuiber, and Visonà manifested caution in dating the homily, keeping open Nautin’s possibility of the early fourth century. Nonetheless, one may respond to Visona’s argumentation in the following way: since the homily seems to have been used as a liturgical text as Visona argues, historical-critical methods may be applied to the text and affirm that the rhetorical embellishments of the text might belong to a later period and come from the hands of a series of editors.

However, a large majority of scholars generally agreed with Cantalamessa’s dating of the homily. Daniélou, Grillmeier, Botte, Simonetti, Hall, and Richardson embraced Cantalamessa’s position; Kretschmar, in his turn, assumed that the homily had been written at the beginning of the third century. In

addition, Blanchetière, Mara, and Mazza used the homily as a second-century document in order to prove their theses about Ignatius of Antioch, Melito, the Gospel of Peter, or Hippolytus of Rome. Finally, for Gerlach, IP should be associated with the paschal tradition conveyed in the Asia Minor of the third century. These scholars have emphasized several elements of similarity between IP and various writings pertaining to the first three centuries, such as the general mystery and Melitopolis language, pneumatic Christology and binitarian theology, as well as the similarities with the testimonia used in scriptural exegesis and with the liturgical tradition of the first three centuries.

The Cosmic Extension of the Heavenly Temple

In a schematic phrase, John Collins tried to encompass some emblematic features of every apocalypse:


At the same time, one has to keep in mind E. J. C. Tigghelaar's following methodological observations: "[a] definition is not a prerequisite for historical studies, and might even prove to be an impediment," and "apocalyptic, too, is resistant to definition." Likewise, Collins's perspective is usually called the 'generic' approach to apocalypses and E. Garcia Martinez affirms that sometimes this approach manifests the weakness of being too general and ahistorical. In this way, I am aware that Collins's definition, while delineating some of the most frequent characteristics of the Jewish apocalyptic traditions, is not ahistorical and indispensable. However, it is useful and I will employ it merely as a helpful guideline as to which features do not have to be considered necessary and complete.

Thought in Early Christianity

According to my hypothesis, all these features, with some modifications that I will mention below, can be identified in the Pseudo-Hippolytean work. First of all, regarding the role of a narrative framework, the homily encompasses a clear-cut two-step history of salvation that implies a divine economy developed in two stages: the era that precedes incarnation, a time of figures, types, and symbols, and the era of truth, when the divine king with his temple and light descend to earth. Nautin and Visonà, for instance, divided the whole text following this wide two-step framework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nautin</th>
<th>Visonà</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>v. 1-3</td>
<td>Exordium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. 4-8</td>
<td>Subject and plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vv. 9-42</td>
<td>The First Part: The Figures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vv. 9-10</td>
<td>The Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vv. 11-42</td>
<td>The Pascha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vv. 11-15</td>
<td>The First Pascha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vv. 16-42</td>
<td>The Solemnity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vv. 43-61</td>
<td>The Second Part: The Truth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vv. 43-48</td>
<td>Christ's Coming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vv. 48-61</td>
<td>The Passion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vv. 59-61</td>
<td>The Glorification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vv. 62-63</td>
<td>The Peroration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moreover, Melito's Peri Pascha follows the same framework.11

The passage 1.1-12 appears to depict the common apocalyptic image of the opened heavens, which recalls for example Ezekiel 1:1, especially if one observes the usage of the same verb that renders the English verb "to open," ἀνοίγω (in LXX and IP). Thus the expression "the heaven opened" and other similar ones seem to be *termi technici* in biblical and apocalyptic literature, as ringing bells announcing a celestial vision.12 Furthermore, the...
picture that describes the consequences that the opening of the heavens implies appears to enclose a special element: the heavenly light floods the universe, and its source—Christ—is envisioned in huge dimensions.

