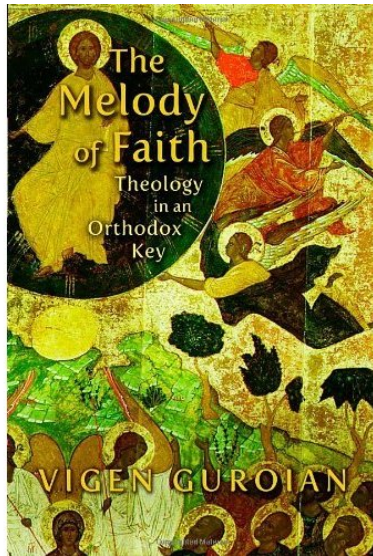


Vigen Guroian, *The Melody of Faith: Theology in an Orthodox Key*,  
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By Fr. Mirone Klysh

In a catechetical manuscript written a number of years ago, the now Father Win Mott used the Holy Liturgy as the basis "of this inquiry into the Christian Faith." In the Preface of the current work, Vigen Guroian notes that "in Orthodox

liturgy, Scripture, hymnody, and iconography together chorus the melody of faith." Guroian cites Jaroslav Pelikan's *The Melody of Theology* as the inspiration for the title of his book. To this list one should also add a recent work by Stanley S. Harakas, *Melody of Prayer: How to Personally Experience the Divine Liturgy*.

Guroian's *Melody of Faith* consists of six "études:" 1. The Litany of Creation, 2. The Luminous Moment of the Apocalypse, 3. Divine Therapy, 4. Mother of God, Mother of Holiness, 5. The Victorious Cross, and 6. The Rhythm of Resurrection. In addition to numerous research notes, the volume also includes a subject index, and a "Scripture Index."

In the Litany of Creation, the author mentions Psalm 104 (103), which indeed could be considered a great song of Creation. In fact, this Psalm in a shortened form is the melody of Creation in the Great Vespers service of the Orthodox Church: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, Blessed are you, O Lord! How glorious are your works, O Lord, in wisdom You made them all. Glory to you, O Lord, Who has created all!" Guroian expresses it thus: "God is more like a cantor who chants His creation into existence and rejoices everlastingly over its beautiful harmony."

Regarding New Sunday or Second Easter in the tradition of the Armenian Church, which is called St Thomas' Sunday in the Orthodox Church, Guroian states: "... in the Armenian service, the first seventeen verses of the Gospel of John are chief among the lectionary readings." These verses are read on Pascha (Easter Sunday) in the Orthodox Church. Furthermore, in the Orthodox Church every Sunday liturgy commemorates the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is evident in one of the hymns of the Matins Canon for Thomas' Sunday, and other Sundays: "It is the day of resurrection, let us be radiant, O you peoples; Pascha, the Lord's Pascha; for Christ has brought us from death unto life, and from earth unto Heaven, as we sing the triumphal hymn!" Another Matins hymn proclaims: "On this day, the Second Sunday of Pascha, we inaugurate the celebration of Christ's Resurrection; and the occasion whereon the holy apostle Tomas touched the Saviour's side."

Further, the Troparions and Kontakions for Holy Liturgy on the Sundays following Pascha refer to the Resurrection, for example: "Let us, the faithful, praise and worship the Lord, co-eternal with the Father and the Spirit, born for our salvation from the Virgin; for He willed to be lifted up on the Cross in the flesh, to endure death, and to raise the dead by His glorious Resurrection" (tone five troparion).

In "The Luminous Moment of the Apocalypse," Guroian speaks of the Apocalypse as "that 'moment' through which the whole course of Creation and its meaning are completely clarified." He raises the question of how Christ is present in the Eucharist, and at the same time, is at the right hand of the Father in Heaven. The celebrant's prayer before Holy Communion in the Orthodox Church speaks of the Divine Mystery: "O Lord Jesus Christ our God, attend from Your holy dwelling place, and from the throne of glory of Your kingdom, come to sanctify us, You Who above sit together with the Father and here are invisibly present together with us. And by Your mighty hand, condescend to impart to us Your Most Pure Body and Precious Blood, and through us, to all Your people."

Guroian also shares a dialogue that takes place between the deacon and the priest after the Great Entrance in the Armenian liturgy (Psalm 24 (23): 7-10). In some Orthodox Churches, this dialogue takes place between the priest and the people at the outside door of the church at the end of the Paschal procession.

