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"Christ Encompassing All Things": Inspired Images in the *Peri Pascha* Attributed to Melito of Sardis[1]

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The *Peri Pascha* attributed to Melito of Sardis remains one of our most unique and enigmatic extant early Christian texts.[2] It is an interesting stroke of history—or providence—that the *Peri Pascha* was first published in 1940, the same decade when debates concerning allegorical and typological modes of biblical interpretation in the patristic period were heating up.[3] Since that time, the exegetical method employed in the *Peri Pascha* has frequently been brought to bear on the ongoing allegory/typology debate, with the consensus shifting over time as the metaphorical "goal-posts" that are the meanings of allegory and typology have moved. In what follows I approach Melito's method of theological interpretation by considering his use of interconnected and overlapping

1. An earlier version of this essay was prepared for Dr. James R. Payton Jr.'s Early Patristics course at McMaster Divinity College in the Fall of 2024. This essay was then awarded the prize for best graduate student essay at the 2025 CPEC (Centre for Patristics and Early Christianity) conference.

2. While much has been written concerning the context of the *Peri Pascha (PP)*—the *where* or the *who* or the *why*—virtually nothing is universally agreed upon by scholars. A majority accepts that the composer is the same Melito of Sardis who is mentioned in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.23–24. However, Lynn Cohick has established, convincingly, that we simply do not know who the author was, where he was from, or what "sort" of Christian he was (Peri Pascha, 11–39). For the purposes of this paper, I adopt the following as conventions: The author is Melito of Sardis, and the text is a paschal homily—or perhaps another liturgical text, such as a Christian Passover *haggadah*. While I refer throughout to Melito's "homiletical" method, one could substitute "liturgical." For more on *PP* as a paschal *haggadah*, see Hall, "Melito," and Stewart-Sykes, *Lamb's High Feast*, 60–66. I refer to the text as (the) *Peri Pascha* throughout.

3. Bonner, *Homily on the Passion*.

images. I propose that Melito's exegetical and homiletical method—for the two must be understood as one—is fundamentally rooted in his interpretation and use of *inspired images*.[4] *Peri Pascha* represents a form of figural exegesis and figural homiletics,[5] in which images are employed as expansive metaphors not as a means to a theological or ideological end, but as a creative representation of that end—that is, Christ, the reality (ἀλήθεια) and true image. Melito presents the Incarnation and Crucifixion of Christ as *the image* which fulfills all other images and in whom all other images coalesce. Throughout the *Peri Pascha* the scriptural images are presented to Melito's parishioners (and contemporary readers) not as something to learn about, or even to look upon, but

4. I prefer the term "inspired images" to "biblical images" for two reasons: first, the "inspired images" which Melito deals with include those which we would recognize as being from the New Testament, and it may be misleading to apply the adjective "biblical" to those texts in the second century; second, I want to suggest, drawing upon Austin Farrer's doctrine of inspired images, that Melito treats *images* as the stuff of inspiration. Farrer articulated his own doctrine of inspired images in his 1948 Brampton lectures, published as "*The Glass of Vision*," which we will consider by way of conclusion (see Farrer, "*Glass of Vision*").

5. The reader may object that my sudden use of "figural" is simply sleight of hand, substituting the Greek *typos* for its Latin equivalent *figura*. This is, of course, exactly what I have done. However, I ask the reader's patience. In simplest terms, I am using the adjectival form of "figure" as a synonym for that of "image" because "imaginary" or "imaginative" both seem to me possibly suggestive of "non-real" associations, which I would like to avoid. More generally, "figural" interpretation does not carry the same theological baggage as typology (or allegory). Recently, Ephraim Radner and David Ney have defended term "figural reading." They write, "The lexical range of 'figural reading' overlaps with that of terms such as typology (where one event or person prophetically prefigures a later event or person) and allegory (a looser mode of theological reference) and thus occupies a place within broadly conceived categories such as spiritual interpretation or theological interpretation" (*All Thy Lights Combine*, 5). While Melito's figural interpretation is more specific than the broad application of Radner and Ney, "figural reading" remains a good shorthand for Melito's method. However, I am not particular as to the precise terminology and I slide back and forth between terms throughout this essay.

as overlapping scenes in which the parishioners themselves become participants.[6]

This paper proceeds as follows. First, I provide an overview of relevant literature in the typology/allegory debate and consider how the *Peri Pascha* has featured in that conversation since the 1940s. Next, in the central section of the essay, I turn to the text of the *Peri Pascha* itself. I consider Melito's own articulation of his hermeneutical method in *PP* 34–45. I then examine key metaphors related to clothing and enclosure/disclosure as Melito presents them in the single image of the first Passover night in *PP* 12–33. Finally, we turn to the Crucifixion of Christ as the principal image in *PP* 94–100. By way of conclusion, I consider Austin Farrer's theology of divine and inspired images. I suggest not that Farrer's doctrine of inspiration is necessarily correct but that Melito's use of images can be understood as a functional instance of Farrer's doctrine of images, homiletically applied.

1. *Typology, Allegory, and the* Peri Pascha

Beginning in the 1940s Henri de Lubac and Jean Daniélou—respectively, teacher and pupil—engaged in a prolonged public debate on the meaning and value of typological and allegorical interpretation. Daniélou argued for a distinction between the two, with typology having its roots in a Palestinian Jewish tradition and allegory following the Alexandrian tradition of Philo.[7] Christian typological interpretation, argued Daniélou, follows the former and is grounded in the linear mode of history.[8] In contrast, Philo and his successors (Origen most of all) were "directed toward an allegory which . . . sought there above all a symbolic meaning."[9] Followers of Daniélou's interpretation thus came to the conclusion that typology is "successful" non-literal interpretation (reliably histori-

6. I speak of Melito's "parishioners" throughout as a reminder that the *Peri Pascha* is a liturgical text—whether homily or *haggadah*. If one treats the *Peri Pascha* as a theological or apologetical treatise, they are bound to be disappointed or to misunderstand.