Pseudo-Hippolytus does not spend much time expounding on the earthly temple, the church, being instead more interested in the divine and mystical one, while the earthly and visible temple seems to represent the mere entrance or the lintel to the celestial Jerusalem. As shown in different studies, the heavenly temple represents a constant aspect in apocalyptic literature. The visionary experiences rapture by being translated into the celestial temple where he is allowed to contemplate the heavenly king, the throne, and the myriads of angels glorifying the king. In one of her articles, Martha Himmelfarb noticed an important distinction between prophetic and apocalyptic visions: the prophets are neither translated into, nor do they ascend into, the heavenly temple. "Ezekiel is the only one of all the classical prophets to record the experience of being physically transported by the spirit of God, but even Ezekiel does not ascend to heaven." Nonetheless, Pseudo-Hippolytus's writing seems to be part of a different paradigm, since the heavenly glory descends to earth. Here Christ's coming (epidemia) turns out to be the moment when the border between the celestial temple and the earth disappears, and the earth becomes flooded by the presence of the divine light. The homilist states in the opening phrase of the hymn: "the heavenly treasures of the divine glory [doxa] are opened up." It should be also noticed that the tradition of the divine light/glory stored beyond the heavens has ancient biblical origins. Psalm 8:1, for example, reads "you have set your glory above the heavens."

The idea of a descended or extended celestial temple seems to manifest similarities with the biblical and extra-biblical literature. Second Chronicles 7:1-3 probably represents one of the most ancient witnesses to this paradigm.

When Solomon had ended his prayer, fire came down from heaven [lo pyr katebê ek tou ouranou] ... and the glory of the Lord filled the temple [doxa kyriou eplesen ton oikon]. ... When the children of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the Lord, katabainan to peithan auton tis autoi katas tis aeris tou auranu... and the glory of the Lord filled the temple [doxa kyriou eplesen ton oikon]. ... When the children of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the Lord... paid katabainan to peithan auton tis autoi katas tis aeris tou auranu...

Psalm 148 is an attribute of Yahweh where both the highest heaven (sea monsters and hills, trees, birds, and stars) and the earth are exalted: his glory (light) is transcendent for disclosing the presence of God, although it is not operating during the pascha (the Ode 3, Troparia, and earth and those by which it is established).

Furthermore, the heavenly light descending is present in the New Testament: Matthew 24:27 and Luke 1:79-79, and sing for their inspiration. For John, the heavenly light descends and earth and those by which it is established.

Psalm 148 is an attribute of Yahweh where both the highest heaven (sea monsters and hills, trees, birds, and stars) and the earth are exalted: his glory (light) is transcendent for disclosing the presence of God, although it is not operating during the pascha (the Ode 3, Troparia, and earth and those by which it is established).

Psalm 148 is an attribute of Yahweh where both the highest heaven (sea monsters and hills, trees, birds, and stars) and the earth are exalted: his glory (light) is transcendent for disclosing the presence of God, although it is not operating during the pascha (the Ode 3, Troparia, and earth and those by which it is established).

Psalm 148 is an attribute of Yahweh where both the highest heaven (sea monsters and hills, trees, birds, and stars) and the earth are exalted: his glory (light) is transcendent for disclosing the presence of God, although it is not operating during the pascha (the Ode 3, Troparia, and earth and those by which it is established).
down and the glory of the Lord upon the temple [πάντες οἱ ἄνωτέρων καταβαίνουσιν], they bowed down with their faces to the earth on the pavement.

Psalm 148 is also emblematic, since it depicts a cosmic glorification of Yahweh where both the heavenly realm (angels, hosts, sun and moon, stars, the highest heavens, and the waters above the heavens) and the terrestrial one (sea monsters and ocean depths, fire, hail and snow, smoke, storm, mountains and hills, trees, beasts, kings, and peoples) offer their particular praise. The thirteenth line ("Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted: his glory (יהוה) is above earth and heaven") is especially significant for disclosing the idea that the divine glory is stored beyond the heavens, although it is not obvious whether the glory descends. It might also be worth noting that the psalm is read or sung in the Eastern Church in the service during the paschal night. Likewise, in the Paschal Canon ascribed to John of Damascus the cosmic liturgy of light comes out as well, for example in the Ode 3, Troparia: "Now all things have been filled with light, both heaven and earth and those beneath the earth; so let all creation sing Christ's rising, by which it is established."