The third etude, "Divine Therapy," raises a concern about the danger of making idols of physicians and scientific medicine and ignoring or rejecting divine therapy. Guroian encourages Orthodox Christians "to take the medicine of life that Christ gives to us as His body and blood – these things are not only the cure for our physical and moral sickness, but the source of eternal life." In the Holy Liturgy of the Orthodox Church, this advice is proclaimed in a hymn after Holy Communion: "Let our mouths be filled with Your praise, O Lord, for You have counted us worthy to partake of Your Holy, Divine, Immortal, Pure, and Life-Creating Mysteries. Preserve us in holiness, so that we may sing of Your glory, practicing Your righteousness all through the day."

"Divine Therapy" is followed by the movement, "Mother of God, Mother of Holiness." Guroian stressed how Mother of God, unlike Eve, questioned the Archangel Gabriel about the message to her. The author makes use of a dialogue that takes place between the Mother of God and the Archangel as part of the Byzantine services for the Feastday of Annunciation. Guroian speaks of the Mother of God as "the mother of all who are mystical Body of Christ" and "mother of new humanity, the church." A hymn for Dormition Great Vespers in the Byzantine tradition expresses these thoughts: "Therefore, O most pure Mother of God, who lives forever with your Son, the King Who brings life, pray without ceasing that your newborn people be guarded on every side and saved from all adverse assault, for we are under your protection."

For unknown reasons, Guroian does not mention two other Byzantine Feastdays dedicated to the Mother of God: her birth or nativity (September 8), and her Entry into the Temple (November 21). A nativity Great Vespers hymn further affirms her role as mother of the church: "Through her we children of earth have been formed anew." Another hymn notes that she is the one "through whom things on earth are joined with Heaven. Throughout the hymns of this Feastday, there is expressed the anticipation of the birth of the Son of God as found, for example, in the Feast Troparion: " Your birth, O Mother of God, has brought joy to all the inhabited earth: for from you have shone forth the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God..."

This anticipation of the birth of the Son of God is also found in the hymns for the Entry Feastday: " The Virgin is revealed in the Temple of God and beforehand she announces Christ to all" (troparion). Interestingly, the Feastday Matins contains a dialogue between Ann and Zacharias similar to the dialogue between Archangel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary in the Annunciation services.

The fifth etude of *Melody of Faith* is "The Victorious Cross." As stated by the author, "death is utterly defeated on the Cross and life triumphs." A Byzantine hymn for the Feast of the Elevation of the Cross echoes this statement: "Hail, life-giving Cross... Through you corruption is utterly destroyed, the power of death is swallowed up, and we are raised from earth to heaven..." Guroian stresses the fact that Christ "willed to die on the Cross." This divine Truth is found in several Byzantine hymns: "of Your own will, You ascended the Cross in the flesh."

Guroian also stresses the unbroken relationship between the Cross and the Resurrection of Christ. This relationship is affirmed in a special hymn for the Elevation Feastday: "We venerate Your Cross, O Master, and we glorify Your Resurrection!" For Orthodox Christians, the importance of the Cross and salvation is seen in the fact that, in addition to its commemoration on Wednesdays and Fridays, it is the thematic melody of three Feastdays: Elevation (September 14), the Third Sunday of the Great Fast, and Procession of the Cross (August 1).

"The Rhythm of Resurrection" composes the final etude. Of interest is the fact that the author places greater emphasis on Great and Holy Saturday and not Pascha itself. Byzantine liturgical hymns underline the connection between these two days, especially at the time of the placing of the Gifts on the altar/tomb after the Great Entrance: "In the Grave with the body, and in Hades with the soul, in that You are God; in Paradise with the thief, and on the throne with the Father and the Spirit, in that You are infinite... O Christ Your tomb, which is the wellspring of our resurrection, showed itself to be a life-containing vessel, more embellished than Paradise and more resplendent than any royal chamber." On Orthodox Paschal Sunday and for forty days thereafter, the Paschal Resurrection is joined to Great and Holy Saturday's "Descent into Hades" by the powerful

hymn: "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and to those in the tombs bestowing life!"

As it was noted above, Guroian notes extensively from Scriptures. However, except in one case, he does not explain why he quotes from seven different translations: NKJV, KJV, NRSV, RSV, NEB, REB, and NJB. Neither does he identify these translations by full title.<sup>1</sup>

In conclusion, *The Melody of Faith* gives the reader an appreciation of the theology of Orthodox hymnology. One would hope that having acquired an ear for the theological melody, the reader would seek the full composition as found in all of the worship services of the Orthodox Church.

*About the reviewer:* Very Reverend Father Myrone R. Klysh, MDiv, is Pastor of the St George Orthodox Church in Winnipeg, MB. He also teaches Church History and Liturgics at the St Arseny Orthodox Christian Theological Institute.

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<sup>1</sup> NKJV – New King James Version, KJV – King James Version, NRSV – New Revised Standard Version, RSV – Revised Standard Version, NEB – New English Bible, REB – Revised English Bible, NJB – New Jerusalem Bible.