7. Daniélou, "What Is Typology?" 336–37.

8. Daniélou, "What is Typology?" 334.

9. Daniélou, "What is Typology?" 336.

cal) whereas allegory is "unsuccessful" non-literal interpretation.[10]

De Lubac challenged his student's thesis on the grounds that the distinction between typology and allegory was unknown to the biblical writers or the church fathers.[11] He was concerned that to separate the two risks "muddling up in certain minds, rather than clarifying . . . the historical problem."[12] Initially, the scholarly consensus sided with Daniélou and accepted the distinction between allegory and typology.[13] More recently, de Lubac's position has been reconsidered as scholars have come to accept that no clear typology/allegory distinction was recognized in the patristic period, though many will still affirm a cautious utility of the terms as descriptive categories.[14]

The *Peri Pascha* has been an important text in the conversation around allegory and typology since its publication in 1940. As the scholarly opinion regarding the value and meaning of typology and allegory has shifted over time, interpretations of the *Peri Pascha* have generally followed the trend. In 1957, Lampe and Woollcombe published *Essays on Typology* in which they defended typology and strongly condemned allegory.[15] Typology, Woollcombe argued, is about identifying explicitly historical connections.[16] Lampe speaks of typology in terms of prophecy and fulfilment and blurs the lines to such an extent that "type" becomes, essentially, synonymous with *implied*—or perhaps "fig-

10. See the discussion in Martens, "Revisiting the Allegory/Typology Distinction," 295.

11. Martens quotes de Lubac: "[Daniélou's distinction between typology and allegory] has, nevertheless the disadvantage, we think, of being formulated with a terminology that is neither scriptural nor truly traditional" ("Revisiting the Allegory/Typology Distinction," 287).

12. de Lubac, "'Typologie' et 'Allégorisme,'" 181.

13. Hanson (*Allegory and Event*) is a classic in this regard.

14. Paul Blowers summarizes the more recent perspective well: "'typology' was not in patristic interpretation a single 'method' of exegesis per se, one allegedly more respectful of *historical* correspondences and less subjective than allegory, though a functional distinction between typology and allegory can be useful in analyzing early Christian exegesis" ("Patristic Interpretation").

15. Lampe and Woollcombe, *Essays on Typology.*

16. Woollcombe, "Biblical Origins," 39.

urative"—prophecy.[17] Allegory, on the other hand, is described as an unfettered wandering, ignorant of biblical categories and parameters.[18] According to Woollcombe, Melito was the great champion of "historical" typology in the second century.[19] He articulates Melito's typological method along the lines of prophecy: "He believed [the types] were, *in their own time*, powerful mysteries, because of the truth which they *foreshadowed*."[20] Woollcombe's perspective is a representative example of how Melito's "typology" was interpreted in lockstep with the scholarly consensus concerning allegory and typology.[21] That Melito's typological exegesis was rooted in the prophetic relationships between past and future historical events was restated by Stewart Hall in the introduction to his 1979 critical edition and translation of the *Peri Pascha.*[22]

If the opinion expressed by Stewart Hall in his critical introduction and translation was characteristic of an earlier consensus, the publication of Alastair Stewart-Sykes's *The Lamb's High Feast* in 1998 followed shortly after by his own translation of *Peri Pascha*

17. "Jesus himself envisioned his mission in terms of Old Testament prophecy and typology" (Lampe, "Reasonableness," 25).

18. Woollcombe, "Biblical Origins," 31.

19. "The most important orthodox rationale of historical typology in the second century" (Woollcombe, "Biblical Origins," 71).

20. Woollcombe, "Biblical Origins," 71 (emphasis mine).

21. Gerald Hawthorne, whom I will return to later, was an early exception to the rule. Hawthorne foreshadowed the winds of scholarly change in 1969 when he argued that Melito understood Christ *to be* "incarnate in [Old Testament] persons or personally involved in [Old Testament] events and institutions . . . [such as] being present *in* the suffering of the sacrificed paschal lamb" ("Melito of Sardis," 318). Hawthorne saw in the *Peri Pascha* not a prophecy-fulfilment typology but an understanding of the Old Testament events according to which Christ is *truly present within* the antecedent symbol. Melito's was a "radical typology," surpassing any of his predecessors or contemporaries (318).

22. "Melito stands firm by Old Testament historicity, unlike the Alexandrian allegorists such as Origen" (Melito of Sardis, *On Pascha and Fragments*, xli). More recently, Blowers has helpfully distinguished between variations of prophecy and typology: "Not just prophetic discourse properly speaking, but also events, characters, images and symbols, and unique literary or lexical features within the ancient texts could all prophetically foreshadow or suggest future developments in the economy of salvation" ("Patristic Interpretation").

in 2001 represents the winds of scholarly change.[23] Perhaps unsurprisingly, with respect to the typology/allegory debate, this shift largely follows that of patristic scholarship more generally, looking upon allegory more favourably than had previous generations. Stewart-Sykes argues that Melito's claim is *not that of*

> scholars of an earlier generation who would contrast what they saw as the ahistorical allegory of Philo and Hellenistic writers with typology, which they saw as concerned with *the saving significance of history and Palestinian in character*. The claim reflected not only the false dichotomy between Palestinian and Hellenistic but also the theological concerns of the decade in which it was made rather than those of the fathers themselves, among whom allegory and typologies of various kinds are mixed together. It is dubious whether the fathers would have recognized this distinction.[24]

Stewart-Sykes still concludes that "Melito's method may be characterized as 'historical typology.'"[25] Yet he differs from earlier interpreters in that he purposefully blurs the line between allegory and typology.

More recently, Hans Boersma has argued that Melito's typology/allegory—Boersma purposely uses the terms interchangeably—is "upward" and spiritual. "Without doubt," he argues, "Melito's typology is historical . . . But the typology involves more than *just* a historical or chronological move . . . [It is] at the same time an upward move, from temporal, earthly types to eternal, heavenly realities in favour of a purely historical typology."[26] Boersma criticizes those who downplay the spiritual and vertical dimension of patristic exegesis in favour of the "horizontal, historical, forward-looking character of typology."[27] Those who have read Melito along such lines have not simply misunderstood the

23. Stewart-Sykes, *Lamb's High Feast*; Melito of Sardis, *On Pascha*. With respect to Melito's use of typology and/or allegory, neither Hall nor Stewart-Sykes put forward significant theories of their own. Rather, both are representative of their respective scholarly generations.

24. Stewart-Sykes, *Lamb's High Feast*, 89 (emphasis mine).

25. Stewart-Sykes, *Lamb's High Feast*, 88.

26. Boersma, *Scripture as Real Presence*, 95.

27. Boersma, *Scripture as Real Presence*, 94.

Peri Pascha, they have been unable to read Melito correctly because of certain ideas of what constitutes legitimate exegesis.