Furthermore, the theme of the descended glory or king of glory is also present in the New Testament writings and pseudepigraphic materials. The Gospels, for example, depict Christ's incarnation as the moment when the heavenly light descended to earth, as in the visions of Matthew (4:16-17) and Luke (1:78-79). In Luke 2:13-14, the angelic armies descend to earth and sing for their incarnated king. In addition, the eschaton, as described in Matthew 24:27 and Luke 17:24, seems to be the moment when the Son of Man will appear as lightning (αστραπή, used in both cases) filling the whole world. For John, too, Christ was light (e.g., John 1:7-9; 1 John 1:1-3, 5, 7; 2:8-10), and his disciples have seen his glory (δόξα: John 1:14). Another argument for the deep Johannine influence on Pseudo-Hippolytus might be that the passage parallels in its emblematic images the prologue of the Gospel of John: Christ, who is the "light" and "life" come into the world. "Darkness" has been swallowed up, and the life has been "extended to every creature." The author is also indebted to John for other christological titles such as "manna" or "bread" that came down from heaven (JPs 8.4; 25.11-12). Perhaps the most explicit text appears in the book of Revelation where one can read: "And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God."

It has the glory (\textit{doxa}) of God and a radiance (\textit{phostēr}) like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal" (21:10–11).

An internalized version of the theme of descended glory may be encountered in 1 Corinthians 6:19, where the idea of a third temple emerged, namely the temple of the human body (\textit{sāma}) deemed as the “temple of the Holy Spirit." There are also writings pertaining to the Second Temple, such as \textit{Joseph and Aseneth} 6.5, which are significant for the idea of the descent of the heavenly temple or \textit{hekhal}.

As for the New Testament pseudepigraphic materials, the Gospel of Nazarenes or the Epistle of the Apostles may constitute good examples. \textit{In sanctum Pascha} and the Epistle of the Apostles display further common elements: (1) the descent of light and life, which are identical (\textit{IP} 1; \textit{EpApost} 39); (2) Christ's coming is at the same time a descent (\textit{EpApost} 13.2; 39.11) followed by an ascension (\textit{EpApost} 13.8; 14.8; 18.4; 29.7), and also compared with the rising of the sun and employing the same verb \textit{anatello} (\textit{IP} 1.2; \textit{EpApost} 16.3); (3) the two sources connect Christ's coming with the Pascha (\textit{EpApost} 16); (4) the two sources had strong Johannine influence.

The theme emerges in other important early Christian writings such as Melito's \textit{Peri Pascha}, where, in 44 (289) for instance, Christ comes from above in opposition to the earthly temple. In 45 (290–300), comparing the Jerusalem from above with the terrestrial one, Melito reckons that the glory (\textit{doxa}) of God is enthroned (\textit{kathidrytai}) not in a single place (\textit{epi heni topo}), but his grace (\textit{charis}) overflows unto all the boundaries of the inhabited world (\textit{epi panta ta perata tēs oikoumenēs}). The pivotal idea of the descended heavens will also appear in Tertullian's \textit{De carne Christi} 3 (the episode of Epiphany), Cyprian's \textit{On the Lord's Prayer} (Treatise IV), Clement’s \textit{Protreptikos} 11.114.1–2, and Origen's first \textit{Homily on Ezekiel} 1.6–8. According to David J. Halperin, Origen's source of inspiration seemed to be the \textit{Sinai Haggadot}. However, all these sources and probably \textit{IP} (if a pre-Origenian writing) give witness for a more ancient tradition.


glory may be encountered like a very rare jewel, and in early Christianity the temple emerged, namely the "temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 3:16). The idea of the descent of the Holy Spirit pseudepigraphic sources, such as the Apostles may contain, are in the Epistle of the Apostles (1 Cor. 3:16), the light and life, which is at the same time a temple (EpApost. 13.8; 14.8; 21.68). The sun and employing the two sources connect, and two sources had strong Jewish influences.

Christian writings such as Pseudo-Hippolytus's Epistle come from above comparing the Jerusalem temple to the glory (doxa) of the Hekhal in Second Temple days (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:20; 1 Tim. 3:16). Thus, the inhabited world (epi topos) of which he descended heavens (epi topos) becomes more complex through portraying Christ as a divine high priest. Pseudo-Hippolytus depicts Christ with certain apocalyptic titles such as the "eternal high priest" (archiereus aionios; 46.33, 36), the "true high priest of the heavens" (55.16–17), and especially the "King of the powers" (46.36), the "King of glory" (46.29–31; 61.9–14), the "eternal King" (46.3, 19), the "great King" (9.28), or the "Lord of the powers" (46.26, 30, 36). As for the visionary, one of the noticeable elements consists in the "democratization" of the accessibility to the hidden realm of heavens. Every human person can be initiated and become a visionary of the highest mystery of the universe, namely the luminous theophany of the Lord of powers. Angels, humans, stars, waters, and the whole earth are all present contemplating the King of glory in his various manifestations. In one of the central scenes (IP 55.5–25), they are terrified spectators at the divine passions of the King of the universe:

