O Death, Where is Thy Victory?
A Study of Christ's *Descensus ad Inferos* in the Odes of Solomon

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that I am the sole author of this thesis and that the work contained herein is my own. All quotations and sources have been duly acknowledged.
Almost 100 years have passed since a manuscript containing that lost book known as the Odes of Solomon was discovered, yet the hymns themselves remain an enigma. There are two reasons for this. The first lies in the elusive nature of the Odes, which has led to their classification in such mutually exclusive categories as the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, the New Testament Apocrypha and the Patristic Literature. The second is due to the fact that previous approaches to their study have either been concerned with matters such as their provenance, original language and date of composition or have only been stimulated by the desire to draw a comparison with other works. In an effort to unravel the mystery of the Odes and gain a greater appreciation of their beauty, this thesis adopts a thematic approach to their study.

The chosen theme is that of Christ's Descent into Hell, an event which held such a fascination for early writers and became an important source of inspiration in Christian art. Besides the unequivocal reference to the Descensus in the final hymn, in which personified Death is seen both as an all consuming monster and a tyrannical gaoler, this theme clearly runs throughout the collection and is dwelt on avidly by the Odist. It centres around the battle between Christ and Death, a wily, ubiquitous and primordial opponent, and the imagery is often closely reminiscent of the Chaoskampf.

The motif is developed by the Odist to express the central truth of the Christian kerygma, namely that Death has been overcome by Christ. Indeed, the whole of the Passion and its meaning are conflated by him into the Descensus episode. Furthermore, the Odist ensures that the personal and abiding significance of Christ's victory is communicated to each and every believer through the depiction of Christian baptism as the mimesis of Christ's Descent. This sacramental interpretation of the Descensus is indicated by its retiming to coincide with Christ's own baptism in Ode 24 and the numerous allusions to baptismal beliefs and practices that occur in other Descensus hymns.

A similar, if more primitive, understanding of the Descensus exists in I Peter 3:18-22. In this text, Christ's proclamation of defeat to the fallen angels is mirrored by the believer's baptismal renunciation of Satan, and his triumph forms the basis for Christian confidence in the face of persecution. The fact that the Odist is primarily concerned with Christ's defeat of Death at the time of the Descent, whereas the author of the epistle regards the victory over evil as more important, may be attributed to the differing historical circumstances surrounding the composition of the two works.
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<td>C.Q.R.</td>
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<td>J.B.L.</td>
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<td>RevT.</td>
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Introduction
The primary aim of this work is to examine the theme of Christ's Descent into Hell within the collection known as the Odes of Solomon. Three questions arise immediately from this choice of subject. In the first place, it may be asked why the Odes should be studied at all; next, why a thematic approach to their study is recommended and lastly, why the Descensus theme in particular has been selected.

At the very heart of the answers to all these questions lies the simple fact that earlier studies of the Odes seem to have failed in what should have been their main objective, namely, to look at the hymns themselves and elucidate their meaning. Hence, much of the introductory discussion will take the form of a summary of the general trends in previous scholarship, and its weaknesses will be highlighted. Such a critique is, in any case, valuable for the studies which will follow, since it illuminates the background against which individual scholars' comments are to be seen. Once this task has been accomplished, it is hoped that the requirement for further examination of the Odes will be acknowledged and the decision to access their secrets through an examination of the Descensus motif regarded as justified.

The Odes of Solomon were known to exist long before their discovery by J. R. Harris in 1909. Together with the Psalms of Solomon, they are catalogued in two ancient stichometries among the apocryphal writings of the Old Testament. Also, a short passage concerning the virgin birth, which is introduced by the phrase "apud Salomonem ita scriptum est" and followed by the words "in ode undevigesim", is quoted in the Epitome of the Divine Institutes by Lactantius. However, the scholars' desire to find this "lost" book began in earnest following the acquisition by the British Museum in
1785 of a manuscript containing the *Pistis Sophia*, an Egyptian gnostic composition of the third century C.E. In this work, which predominantly takes the form of a series of questions directed to Jesus by various disciples, five odes are cited and specifically attributed to Solomon. There was general consensus among those working in this area that these had not been composed by the author of the *Pistis Sophia* but only quoted by him, and that they had been extracted from a larger independent work.<sup>135</sup>

In the light of this prevailing wind of anticipation, it might be expected that Harris' discovery among his papers of a manuscript containing the Odes would have been met with a great deal of scholarly enthusiasm, yet this does not appear to have been the case.<sup>14</sup> Harris himself certainly recognized the hymns' beauty, and he hastened to publish the text with a translation, notes and introductory comment by the end of the same year.<sup>15</sup> Admittedly, in the first decade after his publication, many other scholars took an interest in the hymns and most of the main theories concerning them were expressed during this period. But since 1920 there has been a marked decline in the study of the Odes, relieved only temporarily by the discoveries of a manuscript of the 11th Ode in Greek and the Dead Sea Scrolls, and they have been sadly marginalized.

Harris' extant manuscript of the Odes is undeniably a Christian work and it may be added that their usage in the *Pistis Sophia* and by Lactantius presupposes a relatively early date of composition. Thus, given the poetic form, it seems that the collection must be regarded as an early Christian hymnal. It is clear from passages such as Ephesians 5:18-20 and Colossians 3:16 that the singing of hymns played an important part in the life of the first Christian believers. Indeed,
the practice has dominical precedent, for it is stated at Mark 14:26 that a hymn was sung at the Last Supper. Yet apart from the hymns at Luke 1:46-55, 67-79 and 2:29-32, as well as fragmented texts in the epistles which appear liturgical in style, the New Testament is noticeably reticent in reporting their content. This lack of hymnic material from the early Church was a matter of great regret for the scholars. It constitutes the main reason why the neglect of the Odes is so remarkable and demands redress.

Aside from their potential contribution to the knowledge of early Christian hymnody, it is also evident that a study of the Odes can offer important insight into early Christian beliefs and practices generally. Many have suggested that the New Testament literature, which for the most part embodies the interests of the Western Church that were dominant by the time the canon was fixed, does not tell the whole story of early Christianity. Similarly, neither do the writings of the Western Fathers, which in addition are frequently characterized by their polemical nature. However, even the most cursory glance at the Odes reveals that their author’s outlook faced Jerusalem rather than Rome and that his concern is with spirituality before theology.

The latter point is neatly summed up by Headlam, who states of the Odist, "He is not a theologian or a philosopher or an historian: he is a devout man with spiritual insight and a deeply religious mind who is describing a wonderful experience which has happened to him, a new life, a new joy, a new salvation." The hymns clearly capture a mood which is likely to be very near to that felt in the earliest Church. Since there are remarkably few surviving written works which reflect this primitive atmosphere of celebration, it seems such a perfect example as the Odes can no longer be ignored.
Before moving on to discuss some of the approaches to their study which have been adopted previously, it will be helpful to consider briefly the general ideas which are present in the hymns and also to note some of the more conspicuous absences. They are permeated with joyful imagery, reflecting the piety of one who has found his Lord and enjoys a unique relationship with him. This relationship is above all constituted in love and has been established by the Lord's unstinting grace and mercy, the propagation of his knowledge and his deliberate plan or thought. It is effected by the Lord himself and his pre-existent agents.