Whatever term is used—be it allegory, typology, or something else entirely—Boersma and other followers of de Lubac have provided a great service by re-opening Melito's spiritual vision and inviting closer attention Melito's "vertical" and "eternal" exegesis. Yet readers also ought to be wary of an opposite error which would emphasize the spiritual at the expense of the historical. One could stretch Boersma's interpretation to the point where typology becomes merely a species of spiritual allegory, whereas, for earlier scholars, typology was a species of historical prophecy.[28] Whenever an interpreter chooses to narrowly emphasize either history or spirit, the risk is always that one aspect disappears in favour of or into the other. Against both temptations, the imaginative presentation of history and spirit in the *Peri Pascha* is complex and resists reduction in either direction; Melito's exegesis cannot be easily contained within the two dimensions of history and spirit. The *Peri Pascha* is a multi-dimensional liturgical drama representing a mode of interpretation which is too expansive to be contained within pre-determined methodological categories. The hermeneutical movement among Melito's types and subjects—including his parishioners—cannot be reduced to "forward" or "backward," "upward" or "downward," or even "inward" or "outward." We must seek an account of Melito's interpretive praxis which duly acknowledges the whole of this tri-dimensional spiritual mystagogy.[29] To interpret Melito's mystagogical exegesis by way of his creative representation of inspired *images* is such an approach. By attending to images, Melito invites his audience into his interpretive performance as a powerful transformational experience. Too often, scholars are quick to look for a meaning "be-

28. Woollcombe, "Biblical Origins," 71.

29. In a recent essay, Kevin Clarke helpfully summarizes Melito's "truly mystagogical exegesis": "Melito's allegories reach their fullest maturity in the anagogy that is the elevation of his audience into the very celebration of the mysteries" ("Προοικονοχία in Melito," 107). Clarke is among those who identify an anagogical (or upward) mode of allegory in the *Peri Pascha*, yet he identifies another important feature: Melito's mystical incorporation of his audience into the interpretive nexus.

hind" the exegete's images—whether historical, spiritual, moral or otherwise—rather than a "power" within. This distinction is of vital importance in *Peri Pascha*.

2. *What's So Important about Images Anyway?*

Before turning to the text of the *Peri Pascha*, we need to address what we mean when we speak of an "image." Simply put, an image is "any expression of sensory experience, whether visual, auditory or otherwise."[30] This includes experiences of spiritual sensation. That is, an image may be impressed upon our mind's eye. In *Peri Pascha*, Melito presents a series of images and fills them in with metaphor, symbol, and power. For instance, rather than *explaining* the meaning of the first Passover, Melito creatively understands the biblical account to present a sacred image, overabundant with symbolic colour, sound, and feel—the stuff of spiritual sensation. We may be tempted to think that images are too imprecise to be of theological value. But this is only so if theological value is primarily a matter of mental assent. For Melito, however, *value* (τίμιος) is a matter of spiritual experience and power (δύναμις). Thus, the "explanation" of his images (e.g., the Passover Lamb) is the experiential power of another image (Christ's Incarnation and Crucifixion). "We write in symbol," Farrer explains, "when we wish our words to present, rather than analyze or prove, their subject-matter."[31] The subject-matter of the *Peri Pascha* is Christ. Melito's purpose is to present that subject matter before his parishioners in as concrete a way as possible. His goal is that Christ would be impressed upon each of his hearers just as Christ is impressed upon and within every Old Testament type. By speaking in terms of images exegeted and performed, we come to recognize that Melito's figural interpretation has not two points of reference but three: the Old Testament symbol (τύπος), the reality (ἀλήθεια) of Christ, and the existential experience of the reality in the spiritual imagination of his parishioners. With this in mind,

30. Coljin, *Images of Salvation*, 14.
31. Farrer, *Rebirth of Images*, 19.

we can begin to grasp and experience the *Peri Pascha* for ourselves.

3. *Images and History in the* Peri Pascha

Frances Young has suggested that, in *PP* 35–44, Melito offers "the only ancient discussion which could be regarded as in any sense a theoretical explanation of typology."[32] It is perhaps surprising then that, when Melito turns to address the "meaning of the mystery,"[33] he does *not* give a theoretical explanation but offers an image—an analogy. That an image could be the "meaning" of the mystery requires comment. Hall had translated ἀκούετε τὴν δὐναμιν τοῦ μυστηρίου as "Hear what is the *force* of the mystery."[34] Alistair Stewart-Sykes, defending his choice of "meaning," notes that the word δύναμις "is employed by rhetorical writers to mean the persuasive effect of oratory."[35] However, "meaning" suggests explanation or reflection, whereas Hall's choice of "force" (we could also suggest "power") more strongly supports a sense of "persuasive effect." That Melito provides an image rather than a straightforward explanation supports Hall's translation decision.

The image which Melito provides is that of a draft model (a prototype) which represents a real sculpture while it is yet to be crafted: "Nothing, beloved, is spoken or made without an analogy (παραβολῆς) and a sketch."[36] He goes on to explain that the prototype is provisional and only of worth until the reality appears: "When the thing comes about of which the sketch was a type

32. Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 193.

33. τὴν δὐναμιν τοῦ μυστηρίου (*PP* 34 [216]). It is, as we will discuss, less a "theoretical explanation" and more an image of an image. Unless otherwise noted, quotations of the *Peri Pascha* are from Melito of Sardis, *On Pascha*.

34. Melito of Sardis, *On Pascha and Fragments*, 17 (emphasis mine).

35. Melito of Sardis, *On Pascha*, 59n14.

36. *PP* 35 (217). Hall notes, "the sketch may be that for a painter, or an architect's model, but most likely a sculptor's preliminary sketch for a statue" (Melito of Sardis, *On Pascha and Fragments*, 19n10). Throughout I refer to the stanza number, with the Greek line numbers provided in parentheses. Both are given in Melito of Sardis, *On Pascha*.