Then the world was in amazement at his long endurance. The heavens were shocked, the powers were moved, the heavenly thrones and laws were moved at seeing the General of the great powers hanging on the cross; for a short time the stars of heaven were falling when they viewed stretched on the cross him who was before the morning star. For a time the sun's fire was extinguished, the great Light of the world suffered eclipse. Then the earth's rocks were rent. The veil of the temple was rent in sympathy, bearing witness to the High priest of the heavens, and the world would have been dissolved in confusion and fear at the passion if the great Jesus had not expired saying: Father, into your hands I commit my spirit (Luke 23:46). The whole universe trembled and quaked with fear, and everything was in a state of agitation, but when the Divine Spirit rose again the universe returned to life and regained its vitality.

The next scene (IP 3.1–15) depicts the whole creation glorifying the victory and resurrection of the King of glory:

Exult, ye heavens of heavens, which as the Spirit exclaims, proclaim the glory of God (Ps. 18:1 LXX) in that they are first to receive the paternal light of the Divine Spirit. Exult, angels and archangels of the heavens, and all you people, and the whole heavenly host as you look upon your heavenly King come down in bodily form to earth. Exult, you choir of stars pointing out him who rises

Pseudo-Hippolytus's In sanctum Pascha

Pascha and Celestial Liturgy

At the same time, following Hebrews 8:1 ("we have such a high priest [archiereus], one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens"), IP becomes more complex through portraying Christ as a divine high priest. Pseudo-Hippolytus depicts Christ with certain apocalyptic titles such as the "eternal high priest" (archiereus aionios; 46.33, 36), the "true high priest of the heavens" (55.16–17), and especially the "King of the powers" (46.36), the "King of glory" (46.29–31; 61.9–14), the "eternal King" (46.3, 19), the "great King" (9.28), or the "Lord of the powers" (46.26, 30, 36). As for the visionary, one of the noticeable elements consists in the "democratization" of the accessibility to the hidden realm of heavens. Every human person can be initiated and become a visionary of the highest mystery of the universe, namely the luminous theophany of the Lord of powers. Angels, humans, stars, waters, and the whole earth are all present contemplating the King of glory in his various manifestations. In one of the central scenes (IP 55.5–25), they are terrified spectators at the divine passions of the King of the universe:

Then the world was in amazement at his long endurance. The heavens were shocked, the powers were moved, the heavenly thrones and laws were moved at seeing the General of the great powers hanging on the cross; for a short time the stars of heaven were falling when they viewed stretched on the cross him who was before the morning star. For a time the sun's fire was extinguished, the great Light of the world suffered eclipse. Then the earth's rocks were rent. The veil of the temple was rent in sympathy, bearing witness to the High priest of the heavens, and the world would have been dissolved in confusion and fear at the passion if the great Jesus had not expired saying: Father, into your hands I commit my spirit (Luke 23:46). The whole universe trembled and quaked with fear, and everything was in a state of agitation, but when the Divine Spirit rose again the universe returned to life and regained its vitality.

The next scene (IP 3.1–15) depicts the whole creation glorifying the victory and resurrection of the King of glory:

Exult, ye heavens of heavens, which as the Spirit exclaims, proclaim the glory of God (Ps. 18:1 LXX) in that they are first to receive the paternal light of the Divine Spirit. Exult, angels and archangels of the heavens, and all you people, and the whole heavenly host as you look upon your heavenly King come down in bodily form to earth. Exult, you choir of stars pointing out him who rises
before the morning star. Exult, air, which extends over the abysses and innumerable spaces. Exult, briny water of the sea, honored by the sacred traces of his footsteps. Exult, earth washed by the divine blood. Exult, every soul of man, reanimated by the resurrection to a new birth.21