The Odist describes this relationship with the Lord and its benefits, and the work of the Lord and his agents in numerous ways. It has bestowed on him life; he and others have been freed from their bonds and the hands of their persecutors, and enabled to cast off corruption and put on incorruption. He has gone from darkness into light, from error to truth. He has been saved, or justified, and is righteous. He has achieved rest and is refreshed with the milk of the Lord. He walks in the way that the Lord has appointed and wears a crown. He acknowledges his utter dependence on the Lord, even in the matter of the praise which he offers.

On the other hand, certain significant features are absent from the collection. There is no mention of either the Law, or the name of Jesus (though it seems the term "Lord" is used of God and Christ). The hymns appear to contain imagery from both the Old and New Testaments, but quote neither with precision. At times their thought and language appears close to that of the biblical Psalter, at others it seems more in tune with that of the Fourth Gospel or Pauline epistles. There are no explicit historical allusions and apparently no details of Christian
or Jewish rites. Furthermore, although the majority of the Odes seem to be spoken by the believer, there are points at which the context alone would suggest that the speaker is Christ himself.

Faced with such elusive material, it is hardly surprising that the scholars expressed a variety of widely diverging theories about the Odes. Naturally, the first person to make a comment of any kind was Harris. He concluded that the collection is essentially a unity, though Odes 19 and 42 may be the work of a later writer, and of Eastern provenance, but written in Greek soon after 70 C.E. In his view, the author was a Christian and Gentile by birth, writing in a Jewish environment and with pronounced Jewish sympathies. These opinions about the date of composition and authorial milieu, which colour much of Harris' expository comment on the hymns, were based on the two isolated allusions to the temple (Ode 6:8) and holy place (Ode 4:1-3a), which he construed as historical references to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple.

Just one year later, Harnack also regarded these two "temple Odes" as significant, but interpreted them rather differently. He concluded that the collection was a composite of Jewish hymns and Christian interpolations. The original hymns were written between 50 B.C.E. and 67 C.E., and expressed a type of Jewish theology in which the inner piety of the believer was ascendant. On the other hand, the Christian interpolations, which centred around the Son of God, were added about 100 C.E. by an editor from almost exactly the same cultural environment as the Jewish pietist. Harnack's belief that the Odes were originally a Jewish composition was taken up and developed with variations by many other commentators including Spitta and
Grimme\textsuperscript{10}, the latter providing a retroversion of the text into Hebrew which he saw as the original language.

In fact, Harnack's thesis demands a great deal; an author and interpolator, the former Jewish, the latter Christian, separated by as much as 150 years, both from the same background, expressing the same type of theology and conforming to what would become the Johannine pattern, but neither explicitly alluding to the basic elements of their faith. Many critics pointed to the essential unity of the collection and rejected Harnack's interpretation of Odes 4:1-3a and 6:8, on which his theory of a Jewish Vorlage was built.

They contended that these passages spoke of a spiritual temple, possibly a figure for the Church, and argued that the collection must be seen as a unity and a Christian composition. Nevertheless, there was considerable disagreement about the particular brand of Christianity that the Odes express, and over other issues such as their date and language of composition. Batiffol\textsuperscript{11}, for example, maintained that the speaker in the Odes is the justified believer transformed into Solomon and that their Christology and soteriology betray precisely the same type of docetism that Ignatius strove so hard to combat. But Batiffol could be accused of seeking to overpress the theological implications of what is not primarily a theological text. He was also convinced that the collection's language of composition was Greek, and much of his argument depends on the assumption that the alleged Syriac translator has misunderstood the Greek text that stood before him\textsuperscript{12}.

Many other scholars came down firmly on the side of Greek as the Odes' original language. Connolly\textsuperscript{13}, in a long running debate with Abbott\textsuperscript{14}, isolated several expressions which he felt pleaded strongly in its favour. Frankenberg\textsuperscript{15} went so far as to provide a
retroversion of the hymns into Greek and in addition suggested that their author had been profoundly influenced by ideas such as those expressed in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa. There, the thought is of an internal battle being waged within the believer between the carnal and spiritual natures. Gunkel too felt that the extant Syriac manuscript was a translation from a Greek original and also maintained with others such as Gressmann and Stoltz that the collection was a gnostic work, hence the ready deployment of five Odes by the author of the *Pistis Sophia*.

By contrast, Mingana detected a wealth of Semitisms in the text of the Odes and believed that many of the hymns bear the hallmark of Arameo-Syriac style. He considered that on the whole, the Semitic paronomasias is better attributed to the hand of the author than to that of a highly skilled translator. This preference for a Syriac original was shared by Bernard, though he adduced no linguistic evidence to support his argument and relied almost entirely on Harris' translation of the text.

In fact, Bernard is virtually alone among the commentators in providing an interpretation of the Odes' imagery which can be sustained throughout the collection and giving them a *Sitz im Leben* in the primitive Church. He suggested that they be seen as an anthology of baptismal hymns, with a date of composition in the latter part of the second century C.E. Such a late date allows for the inclusion of Odes 19 and 42, which Harris had suggested contained teaching that was too developed to have come from the first century, and is required if it be assumed that the catechumenate was already an established institution. Though Bernard finds many points of contact between the Odist's language and that of Cyril of Jerusalem in the *Catechetical Lectures,*
Ephraim in the *Hymns of the Baptized* and the oriental rites to support the case for a sacramental interpretation of the hymns, his theory was universally rejected by his fellow commentators. Their main objection was that the restrictions of the *Disciplina Arcani*, which Bernard cites to explain the Odist's remarkable silence on certain subjects, cannot have extended as far as the very mention of the word "baptism" itself.

Arguably the most rigorous study of the Odes was presented by Harris-Mingana in two volumes published in 1916 and 1920. Unlike Bernard, who suggested that the ascription of the Odes to Solomon only took place after its composition, they proposed that the collection is intentionally pseudepigraphical. This accounts for the lack of explicit references to Christian beliefs and practices and is supported by the fact that in their opinion the imagery and Christology of the hymns is markedly sapiential in character. Many of Harris' earlier conclusions on the date of the Odes' composition and the Odist's Jewish sympathies were reiterated, though Mingana's preference for Syriac as the original language prevailed. The introduction to their work covers many subjects in great detail, but it is somewhat disorganized. It includes a lengthy discussion of the knowledge and usage of the Odes by the early Fathers, a rebuttal of Harnack's and Bernard's theories and an attempt to resolve the language issue by means of reference to the Odist's style, his usage of biblical material and a comparison of the Syriac text with the Coptic version of the five hymns preserved in the *Pistis Sophia*.