(τύπος) . . . then the type is [released]."[37] "What was once valuable becomes worthless, when what is of true value appears."[38] It appears that the relationship between type and reality is purely chronological: once the reality has appeared the type is no longer needed. Melito even presses the point: "To each then is its own time: the type has its own time, the material has its own time, the reality has its own time."[39] But if a historical then-now relationship between type and reality is all Melito intends, he is a poor practitioner of his own method, for he urges, "But if you [pay attention to][40] the type through its outcome you will [see][41] him."[42] The type is still around—as an image. It is "worthless" only *in itself*. He goes on to describe where to look to see the mystery: "Look at Abel . . . Isaac . . . Joseph . . . Moses . . . David . . . the prophets . . . And look at the sheep."[43] In other words, look to the antecedent figures. The type is not "destroyed," as Stewart-Sykes translates λύεται, but is "released" or "loosened" when the reality

37. *PP* 37 (235, 237). I use square brackets throughout to indicate where I have deviated from Alistair Stewart-Sykes's translation. The verb here is λύεται, which both Hall and Stewart-Sykes translate as "destroyed." I have rendered it "released" for three reasons: (1) the image of unfastening, loosening, or being set free is within the symbolic milieu of enclosure/disclosure, which we will address shortly. Destruction, of course, presents a remarkably different image in the mind's eye; (2) sticking with the analogy, it seems more likely that a statuesque model would be set aside to collect dust or given to children to play with than be destroyed; (3) destruction seems to represent something stronger than what Melito wishes to convey. He does, after all, make extensive use of types in *Peri Pascha*, presumably, not without value. I do not suggest that "released" is a necessarily *better* translation. Rather, I use it here to emphasize another example of the verbal elasticity and creativity which is permitted within a single expansive metaphor or image.

38. *PP* 37 (239–40).

39. *PP* 38 (241–44).

40. ἀποβλέπῃς. Stewart-Sykes translates this—unfortunately, in my opinion—as "scrutinize."

41. ὄψῃ. Stewart-Sykes translates "discern." Again, Stewart-Sykes's translation choice, as with ἀποβλέπῃς, suggests, incorrectly in my opinion, that Melito wants his audience to consider these types primarily by way of rational investigation, rather than as experiences of spiritual imagination.

42. *PP* 58 (414).

43. *PP* 59–60 (416–22).

appears. In Christ, Old Testament types are set free of the burden of *bearing their own power* (δύναμις).

I do not want to suggest that history is unimportant in the *Peri Pascha*. The opposite is true. That Melito's figural interpretation is historically rooted remains a stable feature in the scholarly discourse. Boersma, for whom history occupies a place of subordinate value, stresses the historicity of Melito's typology.[44] Boersma also emphasizes, however, Melito's ability to "shift effortlessly from horizontal language ('new and old') to vertical language ('eternal and provisional, perishable and imperishable, mortal and immortal')."[45] But does "vertical" best describe Melito's terms here? "Imperishable" and "immortal" need not imply "heavenly" or "above" in contrast to "earthly" or "below." Rather, the historical is taken up into the eternal and vice versa, upholding both history and spirit.

Boersma is surely correct that Melito is interested in more than chronological events of cause and effect. However, he perhaps overstates his case when he suggests that Melito "keeps up this vertical language throughout."[46] For Melito the principal *image*, which is the reality (ἀλήθεια) of Christ, is not in heaven above, but is the whole figuration of the Incarnation of Christ (*PP* 104), as revealed in the Crucifixion (*PP* 96–97). It is the singular image of the historical Christ-event which "encompasses" all symbols and in which history and spirit happily meet without conflict. T. J. Lang expresses the power of Christ across time succinctly: "For Melito, Christ is like an ever-enlarging hermeneutical spiral, spin-

44. Boersma, *Scripture as Real Presence*, 95.

45. Boersma, *Scripture as Real Presence*, 96.

46. Boersma, *Scripture as Real Presence*, 96. There are two places in the *Peri Pascha* where Melito does clearly use "vertical" imagery (see *PP* 39 and *PP* 44–45). He writes, "just as with the provisional examples, so it is with eternal things; *as it is with things on earth, so it is with the things in heaven*" (*PP* 257–258 [39]). Also, "The temple below was of value, now it is worthless because of the Christ [above]. The Jerusalem below was of value, now it is worthless because of the Jerusalem [above]" (*PP* 288–291 [44–45]). These must be kept in mind, but they are the exceptions, not the rule. Had Melito wanted his parishioners to have vertical imagery in mind throughout, I suspect he would have included pairs such as "earthly and heavenly" and "above and below" to his list of "opposites" in *PP* 2.

ning out-ward and drawing all reality into its vortex. As the one who 'has extended (κεχώρηκεν) to all things' and 'is all things,' Christ becomes the reality to which all existence extends as well."[47] For Lang, the reality of Christ—and he intends the whole image of the incarnation of Christ—is a power both centrifugal and centripetal. The power (δύναμις) of Christ extends outward to encompass all things and draw all things—all of history and all of heaven—into Christ's orbit.

Melito is not operating in the realm of successive material events as if it were a matter of causative-temporal history filling in the gaps in an earlier part of the story. He is speaking of the power (δύναμις) of Christ extended across time. On this point, Farrer's articulation of the Evangelists' sense of history is instructive: "If there is one observation which casts more light than any other on the difference between our conception of history and the conception of it expressed by our Evangelists, it may be that for us one train of events leads to another, while for them *one series of scenes prefigures another*."[48] The same could be said for Melito. Lynn Cohick has identified something significant when she states, "What captures Melito's imagination is not so much the words in a specific verse but the event they convey. His intertextual engagement is at the story level."[49] Cohick is correct that Melito is not so much concerned about specific verbal relationships. To speak of engagement at the "story level," however, requires further clarification. If by "story" we mean a narrative account of successive events which are meaningfully connected, Melito does not tell a story. Rather, Melito unveils a series of interlocking images. These images are connected to one another not primarily as one event follows another along a linear timeline. They are con-

47. Lang, "Mystery," 204. "Extended" is Lang's translation. Stewart-Sykes prefers "encompassing" all things (Melito of Sardis, *On Pascha*, 52).

48. Farrer, "Important Hypotheses Reconsidered" 230 (emphasis mine). It is worth pointing out that we are here discussing something similar to the traditional distinction between *historische* and *geschichte*, with Farrer, Melito, and the apostles dealing with *geschichte*. But what interests us is not simply "redemptive" or "sacred" history, nor that history contains meaning/power which it cannot itself explain, but *what that meaning/power is*.

49. Cohick, "Melito of Sardis's *Peri Pascha*," 138.

nected, rather, by virtue of their shared typological relationship to a common reality—Christ, who is found in and through every image.

Thus, we begin to see what history has to do with images. It is elucidated in the alternate interpretations of δύναμις, which we have already discussed. Put simply, "meaning" suggests that the reality of Christ is something other than the image—ultimately behind or through or above it. "Power" suggests that the reality of Christ is in some sense present *within the image*. Importantly, there is not another power—another Christ—from above which encompasses both the type and antitype. It is the historical Christ of the incarnation who is the central image around which all typological images—and indeed all things—orbit. It was seeing the crucified Christ *in* the lamb which turned away the destroying angel from the Israelite homes on Passover. The angel was turned away because the power (δύναμις) of that future event—the reality (ἀλήθεια)—was present in the Lamb *then.* That is the mystery (μυστήριον).