This language reveals the liturgical background of the homily.22 The last three chapters of the booklet, in particular, depict a mystic choral chanting (chorēgia hé mystikē), a spiritual feast, and an antiphonal choir where angels and humans sing and respond to each other.23 There are also images associated with the liturgical experience such as the marriage chamber, the wedding garments, certain interior lamps of the human souls, and “the divine fire of grace (charis) that burns divinely and spiritually in all, in soul and body, nurtured by the oil of Christ” (enthēos dé kai pneumatikós en pāsi tēs charitos dadoucheitai to pyr, sōmati kai pneumati, kai elaiō Christou chorēgoumenon).24

Mystery Language and Visio Dei

While the paschal event seems to convert into a visionary moment—into an apocalyptic incidence—our author does not seem to offer a traditional apocalyptic treatment in terms of preparation for the access to this luminous vision through ascension, but develops a mystagogy instead. The fact that Christ, the king of angels descends himself to the initiand and gradually reveals himself—from the stage of the human form that he put on to the final epiphany of the huge incandescent divine body—also adds a new element to the mystery dimension of the homily.

Pseudo-Hippolytus manifestly affirms in a short methodological exposition in chapters 4–7 that the divine temple and its light are not visible in the way we see the sensible things, but they are rather hidden and mysterious and part of the veiled side of the world, where the mysteries of the truth can be found.25 Similar to Philo’s Questions and Answers on Exodus and Melito’s Peri Pascha, the homilist connects this mystagogy with a typological exegesis of Exodus 12.26 While the types or figures (typoi) of the book of Exodus could be seen through the bodily eyes, the prototypes or paradigms (prōtotypoi kai paradeigmata) are not visible, but hidden (mystika), and able to be seen

21. See also IP 62.
23. IP 62.16–19.
24. IP 62.30–32.
25. IP 7.5: tē tῆς ἀληθείας μοιητία.
26. It seems that a hermeneutical tradition of interpreting Exod. 12 within the paschal context may be traced from Philo’s Questions and Answers on Exodus to Melito. Ps.-Hippolytus, and Origen. While Philo interpreted Exod. 12 allegorically, the Christian theologians changed the allegorical interpretation into a typological one.

only through intellec­tion or intuition (nous; IP 6.10). Since the glory is not located exclusively within the upper realm but present everywhere on earth, the heavenly ascension becomes utterly meaningless. For this reason the author logically changed the ascen­sion into a mystagogy, a penetration into the mystery realm, which exists on the earth as well, not solely in heaven. Therefore the visionary, namely the Christian initiand, has to seek to acquire a mystical knowledge (IP 4.2; 50.5) by pursuing the itinerary of contemplating with acerbity the mysteries hidden within the types. Since the light of Christ and the Spirit spread in the universe cannot be seen with the unaided eye, the participants in the liturgy need to be initiated (IP 4.2). Within this context, the paschal celebration does not take place within the visible world; it is not so much cosmic, but rather mystical, or a mystery.

Carrying on the same logic, Pseudo-Hippolytus claims that the sacrifice and even the Lamb that "has come down from the heaven" (IP 2.15) are mystical. The Lamb is then a "sacred sacrifice" (to thyma to hieron; 18.1), and "perfect" (teleion; 19.1), while the pascha is also mystical (1.15). Thus the same combination of mystery and apocalypticism emerges here again. It is a well-known aspect that pascha is connected with the apocalyptic theme of resurrection and the heavenly Lamb represents an apocalyptic image, which appears in the book of Revelation, first as the slaughtered or sacrificed Lamb, then as the Lamb sitting on the heavenly throne among the angels who glorify him. The mystery adjective hieros (sacred) qualifies in IP everything con­nected with Christ and his temple: rays (1.1), church (63.3), pascha (16.4), feast (6.1; 8.1), solemnity (3.28), knowledge (4.2), victim (18.1), lamb (23.2), body (41.4; 49.6), head (53.2), rib (53.9), blood and water (53.9–10), spirit (47.6–7), word (59.4), resurrection (60.1–2).