The publication of the second volume of Harris-Mingana's work brought to an end the first decade in the study of the Odes. It is clear that though the scholars' main concerns during this period were with issues such as the language and date of composition, provenance
and authorship, there was no consensus on any of these matters. Dates of composition were proposed as far apart as 50 B.C.E. - 200 C.E.; some thought the Odes gnostic, another Montanist, another docetic, another written by Bardaisan, others perfectly orthodox. The language debate ranged from Hebrew to Greek to Syriac but there was no agreement. With the possible exception of Bernard, whose baptismal interpretation was so roundly dismissed, all of these studies appear to have been conducted at the expense of the hymns themselves. This is true even of Harris-Mingana's *magnum opus*, for although there is much detailed information about the background of the Odes, the reader is still left with the impression that the imagery of the hymns remains a mystery.

Despite its shortcomings, many scholars seem to have regarded Harris-Mingana's work as the definitive study on the Odes and interest in them waned steadily after the publication of the second volume in 1920. The hymns were given a temporary reprieve from obscurity by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which momentously rocked the entire world of Christian and Jewish studies. Several scholars suggested that the Odist had been a member of the Qumran sect or was at least profoundly influenced by its teachings. Carmignac, for example, pointed to the parallels between the Odes and the *Hodayoth*. Gibson also argued that there is a direct connection between the dualistic and ascetical concerns of the Qumran sect and early Syriac Christianity, of which he considers the Odes to be representative. Likewise, Charlesworth has furnished a three-way study of the differences and similarities between the Odes, the Fourth Gospel and the Scrolls. However, as an inevitable consequence of the fact that this interest in the Odes was only stimulated by the finding of the Scrolls, in many
cases all that has resulted has been a comparison of the Odist's ideas and imagery with those of the Qumran literature rather than a study of the hymns in their own right.

A further discovery, that of a Greek manuscript of the 11th Ode in 1959, also kept alive the scholars' interest in the Odes to some extent as it led to the re-opening of the original language debate. At last it was possible to make a direct comparison between a Semitic and a Greek version of the same hymn, so it might be expected that a unanimous verdict would have been reached and the problem of the language of composition solved. This was not the case. Vööbus30 and Adam31 argued for a Syriac/Aramaic original, Carmignac32 for Hebrew, whereas Testuz33, Klijn34 and Philonenko35 expressed a preference for the Greek. But the thorough treatment of this question by Eserton36, which takes systematic account of all the relevant arguments up to the date of its publication, has moved the balance of opinion on the matter in favour of the Syriac.

In the modern era, Charlesworth's interest in the Odes has been exceptional. It has already been noted that he has made a study of the hymns in relation to the Fourth Gospel and the Dead Sea Scrolls, but he has also discussed philological37 and stylistic38 issues and the author's alleged gnostic tendencies39. Of the latter, he concluded that though there is an emphasis on knowledge in the collection, this is not used in the gnostic sense. Furthermore, while the Odist uses some of the same themes as the gnostics, these are not given a metaphysical interpretation. Charlesworth has also provided a critical edition of the text together with a translation, which appears to depend heavily on that of Harris-Mingana, notes and a bibliography40. Because the primary concern of this work is with textual matters, it is
difficult to gauge his opinions on the wider questions such as the date and language of composition or authorial milieu, similarly, the expository comment is kept to a minimum. However, there are certain signals that he shares Harris-Mingana's standpoint on these issues too.

The first century date of composition and Judaeo-Christian authorship Charlesworth proposes for the Odes are rejected by Drijvers. He thinks that at least some of the hymns are dominated by anti-Manichaean polemic and that the collection should therefore be dated towards the end of the third century C.E. This is the latest date of composition suggested by any of the scholars but would seem to be excluded by the evidence from Lactantius and the Pistis Sophia, which indicates that the Odes had already reached a wide audience by that time.

Recent contributors to the study of the Odes have included Lattke, McNeil, Franzmann and Blaszczak. It is interesting to note that in these modern works, a gradual movement away from the traditional absorption with the language, date and provenance of the collection is beginning to take place. Following Charlesworth's lead, Lattke's concerns have been largely with textual and bibliographical matters. He has provided concordances of the Syriac, Greek and Coptic words, besides an analysis of all the manuscript evidence, a translation of the hymns into German and a brief summary of the literature on the Odes, evidently deeming these matters to have been wrongfully overlooked. In contrast, McNeil has shown an interest in the Odist's Christology, his doctrine of the Holy Spirit and ecclesiology, whilst both Franzmann and Blaszczak have been concerned with the Odist's literary style and skill as a poet.
This completes the review of the major trends in earlier scholarship on the Odes. It seems that apart from the most modern type of form critical approach, which is currently in vogue generally in the wider field of biblical studies, those that have been adopted previously have been flawed in one or two ways. In the first case, the approach which concerns itself primarily with issues such as the original language of the collection, its date of composition and provenance is evidently misguided. This is because the enquiry into such matters has invariably been conducted at the expense of an elucidation of the text itself, a study of its imagery or any attempt to appreciate the beauty of the hymns. Moreover, a particular problem with the theories that have been voiced over these questions has been their tendency to be constructed on isolated words, phrases or perhaps a single Ode without looking to the collection as a whole. This is true of Harris' and Harnack's reliance on Odes 4:1-3a and 6:8 (from which they allege two differing dates of composition), Connolly's dependence on individual words to argue for the originality of the Greek and Bruston's reckoning that Ode 24 indicates a Syrian provenance for the collection. The very diversity of conclusions that has been reached would tend to suggest that there is little to be gained from pursuing these matters further and certainly not an enhanced understanding of the hymns themselves.

The second approach to the study of the Odes has been that which compares their language and imagery with those of other works such as the Fourth Gospel or Dead Sea Scrolls. Although this has identified some of the central themes of the collection, it has meant that the hymns have always been seen in the light of something else and never in their own true glory. They have become a quarry from which rocks
have been hewn to support other edifices. Whilst such a comparative study may be appropriate in certain circumstances, it is clear that this is only possible in cases where there is a thorough understanding of the individual works concerned in their own right. Since no such understanding of the Odes is held, it seems that their comparison with other works should be postponed until it has been gained.

Admittedly, it may be argued that matters such as the date of composition and provenance of a work must be addressed before the attempt to interpret it begins, since certain dates and places would naturally exclude particular interpretations. By the same token, it could be stated that a comparison with the work of another author is a valuable interpretative tool. Nevertheless, with such elusive material as the Odes, it seems that there is still much to be said for an approach to their study that looks principally to the hymns themselves and endeavours to interpret them.

Thus it appears that the decision to study the Odes by means of a single theme that runs throughout the collection is justified, if not demanded. The specific choice of the Descensus motif has been made for several reasons. In the first place, there is an unequivocal reference to the Descent, one of the few matters concerning the Odes on which all the commentators are agreed, in the final hymn. This Ode will be studied first of all so that a wholly internal control, against which others from the collection may be tested, can be established. Secondly, though the notion of Hell may be of little interest to the modern reader, it is well known that the Descensus theme was a source of particular fascination in the early Church, which continued on in medieval art. It undoubtedly arose from the perceived need to account
for Christ’s activity and whereabouts in the period between his death and resurrection, but as time went on, the doctrine developed way beyond this initial requirement. The Odist’s treatment of the theme is likely to be one of the earliest written examples available and stands therefore at that crucial point in the development of doctrine when speculation had begun but not yet reached its more fanciful heights.