4. *Melito's Images: (1) Egypt*

Farrer describes theology as "analysis and criticism of the revealed images."[50] If this is correct, we must acknowledge that Melito "seems to belong more to the order of prophets or poets, those servants who gain their insight by inspiration, than the order of teachers [theologians] who arrive at their conclusion by serious reflection."[51] Melito not only gains his insight by way of inspired images, he never leaves the field of images. Rather than interpret the biblical images for his parishioners, he creatively impresses the images upon their mind's eye. By never leaving the figurative field, Melito draws his hearers into the biblical images, and repre-

50. Farrer, "*Glass of Vision*," 44.

51. Hawthorne, "Melito of Sardis," 308. Wyatt Graham's statement, "Theology hides in every crevice of this sermon," presents the wrong picture. Theology is not "hidden" within the images. The images present the *whole picture* in figurative form. Theology would be the reflection upon inspired images (see "Passover of the Church," 4).

sents those images in a mimetic way so that his parishioner sense themselves to be re-living the typological scenes and experiencing the power of Christ. This is most evident in the extended description of the first Passover night in *PP* 12–33.

In *PP* 12–33, Melito demonstrates familiarity and ability with nearly every rhetorical tool in the "Second Sophistic" toolbox.[52] Gerald Hawthorne argues that Melito's commitment to Sophistic rhetoric is the driving force behind his "flamboyant" and "arty" use of imagery and metaphor.[53] This suggests that Melito is more concerned with rhetorical form than he is with the content of his proclamation. Hawthorne argues: "How his sermon sounded . . . was as important to Melito as what was said."[54] However, if Melito is operating primarily in terms of images, then rhetoric is a subservient tool, and we can allow for no such dichotomy between form and content. The image *is* the content. Or the typological image (τύπος) *contains within it* the power (δύναμις) of the prototypical reality (ἀλήθεια).

Melito presents that first Passover night as a single image in which everything happens simultaneously. Stewart-Sykes's paraphrase of *PP* 11 (68), "I shall narrate the scriptural story (ῥήματα τῆς γραφῆς)," is slightly misleading. Hall's translation, "I will relate the words of Scripture," is to be preferred not only because it is a more literal translation, but because it does not suggest passing of time the way "narrate" and "story" do. Melito represents a single horrific and unforgettable scene. An artist could portray in one image all that is written in *PP* 12–33 and it would be experienced by the viewer as if happening in a single moment.[55] Melito speaks,

> But *while* the sheep is being slaughtered,

52. "Among the favorite Second Sophistic figures and tropes one finds *parison*, *antithesis*, *homoioteleuton*, *paronomasia*, *alliteration*, *comparison*, *hyperbole*, *oxymoron/paradox*, and *ecphrasis* . . . All these abound in the *PP*" (Broadhurst, "Melito of Sardis," 58).

53. Hawthorne, "Melito of Sardis," 1. See also Broadhust, "Melito of Sardis."

54. Hawthorne, "Christian Baptism," 249.

55. The point here is not that this image can be *contained* in a single frame, but that encountering the image is a *singular experience*.

and the Pascha is being eaten
and the mystery (μυστήριον) is completed,
and the people is rejoicing,
and Israel is being sealed:
then came the angel to strike Egypt
those uninitiated in the mystery (μυστηρίου).[56]

While Israel is rejoicing for their salvation, the destroying angel strikes Egypt. Melito prolongs the dramatic, graphic, and sensory imagery, but the image is singular: "*At one moment* the first-born fruit of the Egyptians was destroyed."[57] Melito writes of "long night"[58] surrounding the Egyptians and "long silence"[59] holding the firstborn. In both instances, the image is of time *standing still*. The single moment seems unbearably long; it did not, however, *take a long time*.

That the scene is imagined as happening all at once makes Melito's dramatic imagery all the more potent. In particular, he makes powerful use of concrete metaphors of clothing and surrounding, rending and unveiling. Consider stanza 17:

[The angel] fell upon Egypt,
He tamed stiff-necked Pharaoh with grief,
clothing (ἐνδυσας) him not with a garment (στόλην) of gray,
nor with a tunic (πέπλον) all torn (περιεσχισμένον),
but with all Egypt torn (περιεσχισμένην) and grieving for her first-born.[60]

This image is extreme. In the moment of grief Pharaoh is clothed, not only with a grey garment, nor with a torn veil,[61] but with "all Egypt torn." A few lines later the imagery recurs graphically: "Not only were [Egypt's] garments (στολὰς τῆς περιβολῆς) torn

56. *PP* 16 (92–98) (emphasis mine).
57. *PP* 26 (171) (emphasis mine).
58. *PP* 22 (139).
59. *PP* 25 (162).
60. *PP* 17 (107–12).
61. The word translated "tunic" in line 111 is πέπλον. It may mean simply a one-piece garment. It may also mean any cloth covering or "veil." This word choice, accompanied by περιεσχισμένον, suggests the image of a torn veil. Melito is creatively bringing imagery related to grief (torn clothing) together with imagery of apocalypse, vision, and disclosure (torn veil).

(περιεσχισμένη), but also her delicate breasts."[62] Pharaoh is then pictured in the middle of all of Egypt, circled in mourning: "seated on sackcloth and ashes, palpable darkness thrown around him as a mourning cloak,[63] clad in all Egypt like a tunic of grief."[64]

In *PP* 19, "palpable darkness" is "thrown around" (περιβεβλημένον) Pharaoh. Here Melito layers the image of "palpable darkness" onto his imagery of clothing.[65] Cohick has pointed out that the biblical imagery of palpable darkness (ψηλαφητὸν σκότος) is taken not from the night of Passover, but from the ninth plague (Exod 10:21). Melito incorporates this imagery, she notes, in a way that "appears to combine the ninth and tenth plagues."[66] The use of this imagery is another example of Melito painting a picture as if it were a single moment in time. While the phrase "palpable darkness" (ψηλαφητὸν σκότος) is taken directly from Exod 10:21 (LXX), Melito's interest is not so much the verbal association as the figurative and existential experience of thick darkness. The symbol of palpable darkness performs a mimetic function in the *Peri Pascha* as Melito homiletically imagines that first Passover night in such a way that it is existentially impressed upon the imaginations of his parishioners.[67]

In *PP* 22, the palpable darkness surrounds all of Egypt and another layer is added to the imagery as Melito begins an extended wordplay with the verb ψηλαφάω:

62. *PP* 18 (117–18).