The recurring usage of such terms as hieros, mystikos, pneumatikos, theios, and megas might not be the "mania for hyperbole of a mediocre orator," but rather the effort to suggest that those realities of the temple and especially its


29. Rev. 5:6, 9, 12–13. Cf. John 1:29, 36; Acts 8:32; 1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:19; 2:24. For the roots of this image, see Gen. 22:7–8, 13; Exod. 12:21; Lev. 4:35; 5:6; 9:3. For the image of the suffering righteous connected to the lamb, see Isa. 52:13–53:7; Jer. 11:19.

30. Nautin, Homélies, 46. See for instance the repeated adjective μέγας in Ezekiel the Tragedian.
king—the preexisting Christ—do not belong to the sensible realm, but to the invisible, noetic, or mysterious one. It can also be noticed that the attribute *megas* is used as well, particularly in connection to the divine temple and Christ’s body: *megas Christos* (IP 1.11); *megalē megalou basileōs epidēmía* (2.3); *megalou basileōs* (9.28); *tō megalō sómati* (32.3); *to megethos pan tēs theotētōs* and *pan to plērōma tēs theotētōs* (45.10; cf. Col. 2:9); *tōn ektatheison cheiron Iēsou* (15.14); *cheiras exetainas patrikas ekalypsas hemas entos tōn patrikon* (38.3–4); *tas cheiras tas megalas* (63.2–3). Consequently, rather than being a note of grandiloquence,31 it might be the Jewish biblical and pseudepigraphical theme of divine body, as I will illustrate a few pages further. In this way, all these adjectives might constitute the linguistic instrumentarium of a theologian expressing old apocalyptic ideas pertaining to the early Jewish-Christian mindset rather than the rhetorical artifices of a fourth- or fifth-century orator.

The Nature of Christ’s Luminous Body

The initiatory process of revealing mysteries reaches its completion with the highest revelation, which is the light that fills the whole creation or the huge luminous body of Christ. A significant aspect of the nature of this light is that of being manifested as a body not of material, but of pneumatic or spiritual nature. With the idea of a humanlike form or body of God one encounters the Jewish theme, both scriptural and apocryphal, of the divine luminous form contemplated by the prophets and apocalyptic visionaries alike. Some of the most famous passages are Exodus 24:9–11, Ezekiel 1:26 (where on the throne sits a “figure [ἡμῶν]ν ἡμῶν] with the appearance [ὁμοιόμαι ἡμῶν] of a man [ὁμοιόμαι ἡμῶν]”; cf. LXX: *homoiōma hōs eidos anthrōpou*), Daniel 7, or Philippians 2:6 (“in the form of God” *en morphe theou*). While there is no textual evidence, it is plausible that Pseudo-Hippolytus would have taken over this theme from a Jewish context, given the considerable Jewish presence in Asia Minor at the time, the author’s Quartodeciman position, and his mention of a “secret” Hebrew tradition about creation.32 At the same time, it is also plausible that he adapted the theme of God’s form through the mediation of his Christian community where the theme was popular in the second century. The idea of the image or form of glory, or of the huge body of Christ, also appears, for example, in Matthew 17:2; Mark 9:2; Luke 9:29; 1 Corinthians 11:7; Philippians 2:6; 3:21; 2 Clement 17.5; Gospel of Philip 57.30–58; and in Herakleon of Alexandria who, in his commentary to John 1:27—as Origen testifies in *Commentary on John* 6.39—reads: “The whole world is the shoe of Jesus.”

Pseudo-Hippolytus speaks about a body that touches the heavens and makes the earth fast by its feet, while the huge hands embrace the winds between the heaven and the earth, of the most ancient in the light of the Spirit of God, present, for example, in Isaiah 9:26; Isaiah 25:10; and in the Spirit of God. It can also be noticed that the word *mégis* denotes size, a well-known synonym well in Irenaeus of Lyons of God operating in the world (cf. IP 17.4). At the same time, however, the Spirit is also the way of angels, at the same time, also observe that the Spirit are mystical and pneumatic (theios), “pneumatic/spiritual (aprositos) refer to sensible things, namely to the universe, namely to the body of Christ (embolai) of the Spirit of the universe, namely to the sensible things.35 From Philo, the Pseudo-Hippolytus’s terminologies:

But as it is, the spirit: [to theion], the excess division [to adumbrati], things [to panté di’K].36 There is no hurt, which thou diminution [elattouo].