There are two further matters which plead the case for a study of the Descensus theme. Writing in 1944, Grant said of the hymns, "As for doctrines more specifically Christian, they do not speak of the resurrection and ascension (though these may be implied in Christ’s victory), nor of baptism and the Eucharist." Given the centrality of these doctrines to the early Christian kerygma and the importance of the sacraments in the primitive Church, the Odes would be a very strange Christian work indeed if this were really true. In the course of the following studies it will be shown exactly how fully the doctrine of the resurrection is implied in Christ’s Descensus victory, and the way in which baptismal beliefs are related to this and alluded to.

The final justification for the selection of the Descensus theme as a subject for study is that it presupposes nothing about the Odes’ date of composition, language, provenance or religious milieu which have all been so hotly contested. This is because the notion of a descent by the hero or god into the Underworld or abode of the dead was so very common in the ancient world, and occurred across Greek, Semitic and many other cultures. The earliest version of this event seems to be the Sumerian myth of Inanna’s Descent to the Netherworld, but there are also the Gilgamesh Epic, the so called Ba’al cycle from ancient Canaan and several different versions in Greek culture alone.
All of these descent myths seem to be characterized in one of two ways; either as a quest for knowledge about the realm of death, or in order to rescue the descender’s loved ones. In both cases, the attempt to gain mastery over death itself is always implicit.

It is hoped that the three questions which were posed initially regarding the decision to examine the theme of Christ’s Descent into Hell within the Odes have been satisfactorily answered. Further study of the hymns is certainly justified because they have been so sadly marginalized and their beauty neglected. A thematic approach to this study is surely fitting because of the failure and misguided concerns of those that have been adopted previously. Lastly, the study of the Descensus motif in particular clearly has much to commend it. It is now appropriate to begin the examination with a study of the language and imagery of the final hymn, to see what can be learned of the dominant features of the Odist’s treatment of the theme from this undisputed reference to it.
Notes to Introduction
These are the Stichometry of Nicephorus (ninth century C.E.) and the Synopsis Sanctae Scripturae of Pseudo-Athanasius (sixth century C.E.).

Some manuscripts read "in psalmo undevigesimo" or "in psalmo vigesimo". The same passage, now known to come from Ode 19, is also cited by Lactantius in the Divine Institutes (IV 12), where it is introduced by the words "Salomon ita dicit!".

Attention was drawn to the presence of five odes in the Pistis Sophia as early as the beginning of the 19th century by Münter [F. Münter, Odae gnosticae Salomoni tributae, Thebaice et Latine, praefatione et adnotationibus philologicis illustratae (Copenhagen: J. F. Schultz, 1812)]. The specific opinion that these had not been composed by the author of the Pistis Sophia was voiced by Harnack [A. Harnack, Uber das gnostische Buch Pistis Sophia (Leipzig, 1891)] and Ryle and James [H. E. Kyle and M. R. James, PSALMOI SOLONONTOS: Psalms of the Pharisees, Commonly Called the Psalms of Solomon (Cambridge: University Press, 1891)].

Harris' manuscript, which also contains the 18 Psalms of Solomon, is damaged at the beginning. The preface and first, second and opening verses of the third Ode are missing. However, Harris was able to identify the collection as the Odes of Solomon from his remembrance of Ryle and James' work on the Psalms of Solomon, in which the passages from Lactantius and the Pistis Sophia are mentioned. Fortunately, one of the five hymns quoted by the author of the Pistis Sophia and introduced as the 19th Ode appears to be the first Ode which is missing from the damaged manuscript. This disparity in the numbering no doubt arose from the fact that since the Odes and Psalms of Solomon were circulated together, in some cases the 18 Psalms preceded the Odes, but in others followed them.


The following review is not an exhaustive study of all the previous scholarship on the Odes, it is simply intended to be representative of its general trends.


F. Spitta, "Zum Verständnis der Oden Salomos, (i) and (ii)," Z.N.W., XI (1910), pp.193-203 and 259-90.

H. Grimme, Die Oden Salomos: Syrisch-Hebraisch-Deutsch (Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1911). Grimme also detected an acrostic pattern at the beginning of each Ode, which he took to be further evidence of their composition in Hebrew. This theory was widely criticized on two counts.
Firstly, because the pattern seems to peter out part way through the collection, and secondly, because it is not exclusively applicable in Hebrew but could pertain to other Semitic languages.


(12) In the first three years following Harris' discovery, much of the language debate focused on the theory of mistranslation and a corrupt text. To some degree, this was brought to an end by Burkitt's identification of another Syriac manuscript of the Odes which was held in the British Museum. (F. C. Burkitt, "A New Manuscript of the Odes of Solomon," J.T.S., XIII (1912), pp.372-85.)


(15) W. Frankenberg, Das Verständnis der Oden Salomos (Giessen: Alired Töpelmann, 1911).


(19) It should, however, be noted that the canonical Psalms are quoted in exactly the same way by the author of the Pistsis Sophia.

(20) A. Mingana, "Quelques mots sur les Odes de Salomon, (i) and (ii)," Z.N.W., XV (1914), pp.234-53 and XVI (1915), pp.167-90.


(23) Harris-Mingana continued to regard the mention of the holy place and temple in Odes 4:1-3a and 6:8 as a historical landmark. They found evidence to suggest that the ideas contained in Odes 19 and 42, which Harris had argued in the editio princeps may have been the work of a later author, could also be ascribed to the first century C.E.


(45) G. R. Blaszczak, A Form Critical Study of Selected Odes of Solomon (Scholars' Press, 1985).

(46) This opinion is based on Bruston's highly individual interpretation of the hymn, in which he sees references to a mixed population and the birds and reptiles that were sacred to pagan deities. He concludes that either Egypt or Syria may be inferred as the author's home, but the former is excluded by the absence of quadrupeds from the enumeration of sacred animals. [C. H. Bruston, "Quelques observations sur les Odes de Salomon," Z.N.W., XIII (1912), pp.111-6.]

(47) Exactly this point is made by Franzmann (op. cit.) in her opening words, "As with other texts from the early centuries C.E. discovered in this century, the Odes of Solomon have suffered the effects of that overpowering scholarly temptation to "skim off" from a text what might shed light on other "more important" (read "canonical") works from the mainstream Hebrew or Christian traditions, with the result that often the newly discovered texts are treated as little more than footnoting material."


(49) However, in line with the a priori principle of textual study, the collection's unity will be assumed unless and until this clearly becomes untenable.
Chapter 1: Ode 42
What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from.

How accurately Eliot's words reflect the position at the outset of the investigation into the Descent motif in the Odes of Solomon, for it is in the final hymn of the collection that the way forward is most clearly signposted. The presence of the Descent motif in the closing verses of the 42nd hymn is one of the few matters in the study of the Odes about which all the scholars are in accord. It is for this reason that the last Ode has been chosen as a starting place.