63. περιβεβλημένον τὸ ψηλαφητὸν σκότος ὡς ἱμάτιον πενθικόν.

64. *PP* 19 (119–24).

65. It is not lost on me that to "layer" images on top of one another is itself another clothing metaphor.

66. Cohick, "Re-Assessing," 131.

67. In the context of liturgical worship—particularly a paschal gathering—this clearly has eucharistic overtones. Young describes the mimetic function of Melito's homily along narrative and rhetorical lines, though not *figurative*: "In the Peri Pascha, he graphically retells and develops the story of Passover and exodus, intoning it in rhetorical, almost hymnic, style. The presentation is 'mimetic' in more senses than one: a dramatic effect is deliberately created by the use of evocative language, drawing the hearer imaginatively into the 'pity and terror' of the story, and allusion and quotation suggest a 'mimicking' of the scriptural narrative" (*Biblical Exegesis*, 233).

> Listen and wonder at a new disaster,
> for these things enclosed (περιέσκεν) the Egyptians:
> long night,
> palpable darkness (σκότος ψηλαφητόν),
> death grasping (ψηλαφῶν),
> the angel squeezing out the life,
> and Hades gulping down the first-born.[68]

We have already encountered the adjectival form of ψηλαφάω in the phrase "palpable (ψηλαφητόν) darkness." Now palpable darkness and grasping death are together "squeezing out the life." The play on words is continued in *PP* 23: "In the palpable (ψηλαφητῷ) darkness hid untouchable (ἀψηλάφητος) death."[69] This is one of the most poetic phrases in the homily, but even here the poetics of the wordplay and the rhetoric is in service of the single image that is the dark night of the first Passover. This is suggested in the meaning of the verb ψηλαφάω. The verb can suggest a sense of *groping* or *feeling after something in the dark*.[70] That Melito describes darkness as ψηλαφητόν is not, however, redundant, but emphatic. To draw out this emphasis in English is particularly clunky: "darkness which can be groped after in the dark."[71] In *PP* 24–26, the wordplay gives way as the image of the possession of the firstborn by silence, darkness, and death becomes all-encompassing: "And one of the first-born, [embracing][72] the material darkness in his hand, as his life was stripped away, cried out in distress and terror: 'Whom does my hand hold (κρατεῖ)? Whom does my soul dread? Who is the dark one enfolding (περικέχυται) my whole body?'"[73] The metaphor becomes more physical still:

68. *PP* 22 (137–43).
69. *PP* 23 (145).
70. ψηλαφάω in Mounce, ed., *Analytical Lexicon*, 487.
71. While "grope" is not often used in this technical sense in modern speech, its meaning is precise: "to feel about blindly or uncertainly in search" (see *Merriam Webster Dictionary*).
72. 'εναγκαλισάμενος. That Stewart-Sykes carries on with the English "grasping" here despite the different Greek verb is telling. He seems to recognize that, while the wordplay has given way, the overarching image is only becoming more evident.
73. *PP* 24 (149–55).

"The long silence held (κατὲσχεν) him,"[74] "the one who could not be deceived fastened (προσήπτετο) on the first born,"[75] and "the fondled (περίψυκτος) one was dashed downward."[76] The cumulative effect of Melito's interrelated metaphors of enclosure is an existential, claustrophobia-inducing darkness. Melito paints a single image which is both obscured in darkness and is as vivid a sensory experience as one can imagine. Alistair Stewart-Sykes's translation of ψηλαφητὸν σκότος as "palpable darkness" turns out to be a clever summation of Melito's overarching image.[77]

Melito only occasionally addresses his parishioners directly and nearly every time it is some form of "pay attention!"[78] This does not mean, however, that he is not keenly aware of his audience. Rather than explaining the images for his congregation, Melito expresses the essence of the scenes in such sensory vividity that hearers and readers experience the events for themselves. In *PP* 27–29, Melito describes the horrific sensory experience of the moment of the death of Egypt's first-born children. He describes the sound ("lowing was heard in the plains of the land, the moaning of beasts"),[79] the stench ("Egypt was stinking with unburied bodies"),[80] and the sight ("The mothers of the Egyptians with their hair undone, the fathers with minds undone. It was a terrible spectacle to watch").[81] By making use of concrete figurative language, Melito is impressing upon his parishioners an existential experi-

74. *PP* 25 (161).

75. *PP* 26 (169).

76. *PP* 26 (177).

77. Note, however, Stewart-Sykes's own assessment is more along the lines of rhetorical tradition: "The phrase σκότος ψηλαφητον [is] repeated several times in different forms. This is not a solecism on the part of Melito but a communication in sound of the terror of the situation. Melito uses the same sounds as Homer, to produce the same effect" (Stewart-Sykes, *Lamb's High Feast*, 82).

78. "understand" (2 [6]); "listen and wonder" (22 [137]); "hear" (23 [144]); "listen" (34 [216]; 95 [710]); "you have heard . . . hear now" (46 [301–2]); "learn" (46 [306]); "look at" (59 [415]; 60 [422]).

79. *PP* 27 (178).

80. *PP* 28 (186).

81. *PP* 29 (187–89). The doubling of "undone" is the figurative opposite to the series of increasingly intimate and intense images of possession/enclosure in *PP* 24–26.

ence. Images are much more powerful in this regard than is prosaic speech. "Figurative language," Brenda Coljin remarks, "is more vivid and arresting than literal language. It captures the attention and the imagination, and by doing so, takes root in the memory."[82] Melito, wisely, never instructs his congregation in what to think or how to act. Rather, he drags his parishioners into the ghastly image of that first Passover night in order that each person would sense themselves to be transformed into types prepared to be fulfilled by the power (δύναμις) of Christ. Type (τύπος), Fabriny recalls, "goes back to *typtein* which means 'to strike.' The blow or the striking resulted in a voidness or emptiness as an imprint is left when a comet hits the surface of the earth. This hole or vacuum is an enigma or a question, which requires, or even provokes fulfilment."[83] In his re-imagining of the first Passover night, Melito has invited his parishioners not only to experience that dreadful night *as* Egypt, "struck" by the destroying angel, but to open themselves up to the fulfilment of that terrible void. In other words, like his types, Melito parishioners are invited to receive into their own darkness the transforming reality (ἀλήθεια) of Christ as their own indwelling power (δύναμις).