It is noteworthy that Christ, scattered among sensible things, the constitution of his body, immortal and immemorial, 55.11 the Johannine attribute of "might".

32. IP 17.4.
between the heaven and earth. The metaphor of the “hand of God” is one of the most ancient Jewish anthropomorphic expressions for the Spirit of God, present, for example, in Exodus 15:16; 32:11; Deuteronomy 6:21; 7:8, 19; 9:26; Isaiah 25:10; and Ezekiel 37:1 where the hand of God is identified with the Spirit of God. It can be also found in 1 Peter 5:6. Actually, the Hebrew word י’/ד denotes simultaneously “hand” and “power,” the latter term being a well-known synonym for the Spirit (e.g., Mic. 3:8). The idea is present as well in Irenaeus of Lyon, for whom the Son and the Holy Spirit are the hands of God operating in the universe, and in Theophilus of Antioch, for whom the Holy Spirit is identical with the “Hand of God.”

At the same time, the luminous body in the Pseudo-Hippolytean text is identical with the celestial tree, the tree of paradise, the pillar of the universe, the Spirit that permeates all things, and the “ladder of Jacob, the way of angels, at the summit of which the Lord is truly established.” One should also observe that none of these realities is visible and sensible, but all are mystical and pneumatic. For Pseudo-Hippolytus, such titles as “divine” (theios), “pneumatic/spiritual” (pneumatikos), perfect (teleios), or “separated” (aprositos) refer to something completely different from the things of the universe, namely to the divine. Being separated, the effusions or emanations (embolai) of the Spirit/Christ remain unmixed (akratos, amiges) with the sensible things. Although echoing the following pneumatological fragment from Philo, the Pseudo-Hippolytean pneumatology employs some different terminologies:

But as it is, the spirit which is on him [Moses] is the wise [to sophon], the divine [to theion], the excellent spirit, susceptible of neither severance [to atmeton] nor division [to adiaireton], diffused in its fullness everywhere and through all things [to panté di’ holon ekpepieromenon], the spirit which helps, but suffers no hurt, which though it be shared with others or added to others suffers no diminution [elattoutai] in understanding and knowledge and wisdom.

It is noteworthy that among the expressions related to the huge body of Christ, scattered among different parts of the text, some regard the fiery constitution of his body. Passage 1.1–12 avers that the mighty (megas) Christ, immortal and immense (polys), sheds light brighter than that of the sun. At 55.11 the Johannine christological title “the light of the world” also receives the attribute of “mighty” (to mega tou kosmou phōs). Furthermore, comment-

---

33. IP 51. Cf. IP 63, for the hands of God.
34. E.g., Irenaeus, AH 4.20.1; and Theophilus, To Autolycus 5.
35. IP 51.
36. IP 45.7–9. Cf. 1 Tim. 6:16, where God is called φῶς ἄπρόσδοκος. The same title also appears in Athenagoras’s Legatio 16.3, along with ἀγαθός, δίκαιος, and λόγος.
37. Philo, Gig. 6.27 (LCL, Philo 2:459).
ing on Exodus 12:8 ("They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire") the author makes the following cryptic affirmation:

This is the night on which the flesh is eaten, for the light of the world has set on the great body of Christ: *Take and eat; this is my body.*

Since the liturgical or eucharistic context is noticeable here, the interpretation needs to be done from a liturgical perspective. My reading would be that Pseudo-Hippolytus refers to the Christian Eucharist, which is taken or received without the vision of Christ's glory; in translation, it is taken "in the night." This night does not refer to the incapacity of seeing the visible light, but to the incapacity of perceiving the invisible, mystical, or pneumatic glory.

The Eucharist is identified then with the "great body of Christ" on which the "light of the world" is set (edy). A series of analogies may provide a better understanding of these expressions:

*The visible sun*—parallels the *light of the world* (a comparison frequently used in the Christian literature; see *IP* 1.12), which is Christ.

*The night*—parallels the *mystery* of the visible elements of the Eucharist, which covers the divine light of Jesus' glorious body.

*The earth*—parallels the *bread of the Eucharist*, the visible realm, which veils the divine light.

One chapter further (*IP* 27.1–2), while commenting on Luke 12:49 ("I came to cast fire upon the earth"), he straightforwardly affirms that the "flesh is roasted with fire, for the spiritual or rational body of Christ is on fire" (*ta de krea opta pyri empyron gar logikon sôma tou Christou*).