The aim of this chapter will be to look closely into the vocabulary and imagery used of the Descent in Ode 42 and to gain some idea of the Odist's understanding of the Descent and its effects. When this survey has been completed, it is intended that the findings will in turn be used as a yardstick against which other hymns from the collection can be examined in subsequent chapters. For this reason, the parallels which are cited in the chapter between this Ode and the rest of the hymns will be few in number, with the focus resting instead on identifying the conceptual framework within which the Odist operates. The arguments for the Descensus interpretation of those Odes in which the Descent motif is far less explicit and much more disputed by the commentators can, it is hoped, be supported by means of a comparison with the patterns of vocabulary, imagery and ideas found in the overt and uncontested reference in Ode 42. The strength of this approach lies in the fact that it is a wholly internal method of control. This is clearly important when dealing with material such as the Odes, for which the difficulties surrounding their provenance and date of composition make it impossible to identify accurately any appropriate external controls.
The following investigation will be made in two parts, taking the relationships between Christ and the other two groups of players in the Descensus drama (Death/Sheol and the dead) as the point of departure. The Odes have often been described as outpourings of spiritual intimacy in which the relationship between the believer and the Lord is of paramount importance. This is true throughout the collection, and appears especially so in Ode 42, in which the dialogue and activity between the three parties is pivotal. Moreover, such a synoptic method is preferable to that of verse by verse analysis which can be impossible to apply when the thought is so closely interwoven as it is in this case. The bipartite approach is also commended by the content of the Descent material in Ode 42 itself. It is hoped that its examination will show that in Christ's dialogue with the dead, the imagery deployed by the Odist differs from that of Christ's encounter with Death/Sheol.

Before moving on to look at the Descensus material in Ode 42 it will be necessary to review the setting in which this is found and to consider briefly the opinion voiced by some scholars that its introduction is awkward in the context and may be the work of a later editor.

The two opening verses of the Ode coincide very closely with those of the short 27th Ode. The speaker is the Odist himself, or believer, who stands before the Lord, arms outstretched, evocative of the crucifixion. The hymn develops into a meditation on the speaker's triumph over his persecutors and his love for those who believe in him. The latter is expressed in the nuptial imagery so favoured by early writers to express the relationship between Christ and the Church. Many commentators have therefore suggested that there is a change of
speaker from v3 onwards (though apart from the content there is no device to mark this change) and that the words which follow are spoken \textit{ex ore Christi}.

Clearly, however, the Odist does not abandon the theme of the Passion with which he began. Some of the thought is certainly obscure, for example, the difficult third verse, and the reference to the death of the persecutors in v5, but the emphasis is on the final triumphal vindication of the one who is righteous, exemplified by Christ (see v2 in which the appellation "Righteous One" is used). This is explicitly stated in the tenth verse, which immediately precedes the \textit{Descensus} narrative.

As is common in the Odes, the thought does not proceed in linear fashion, the reference to the resurrection (v6a) comes before the Odist has finished dwelling on the subject of rejection, but he is not interested in a single dimensional narrative of events. The preoccupation is rather with the effects of the cross and resurrection events and this is stated in terms of the mutual love which has been established between Christ and the believers\textsuperscript{135}, and the end of the persecutors. Just as it was argued that the latter part of the Ode hinges on the relationships between the three parties involved, so in the opening section the relationships between Christ and the persecutors, Christ and the believers, and the believers and the persecutors hold the key to the meaning. It is unnecessary to try to identify the persecutors more closely. For the Odist, all who are not with Christ are against him.

The content of these opening verses will be returned to in the following discussion. For the present, it is enough to state that the Odist has set the stage for the introduction of the Descent material.
There is no reason to suppose that this is an intrusion, for the context is one of Passion and resurrection.

[A] The relationship between Christ and Death/Sheol

The Descensus narrative begins at the 11th verse with a dramatic statement by Christ of the effect his appearance had on Death and Sheol, which are evidently personified:

Sheol saw me and began to mourn,
And Death disgorged me and many with me.

The verb ḫdwyt in the first line has generally been translated in one of two ways. Either with the sense of causing distress (so Harris<sup>14</sup>, Bernard<sup>5</sup>, Harris-Mingana<sup>8</sup>, Plooij<sup>7</sup> and MacCulloch<sup>9</sup>), or with the sense of rendering impotent (so Grimme<sup>19</sup>, Bauer<sup>110</sup>, Bieder<sup>11</sup>, Labourt<sup>11a</sup> and Danifelou<sup>113</sup>). Charlesworth's<sup>114</sup> choice of the verb "shattered" appears to accommodate both of these meanings, whereas Frankenberg<sup>116</sup> supposes the underlying Greek verb nausiaσ, thus prefiguring the disgorging described in the second line of the verse. Of the two main alternatives, the sense of causing distress is likely to be the more accurate, but previous translators have overlooked the point which the Odist is making, namely that Sheol is not just distressed by Christ's appearance but actually mourns, which is the basic meaning of the ethpe'el theme of the verb ḫw<sup>9</sup>. The use of this verb is not arbitrary, but is intended to set the scene for the events which follow, in which there will be a reversal of the norm, of the fortunes so far.

The Odist's view of Christ's Descent is as a unique event which overturns previous experience and replaces it forever with a definitively new pattern. Thus the one who has caused grief and
mourning is made to grieve and mourn, and the gorer will be forced to
disgorge. Precisely the same notion of role reversal in mourning is
used by Aphrahat in his treatment of the Descent in *Demonstration XXII
4*:

But when the dead saw the light in the darkness
they lifted their heads from the imprisonment of
Death and looked up and saw the brightness of
King Messiah. Then the forces of his darkness sat
in mourning because Death was being brought down
from his position of authority.

and by Ephraim in *Carmina Nisibena XXVII 4*:

The Virgin in her bringing forth he made glad;
but Sheol he grieved and made sad in his
resurrection.

Before moving on to investigate other elements which form part of
the Odist's understanding of the relationship between Christ and Death,
it is important to touch briefly on the relationship between Death (a
masculine noun in Syriac) and Sheol (a feminine noun). This instance
of the word ṣywî in Ode 42:11 is one of only three such occurrences in
the whole collection, the other two being at Odes 15:9 and 29:4. In all
three examples, Sheol is paired with Death. In fact Sheol, generally
regarded as the abode of the dead, seems to drop out of the picture in
Ode 42 after the first line of the narrative. Harris' manuscript has
the variant reading of a plural verb ṣkhîw for the singular ṣkhî in
v13, possibly indicating that both Death and Sheol are the subjects,
and Schulthesse*16* proposed that the possessive suffix in v12b should
be pointed as a feminine, referring to the deepest part of Sheol, though
neither manuscript supports this. But apart from this orthographic
variant and proposed emendation, the rest of the verbs and suffixes in
vv11b-14a are either in the first person singular of the speaker or in
the third masculine singular, agreeing with the masculine noun Death.

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It seems unlikely that the Odist always conceives of Death and Sheol as separate and distinct from each other, as most of the scholars imply in their comments on the matter. Although this distinction is sometimes apparent, it is more often blurred and the two terms may be synonymous. This is clear from v1a in which Sheol, thought to be a place, is ascribed the sense of sight and thrown into mourning as if it were a figure.