5. *Melito's Images: (2) Christ*

That void is filled by the central—and only essential—image of the *Peri Pascha* in *PP* 95–100. Here Melito imagines the incarnate and crucified Christ. That this is the central focus of the homily we know from the beginning: "For instead of the lamb there was a son, and instead of the sheep a man; in the man was Christ encompassing (κεχώρηκεν) all things."[84] Notice again the enclosure imagery. The "palpable darkness" may have enclosed all of Egypt, but it is only Christ who encompasses all things. "He is," in fact, "all things."[85] Images of covering and darkness coalesce again in *PP* 97:

82. Coljin, *Images of Salvation*, 19.
83. Fabriny, *Lion and the Lamb*, 23.
84. *PP* 5 (33–35).
85. *PP* 9 (54).

> O mystifying murder! O mystifying injustice!
> The master is obscured (περεσχημάτισται) by his body exposed (γυμνῷ),
> and is not held worthy of a veil (περιβολῆς) to shield him from view.
> For this reason, the great lights turned away,
> and the day was turned to darkness;
> to hide the one denuded on the tree,
> obscuring (σκοτίζων) not the body of the Lord but human eyes.[86]

That Christ has no veil (περιβολῆς) reminds one of Egypt's "torn garments" in *PP* 17 and Pharaoh's "robe" of wailing in *PP* 20.[87] Christ is naked, yet "veiled" in another sense by the turning away of the sun. Notice, Christ's body is not hidden by the darkness. Rather, human eyes are darkened (σκοτίζων) that they would not see his nakedness. The image itself is difficult to understand. The reader wonders how this works, but Melito gives no answer. All he offers is a single shocking image of the man who is also God, naked and lynched on a tree: "He who hung the earth is hanging . . . God has been murdered."[88] Melito speaks of Christ as the "[power] of the mystery." This image of God on the cross is the locus of that power. It is a power which "clad death in shame."[89] It is accomplished, somehow, through "the Lord [clothing] him-

86. *PP* 97 (717–24).

87. περιβολῆς is a delightfully ingenious word in this situation. It could be translated simply as covering or garment, as in *PP* 17 and 20. It is reminiscent of the similar word παραβολῆς, which used by Melito seven times in *PP* 35–45 and translated variously as "analogy" or "illustration." The relationship between περιβολῆς and παραβολῆς provides an example of Melito making use of phenomes and verbal association in a rhetorical manner to draw them into the orbit of one and the same field of images.

88. *PP* 96 (711, 715). For an exposition of the Crucifixion of Christ understood vis-à-vis lynching see Cone, *Cross*. Cone's work is, in fact a powerful example of the prophetic capacity of symbolic identification. By analogously identifying Christ's Crucifixion with the "death of thousands of black men or women strung up to die on a lamppost or a tree" (xiii), Cone invites mimetic interpretive performance of the same symbolic and imaginative sort that we see with Melito. It is thus one example of how exegesis by way of mimetic symbols and images can be expansive and fertile, opening up, rather than closing down, potential meaningfulness and power.

89. *PP* 68 (467).

self with humanity, and with suffering on behalf of the suffering one."[90] Melito makes no attempt to explain the image. He expects his parishioners to experience it. Paul Ricœur's aphorism is informative, "the symbol gives: I do not posit the meaning, the symbol gives it."[91]

In *PP* 101–105, Christ speaks through Melito in the first person: "'It is I,' says the Christ. I am he who destroys death."[92] Hawthorne argues that when Melito here adopts the *I* of Christ, he is not simply using Christ's words or putting Christ's words into his own mouth. Rather, Christ himself *is* speaking through Melito:

> [The Parousia] is happening in the word preached . . . It is tempting for us in the twentieth century to conclude that this is merely a literary or rhetorical device and that the preacher is responsible for putting words in the mouth of the deity . . . But the mentality of Melito and that of the members of his church conceived it as quite the opposite of this . . . For them Christ was really present in their midst putting his message into the mouth of his minister, not the other way around.[93]

Whether Melito believed this to be literally the case is not the point. It is the case figuratively and existentially. That is, Melito, with his parishioners, dramatized it so. We need always to be wary of getting behind the images of the poet. There is no back of an image; it is the image itself which contains, in a sense, more than it can bear. Hawthorne argued otherwise: "Although Melito believed that Christ was the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, hence, indescribable and in comprehensible, this did not keep him from trying to explain his significance."[94] If by "explain" Hawthorne really means "picture" "image" or "represent," then perhaps we could—technically—agree with him. But otherwise, if he intends that Melito attempted to articulate *what it means* that Christ was indescribable and incomprehensible, this is misleading. Rhetoric was a tool which Melito used to great effect. Perhaps it was, as Hawthorne suggests, "The best setting he knew

90. *PP* 100 (748–49).
91. Ricœur, "Hermeneutics," 288.
92. *PP* 102 (759–60).
93. Hawthorne, "Melito of Sardis," 368–69.
94. Hawthorne, "Melito of Sardis," 386.

for displaying this invaluably precious stone."[95] Yet neither rhetoric nor theological ideas were the governing factor in Melito's composition and proclamation of the *Peri Pascha.* To that central place we must uphold images.

It is not insignificant that the final line of the *Peri Pascha* before the concluding doxology is φορεῖ τον πατέρα καὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς φορεῖται. Stewart-Sykes translates it, "He bears the father and is borne by him."[96] Hall's translation is "He carries the Father and is carried by the Father." Both translations obscure the vital image. The verb in question is φορέω, a frequentive of φέρω. As a frequentive, φορέω suggests repeated or ongoing action. It could simply mean to "bear repeatedly," but such stale prose is hardly a fitting image for our poet. Hawthorne is correct to emphasize that φορέω is commonly used to refer to the wearing of clothing, and to suggest just such an image here.[97] The Gospel of John records that, when Jesus was presented before the crowds at Pilate's portico, he was wearing (φορῶν) a crown of thorns and a purple robe. Not incidentally, it is while dressed in this manner that Pilate says of Jesus "Ἰδοὺ ὁ ἄνθρωπος" ("Behold, the Man!") (John 19:5).[98] Paul uses the same verb in 1 Cor 15:49 to describe humankind "bearing" the image of the earthly (man) and likewise "bearing" the image of the heavenly (man). Melito is describing, at the very climax of the *Peri Pascha*, an image of mutual "wearing" between the Father and the Son. It is, as we have been considering, figuratively related to other typological images of closure/disclosure. My suggestion is not that the theological *meaning* of the relationship between the father and son is dependent upon the correct image. Rather, I simply point that at the apex of Melito's exalted description of Christ's supreme identity, he makes use of this familiar imagery to describe the co-clothed Father and Son; they are

95. Hawthorne, "Melito of Sardis," 386.

96. *PP* 105 (802).