This christological conception also implies a particular understanding of the incarnation. Pseudo-Hippolytus does not employ such verbs as *sarkoo*, *ensomatoo*, or *enanthropeo*, but renders various aspects of the mystery of the incarnation through different vocabulary. He uses, for instance, *apostolē* (sending; *IP* 3.21) to underline the fact that the Father sent the Son into the world. A correlative term for "sending" is *epidemia* (2.3; 7.6; 43.2–3; 44.1; 47.10; 56.9)—"arriving," "coming" on (epi)—either on earth (43.2) or into the body (*sôma*; 47.10). Another noun—*anatolē* (dawn; 3.4; 17.14; 45.23)—renders the light of Christ that fills the universe (cf. Matt. 2:2; Luke 1:78). This dawn or Orient is spiritual (*pneumatikē*; 45.23) as well and therefore mystical, not visible. The huge light, according to the author, was set (edy), contracted (*systeilas*), collected (*synathroisas*), and compressed (*synagagon*) in Christ's body, while...
ight in Early Christianity

...they shall eat it... pietic affirmation: here, the interpretation of the reading would be, “which is taken in the visible light, but pneumatic glory.

Pseudo-Hippolytus’s In sanctum Pascha

Christ’s body, while the immenseness of his whole divinity (to megethos pan tês theotetos) remained unchanged.

He willingly confined himself to himself and collecting and, compressing in himself all the greatness of the divinity, came in the dimensions of his own choice in no way diminished or lessened in himself, nor inferior in glory [ou meioumenos en heatô oude elattoumenos oude te doxe dapanômenos].

In order to discover the divine body of light veiled and enveloped by Christ’s visible body, namely the visible elements of the Eucharist, Christians need to be initiated.

Conclusion

Coming back to Collins’s definition, one might state that the homily displays (1) a large framework, which is the history of salvation, where (2) the paschal celebration inserts itself as a privileged opportunity of accessing the divine temple extended into the whole universe, and of seeing (3) the divine king in a mystical way. This transcendent reality is not especially placed in an upper realm, but present in a deeper, hidden here. (4) Participants are human initiants in a mystery rite, while (5) the homilist represents the initiated mystagogue divulging one by one the sacred mysteries.

In sanctum Pascha, therefore, seems to reflect similar features with some of the most representative categories of apocalyptic literature: it is a revelation of the heavenly and divine king, of his throne, glory, and angelic choirs, but it is an apocalypse of a different nature, namely a mystery apocalypse.

The preceding discussion uncovers three elements: paschal celebration, apocalyptic language, and mystery language. The first two elements appear to be a common idea in first-century Christian writings.41 The last element is slightly suggested in Melito, but clearly developed by Pseudo-Hippolytus in a mystery apocalypse. One can thus suppose that all these ideas were present within the intellectual atmosphere of the Christian communities in second- and third-century Asia Minor, and Pseudo-Hippolytus articulated these elements as a rich mystery apocalypse.


them in a more unitary way, adding as well the theme of Christ's divine body, which does not occur in Melito.

Asia Minor in the second to fourth centuries was consequently the place of a decisive synthesis of two traditions—apocalypse and mystery—a synthesis that would come to dominate the liturgical life of the church until today. Pseudo-Hippolytus's IP witnesses to the application of this synthesis in the paschal celebration or, putting it differently, to a development of the paschal language toward this mystery-apocalyptic vocabulary. In addition, the homily may put in a new light such writings as Philo's Questions and Answers on Exodus and Melito's Peri Pascha, writings that can be envisaged as the roots of this application. With time, important debates of the church such as the anthropomorphic quarrel eliminated anthropomorphic tendencies, while the christological and pneumatological debates, along with more Greek rhetoric, led to the intricate paschal homilies of the famous Cappadocians, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa.

Pseudo-Hippolytus's homily is consequently important as a pool of testimonies; it displays an affluent terminological and ideological treasury for the Christian theology of the second, third, or perhaps even the early fourth century. The synthesis of Jewish apocalyptic images and Greek mystery terminology definitely witnesses to a period of syncretism, as well as to a Christian community in search of the language to express, and give shape to, its own identity.