Such interchangeability is well attested in the biblical usage of the two terms e.g., Revelation 1:18 (where the figure Death is said to have keys), 6:8 (in which Hades follows after Death), 20:13 (in which Death and Hades give up the dead in them), Habakkuk 2:5 (where the greed of Sheol is paralleled with that of Death) and the Sinaiticus reading of I Corinthians 15:55, which agrees more closely with the underlying text Hosea 13:14, in which Sheol shares Death's implicit status as enemy king.

This equivalence of the terms Death and Sheol, their apparent personification and the dominance of Death are of significance in understanding the picture which the Odist paints of the Descent. Most importantly, they reflect the fact that the major theme of the Descent is the meeting and subsequent conflict between two opposing figures, Christ and Death. In this respect the Odist's world view can be described as strongly dualistic. On the one hand stands Christ, agent of the Lord, force for life; on the other, Death, opponent of the Lord, force of destruction. Sheol, in so far as it is mentioned at all by the Odist, is always defined in terms of its relationship to Death.

Returning now to the main subject of this investigation, the relationship between Christ and Death, Christ, as speaker, goes on to say:
And Death disgorged me and many with me.

I was gall and bitterness to him, 
And I went down with him to his innermost depth.

At first sight, this language appears puzzling, but the picture seems to be of Death being poisoned by Christ and forced to vomit up what he has consumed, in this case, the dead. The meaning of v12b and the source of the mention of "gall and bitterness" in v12a have been debated, but before looking into these matters, it will be necessary to consider the possible background to this imagery of Death as the devourer of the dead, and Christ as poisoner.

Turning again to Aphrahat's treatise on the Descent, the same thought occurs in Demonstration XXII 4:

And Death tasted the poison of his slayer and his hands were paralysed and he knew that the dead were being made alive and slipping away from his tyranny ...... Then, when Jesus had completed His ministry in the house of the dead, Death ejected Him from his place and could not stand Him being there, nor did His food please him like that of all the dead.

and still more explicitly in Demonstration XXII 5:

And when he completely disgorged Him and He went from his place, He left a poison with him, the promise of life, that gradually his power would fail. Just like a man who ingests a lethal poison in the food which is given for sustenance, and when he realizes deep down that he has received a lethal poison in the food, then he vomits up from his belly the food with which the lethal poison is mixed. But the poison has left its force in his limbs so that little by little his body's constitution might be broken and corrupted. Jesus, being dead, was the destroyer of Death, so that by Him life might reign and Death, to whom it was said, "Death, where is your victory?" might perish.

The notion of Christ as a pharmakon tēs zōēs who is a pharmakon tou thanatou to Death belongs within Christianity, but the idea of Death as a devouring monster is far older. Bearing in mind the above
observations that Death and Sheol are synonymous in the Odes, and in some biblical texts, Isaiah 5:14 reads:

Therefore Sheol has enlarged its appetite and opened its mouth beyond measure, and her nobility and her multitude go down, her throng and he who exults in her.

Similarly Habakkuk 2:5:

His greed is as wide as Sheol; like Death he has never enough.

and Numbers 16:30ff:

But if the Lord creates something new, and the ground opens up its mouth, and swallows them up, with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised the Lord. And as he finished speaking all these words, the ground under them split asunder; and the earth opened up its mouth and swallowed them up .... So they and all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol; and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly.

No attempt has been made to discuss the contexts in which these biblical statements about the nature of Death and Sheol are found. It is sufficient to this enquiry to note that this imagery is found in a variety of contexts, poetic and prosaic alike. But where does it come from?

Recent studies of biblical imagery have noted its indebtedness to Canaanite religion, and it is to this Canaanite matrix, via biblical and other filters, that the Odist’s concept of Death as a devouring monster and Christ as his slayer ultimately belongs. In the so-called Ba’al cycle, Ba’al, son of the divine parents El and Asherah, is lord of life, fertility, weather and the microcosm, but his rule is perpetually under threat from two opposing deities, Yam and Mot. The cycle opens with Ba’al’s attempt to establish order and harmony in the face of the chaotic sea, Yam, who had originally been crowned as king of the
primordial chaos by El. Ba'ul succeeds in overthrowing Yam and in recognition of this victory is promoted by El. He further consolidates his position by constructing an elaborate palace on Mount Zephon, but has no sooner celebrated its completion than Mot appears on the scene, devours him, and forces his descent to the Underworld. Fortunately for Ba'ul, a rescue team is on hand in the form of the goddesses Anat, who slays Mot, and Shapash, who cheats Mot of his prey by getting Ba'ul to provide a substitute in his own likeness. Ba'ul is brought back to earth and resumes his seat on Mount Zephon.

After an interval of seven years, a second battle between Ba'ul and Mot ensues, this time with Mot leaving his underground home and confronting Ba'ul face to face on Mount Zephon. It is only after direct intervention by El that Mot is persuaded to withdraw and acknowledge Ba'ul's right to be king.

Mot is patently more than a mere disrupter of fertility in the Canaanite texts. The second battle, the need for El's co-operation in suppressing him and the threat that should his demand for restitution against Anat be denied, he will attack and consume all men on earth, all serve to bear this out. He is, as his name suggests, the personification and lord of death itself.

The above is a broad outline of Ba'ul's conflict with Mot, but how is Mot characterized therein? One of the most striking features of the narrative, which is reflected in the biblical texts dealing with this subject, is the frequent and insistent emphasis on the voracity and insatiability of Mot's appetite. Three examples from the Canaanite texts will suffice to illustrate this point. Firstly, Ba'ul dispatches his messengers to Mot with the following warning:

Come you not near to Mot, son of El, lest he make you like a sheep in his mouth,
(or) you both be carried away like a kid in his jaws.\(^{19}\)

Likewise, Mot describes his own voracity:

> My appetite is the appetite of the lion in the wasteland, or the desire of the shark in the sea.\(^{19}\)

Elsewhere, still more explicitly, Mot is said to have:

>`[Jaws (reaching)] to earth, lips to heaven [and] a tongue to the stars.\(^{20}\)`

Having identified the distant origins of the Odist's picture of Death as a devouring monster and remembering the equivalence of Death with Sheol, it is appropriate to go back to the notion of mourning in *vita* with which the *Descensus* narrative begins. In Zechariah 12:11, the prophet warns of a future day when:

>`... the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad-Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo.`

Hadad is another name for Ba'Al in the Canaanite texts, which report that mourning took place when Ba'Al was forced by Mot to descend to the Underworld. This lamentation is initiated by El, but taken up by Anat (Ba'Al's wife/sister), the goddess who eventually slays Mot. Many commentators have compared this passage in Zechariah with the reference to the women weeping for Tammuz at Ezekiel 8:14 and suggested that both be seen as allusions to the ritual grieving performed for the dying fertility god. If the Odist is playing on his audience's knowledge of this practice, his desire to depict the Descent as a reversal of the normal pattern becomes all the more evident. Instead of the descending god being the one mourned for, it is Death/Sheol, his assailant, who goes into mourning.
It is now time to return to the consideration of the effect Christ has on Death. The Odist's understanding of this is clearly the same as that of Aphrahat. In contrast with normal procedure, Death is unable to consume Christ, but is poisoned by him and forced to vomit him up and many of the dead with him. This is expressed by the Odist using the two nouns $\text{hl}$ and $\text{mrr}^\dagger$.