97. Hawthorne, "Melito of Sardis," 336.

98. In John 19:2, the soldiers περιέβαλον ("cast around") the purple robe upon Jesus. This is the same verb Melito uses to describe palpable darkness being "thrown around" Pharaoh in *PP* 19.

"wearing" each other.[99] This is, for Melito, an image of the most intimate sharing imaginable. It is this same God—Christ—who has in like manner united himself with humanity. This is he who "[clothes][100] himself in the suffering one through a virgin womb and comes as a man."[101] This is the covering—the intimacy with the reality of Christ—that Melito wants his congregation to sense and experience.

6. *Conclusion: Austin Farrer, Melito's Images, and Reading the Bible*

By way of conclusion, I want to urge a renewal of Melito's figural methodology at the most basic level—reading the Bible.[102] I will make this turn by way of Farrer's little known—and poorly re-

99. Is this an example of what Bonner calls Melito's "naïve modalism?" (Bonner, *Homily on the Passion*, 28). If we answer yes, then we must ask similar questions about other metaphors of clothing and "putting on." While it may be accurate to say that, when analyzed theological, according to the standards of later dogmatic and doctrinal developments, such an image represents inadequate trinitarian theology, this would be to miss the point entirely. Images always say *more* than the words themselves mean, not less. The image of Christ being "clothed with humanity" would continue to be used for centuries after Melito. St. Ephrem, for example, will write of Christ, "Our body was your clothing" (*Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns* 22.39).

100. Stewart-Sykes here translates ἐνδυσάμενος as "wraps." I have no objection to this. I supply the verb "to clothe" for the purposes of calling more clearly to mind the overlapping clothing/covering imagery.

101. *PP* 66 (451–58).

102. I have not had occasion in this paper to address Melito's extended tirade against "Israel" in *PP* 72–97, but I do not want to leave the reader with the impression that I fully endorse Melito's "Bible reading" in this section. Were I to venture one suggestion—not a justification—it would be that Melito wants his parishioners to experience for themselves the sense of Israel's failure and ignorance as he also wants his hearers to take upon themselves the grief and sorrow of Egypt. Israel, like Egypt is unable to *see*: "You were not Israel. You did not see God. You did not perceive the Lord" (*PP* 82 [590–91]). Generally, I disagree with those who understand Melito's comments against "Israel" to be antisemitic remarks against his Jewish neighbors in Sardis. Rather, I accept the argument of Kevin Clarke that "Melito's choice of Israel is theological" (Clarke, "Προοικονομία in Melito," 88). This does not mean, however, that others ought to follow Melito's symbolic rhetoric in this regard. They ought not.

ceived—doctrine of inspired images. In 1948, Farrer delivered the prestigious Brampton Lectures at Oxford University. In these lectures, which he titled, "The *Glass of Vision*," Farrer sought an explanation of "the form of divine truth in the human mind" which accounted for the central place of images in divine inspiration.[103] Farrer argued that the apostle's (and prophet's) experience of inspiration is of like kind to the poet's sense of inspiration: that the content which is impressed upon the apostle's mind, and which he must endeavour to communicate, is, principally, a set of overlapping images. That is, Farrer argued for a doctrine of biblical inspiration in which the *image*, not words or events, is the essential mode of revelation.[104] Farrer's theory was not well-received and fifteen years later he described both the literary and theological side of his thesis as "demolished."[105] Yet he still attempted to salvage the argument. He wondered,

> suppose there was no system coming to birth in the Apostle's mind at all—not, that is, on the conceptual level? Suppose that [the inspired author's] thought centered round a number of vital images, which lived with the life of images, not of concepts. Then each image will have its own conceptual conventions, proper to the figure it embodies: and a single over-all conceptual analysis will be about as useful . . . as a bulldozer for the cultivation of a miniature landscape-garden.[106]

Melito's figural hermeneutics in *Peri Pascha* is perfectly congruent with this assessment of inspired images proposed by Farrer. While he never mentions it, Melito seems to express the same wariness as Farrer about "conceptual analysis." Whether or not Melito believed that images are the stuff of revelation ("the form of divine truth in the human mind"), we must acknowledge that the *Peri Pascha* functions as if this were the case. Melito treats images as the locus of inspiration. Hence, the *Peri Pascha* is not an exposition of inspired *text.* Nor is it an interpretation of inspired historical *events*. It is, rather, an existential representation of overlapping, inspired—yes, historical—*images*.

103. Farrer, "*Glass of Vision*," 15.
104. Farrer, "*Glass of Vision*," 37–39.
105. Farrer, "*Glass of Vision*," 39.
106. Farrer, "*Glass of Vision*," 44.

If what the biblical writers present us with in the Scriptures are inspired images, then we ought to learn again to "come and see" and "behold the man."[107] Melito's goal is to get his congregation as close to the image of Christ as possible. He wants them to be there. The liturgical dramatization of images is the best that he can do. Images are nearer to history than descriptive thought is because any historical *event*—for those who experience it—is retained in the memory *as an image*. Descriptive thought—theological reflection—is further removed because it is necessarily mediated by imagination and memory. But what if images are also nearer to the stuff of divine revelation? In that case, Melito is not only presenting his parishioners with images of history, he is also presenting them with an image of the mind of God, that is—*the* image of God. In *Peri Pascha*, the image of Jesus Christ is impressed upon the human imagination as a typological imprint, so that the image of God in humanity is liturgically remade through the transformation of inspired images in the human mind. Farrer referred to this transformation, which is the very essence of Christianity, as "the rebirth of images."[108] To use Melito's words, "in the man was Christ encompassing all things."[109]

To learn to read the Bible with Melito is to encounter again its inspired images. The good news is that not only are images and symbols more natural to divine communication (revelation) than conceptual thought or logical reason, the same is true of human communication. That is, images and symbols communicate more clearly—if not always *completely*—than "literal" language. "The theologian," Farrer writes, "may confuse the images, and the metaphysician may speculate about them; but the Bible reader will immerse himself in the single image on the page before him."[110] Whether Melito had any pages of the New Testament before him, we will likely never know. But that he immersed himself and his parishioners in the inspired images contained therein we can have no doubt.

107. John 1:46; 19:5.
108. Farrer, *Rebirth of Images*, 14.
109. *PP* 5 (35).
110. Farrer, "*Glass of Vision*," 50.

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