Harris-Mingana suggested that the Odist has borrowed imagery from the Septuagint and Syriac versions of Isaiah 14:9, in which the fall of the king of Babylon is described:

Sheol is embittered at your descent
His fall is likened to that of Helal, the day star, son of Shahar, Dawn, a member of the Canaanite pantheon who had aspired to put his throne over all the other gods in the Mount of the Assembly$^{(21)}$.

However, MacCulloch$^{(22)}$ and Bernard proposed that further inspiration behind the mention of $\text{hl}$ and $\text{mrr}^\dagger$ may have been derived from the tradition found in the Gospel of Nicodemus and reiterated by Ephraim$^{(23)}$ that it was at Satan's instigation that gall and bitterness were offered to Christ on the cross. If this is the case, it forms another example of the Odist's wish to picture the Descent as an overturning of previous patterns. By the time of the Odes' composition, Satan's original function as a morally neutral member of the heavenly court had developed considerably and was becoming equated with that of Death. At the hour of the crucifixion, when Death still apparently holds sway, he is able to proffer gall and vinegar to assuage Christ's thirst. But at the time of the Descent, when his rule will be definitively broken, Christ uses the same draught to inflict defeat.

The meaning of the second line of v12 has been debated. The text as it stands reads:
And I went down with him to his innermost depth but, as was noted above, Schulthess argued that the diacritical point should be added to the suffix attached to the preposition b, making it feminine. The sense of the line would then be that Christ went down with Death into the deepest part of Sheol. This view is apparently shared by many commentators. Bieder and Danielou observe that it emphasizes the scope of the Descent. Connolly and Bernard point to a passage from the Acts of Judas Thomas which reads:

Thou didst descend to Sheol, and go to its uttermost end.

Bieder further remarks that it represents a development of the picture of Death as a monster and Christ as poisoner, into Death as a cowering animal chased into the very depths of its lair, which is Sheol, by Christ the hunter. Again, this is a reversal of the role which has previously been played by Death, who himself had hunted down the dead at every opportunity. Batiffol\textsuperscript{15} also construes the line as a reference to the depth of Sheol, and in addition suggests that the preposition and masculine pronominal suffix \( \textit{mh} \) speak not of Death, but of the cross, which in the wider Christian Descensus tradition was thought to have been taken by Christ into Hell. The immediate context, in which the cross is not mentioned at all, furnishes no justification for this view\textsuperscript{215}.

However, this interpretation, which assumes a reference to the depth of Sheol rather than of Death, and the implied emendation of the text which it entails, is inappropriate, for the Odist has not yet moved away from his theme of the poisoning of Death by Christ. The meaning must be that Christ, as toxic gall and bitterness, penetrates the very core of Death's body, leaving no limb or organ unaffected. The line should therefore be translated:
And I seeped down through his every limb
thus paralleling the thought expressed in Aphrahat. Sheol, in so far
as it figures at all, is the belly of the monster, rather than his lair,
and thus part of him.

Discussion of the 13th verse has centred around the identification
of the head and feet in the first line:

Then he released the feet and the head,
Because he was unable to bear my face.

There are six possible interpretations, all of which can be further
subdivided depending on whether a singular verb (as per Manuscript M)
or a plural one (as per Manuscript H) is read in the second line:

[1] The first assumes Death is the subject of the first line, with the
terms feet and head referring metaphorically to Christ and the
dead who are members of his mystical body. Thus the Odist has
finished working with the idea of Death as a monster and Christ
as his poisoner, and moved instead to the perhaps more common
idea of Death as a gaoler who holds the dead bound in a
subterranean prison, but who at the advent of Christ is forced to
release them. This is the interpretation favoured by Harris,
Bernard and Frankenberg (who uses the Greek term aichmalōsia to
elaborate on the idea) and is supported by the facts that the dead
have already been mentioned earlier in the narrative (v11b) and
that the notion of the believers as limbs of the Lord is found
elsewhere within the Odes (e.g. Odes 3:2 and 17:16, possibly in a
Descensus context). Harris and Bernard read a plural verb in the
second line, of which Death and Sheol are joint subjects,
Frankenberg reads the singular, of which Death alone is the
subject.
The second considers Death to be the sole subject throughout the verse and the gaoler motif to be in operation, but construes the terms feet and head in a literal physical way as a general reference to those parts of the bodies of all the dead by which they were manacled by Death. Support for this interpretation, which is that held by Labourt, may be adduced from v16b in which the dead allude to their bonds of darkness.

This interpretation is a minor variant of that immediately above, except that the feet and head in question belong specifically to Christ. It may be supported from the mention by Christ in the next line of "my face", in which case the possessive suffix attached to πρόσωπον is extended to cover the feet and head in the first line as well. Against such an interpretation is the fact that Ode 42 contains no allusion to Christ being bound in the same way the rest of the dead are.

Harris-Mingana's interpretation, which is not explicitly stated in their commentary on the Ode, but which may be implied from their introductory notes, is based on a passage from Cyril of Jerusalem which refers to the eating of the Paschal Lamb. Catechesis XII 1 reads:

We who are accounted worthy to partake of the spiritual Lamb, partake of the head with the feet: of the head, which means His Godhead; of the feet, that is His manhood.

The subject of the whole verse is Death (they read a singular verb in the second line), and the feet and head in question belong to Christ as in interpretation [3], but instead of being construed in a literal way, they refer metaphorically to Christ's two natures. This interpretation is possible, but improbable, since there is
little evidence from the wider collection of Odes of such a refined theological concern.

[5] The fifth possible interpretation also understands the reference to the feet and head in a physical manner, but regards them as belonging to Death and sees v13a as a doublet to v11a. This interpretation is favoured by the majority of German writers (some of whom read the singular verb in line two, some the plural) who use either the verb sinken or the adjective schlaff to translate the Syriac *Γρπγ. Underlying it is the view that the Odist has not yet finished working with the poisoning metaphor but has in mind a gradual paralysis and enfeebling of Death, having ingested Christ. The same idea is also found in Aphrahat and brings out the double efficacy of Christ’s poison which not only causes Death to vomit him up and many with him, thus robbing Death of his present possessions, but also remains in Death’s system, weakening and destroying him, thereby rendering him permanently incapable of any future activity.

[6] Batiffol’s interpretation is developed from his understanding of v12 in which he detects a reference to the cross. He assumes that it is the cross and not Death which is the subject of the first line, but construes the terms head and feet as a reference to Christ and the saints as in interpretation [1]. He finds support for his interpretation from the obscure 23rd Ode, in which he sees the wheel as a cypher for the cross:

The head went down to the feet
Because unto the feet ran the wheel
And whatever had come upon it.
Moreover, Batiffol maintains that the usual translation of the Syriac verb *rpy by détendre, or its equivalent, is nonsensical, and proposes the first line be rendered:

La croix a rapproché la tête des pieds.

He reads a singular verb in the second line, of which Death is the subject. Of all the possible interpretations of v13, this appears the least plausible. Batiffol’s contention that the translation détendre is meaningless can hardly be substantiated, for there have been shown to be at least five alternative interpretations all of which render the Syriac *rpy in this way. It is not quite clear from his comments whether he claims that the sense rapprocher is included within the semantic range of the Syriac verb, or whether this verb should be emended. If the former is the case, it seems unjustified. If the latter is the case, then he fails to suggest an appropriate emendation. The objection to his theory that there is any reference to the cross has already been raised above.

Whether or not a singular verb (of which Death alone is the implied subject) or a plural one (of which Death and Sheol are joint subjects) is read in the second line of v13 is of small consequence, for the functional equivalence of these two terms in Ode 42 has been recognized. The thought of this line should be understood in the sense that Death was unable to tolerate the appearance of Christ, which again is supported by the parallels in Aphrahat and the Acts of Thomas\(^{229}\), rather than that he was physically incapable of bearing Christ’s weight\(^{229}\).

However, the problem of deciding which one of the first five possible interpretations of the first line is appropriate remains
unresolved. Of these five, interpretations [1] to [4] belong together, for they all assume that the metaphor has shifted from poisoning to binding, whereas the fifth considers that the poisoning imagery is still in operation. Whilst the thought of the Odes in general switches freely from one group of images to another, the context here gives no indication whatsoever that such a shift from poisoning to binding has occurred and for this reason, the fifth interpretation, which attributes the feet and head to Death, should be adopted.

A translation of vv12-13 may then be given as follows:

I was vinegar and bitterness to him,
Seeping down through his every limb.

Then he lost control of his feet and head,
Because he could not endure my presence.

Admittedly, there is little linguistic evidence to support the rendering of the ap'e'l form ḫpy by "lost control", since this is really an extended sense of the pa'e'l theme of the verb ṣp which includes the meanings to relax, weaken or enfeeble. However, the sense it brings to this difficult verse does afford some justification. Moreover, the interpretation is commended on two further counts. The first is grammatical; the absence of any possessive suffixes to the nouns head and feet indicate that these nouns most obviously refer to the subject of the line, which is Death. The second is that the thought of a gradual paralysis of Death's body is clearly spoken of by Aphrahat. Demonstration XXII 4 reads:

And Death tasted the poison of his slayer and his hands were paralysed ..... 

and the following paragraph adds:

But the poison has left its force in his limbs so that little by little his body's constitution might be broken and corrupted.
This completes the examination of the relationship between Christ and Death. Several conclusions may be drawn from it about the Odist's overall understanding of the Descent. The first is that Death and Sheol are equated and are more than mere personifications. They are supernatural divine figures who stand in contrast to Christ and oppose him. They are overcome by Christ, who, as a deadly toxin, both robs them of the dead they have consumed so far, and poisons them so that they are unable to gorge any more. The background to this imagery has been traced through biblical and other texts of all periods and been shown to be Canaanite in origin. Furthermore, the Descent in the Odes reflects a markedly dualistic understanding of human existence which prior to the advent of Christ in Sheol has seen the dominance of Death. The Odist uses the language of reversal - the mourning of Death, the disgorging by the monster - to show that this is no longer the case. The Descent for the Odist is a unique event which definitively destroys the forces threatening human existence.

[B] The relationship between Christ and the dead

The idea that there has been an end to Death is underlined by the Odist who, apart from briefly describing the dead as his possessions in v14a, drops Death from the picture altogether. Christ, who is still the speaker, proceeds to report his dialogue with the dead in Sheol (v14ff.). Before commenting on specific elements within that dialogue it is important to note three general features which illustrate the Odist's understanding of the nature of the relationship between Christ and the dead.

Firstly, it is clearly a reciprocal relationship. There is a two way interaction between Christ and the dead. Christ speaks to the dead
(v14b) and they respond (v15a). They acknowledge his status (vv15b and 18b) and he theirs (v20b). They plead for release (vv15b-18a) and he hears them (v19a). He considers their faith (v19b) and places his name on their head (v20a). Secondly, although this relationship is reciprocal, Christ is always its initiator and controlling force. He it is who first addresses the dead, their words are only a response to his invitation. It is his objective which is primary, and his activity which is part of a deliberate plan. This is particularly emphasized in vv14b-c, in which the outcome of the invitation and its purpose are virtually prefigured by the inclusion of the detail of the manner in which it is delivered:

And I addressed them with living lips,
So that my speech would not be in vain(31).

The third point is that the Odist does not elaborate on the moral status of the dead, they are spoken of simply as "the dead" without further qualification. Many of the scholars' comments on this Ode refer to the dead as "saints", but this reflects more the influence of later Descensus tradition on these writers than what is actually contained within the Ode itself. It seems that the Odist's concern is purely with the response of the dead to the appearance and invitation of Christ, and not with any prior state of righteousness.

Having made these general observations about the way the relationship between Christ and the dead is depicted, it is appropriate to continue by examining the specific content of the words which are spoken. Bieder remarks that the 14th verse reports the founding of the underground Ecclesia, a view which is shared by Daniélou:

And I made a congregation of living among his dead
The problem of establishing the chronological relationship between this line and the ones which precede and follow it should not be dwelt on too long, though the matter does require some comment since it impinges on the manner in which the Ode is to be interpreted. It could be argued that the dialogue in vv14b-19a belongs before the event described in v14a, for the dead in v14a are already said to be living, which suggests that their plea in that dialogue has already been answered. Furthermore, the events outlined in vv19b-20 apparently resume the thought begun in v14a and, the whole of the activity from v14 onwards may stand in advance of the disgorging which is reported in the 11th verse. But the fact that the Odist's primary motive is other than merely narrating events has been established and it is sufficient to reiterate that this is once more apparent.

The content of Christ’s initial invitation to the dead is not explicitly stated. It can only be guessed at from the manner of its delivery (by living lips), the allusion to its importance (so that my speech would not be in vain) and the response, in the form of a plea, which it generates from the hearers:

And those who had died ran towards me,
And they cried out, saying,
Son of God, have pity on us,
And deal with us according to your kindness,
And bring us out from the bonds of darkness,
And open for us the door through which we can come out to you.
For we recognize that our death does not touch you.
May we too be saved with you
For you are our saviour.

The expression "Son of God" is a hapax in the Odes, and may reflect the Odist’s desire to show that Christ has the appropriate
divine credentials for the task in hand. Besides their request for pity, which Batiffol states is similar to that of the 10 lepers in the gospel account of their healing (Luke 17:11ff.), the dead also plead in general terms that Christ deal with them according to his kindness. The noun *bsymw* is frequent in the Odes (7:3, 11:21, 14:3, 17:7, 19:1 and 11, 20:9 and 25:12) and in all but one of these occurrences is ascribed to the Lord. The only exception is found at Ode 19:11 where it is ascribed to the virgin, who is expressly in that Ode an agent of the Lord's salvation plan. It has been translated "kindness", in harmony with the appeal in the previous verse for pity, but this noun can also mean "sweetness". Thus the Odist deliberately contrasts Christ's relationship with Death, to whom he was bitterness (v12), and that with the dead, who implore him to deal with them according to his sweetness, using a pair of antonyms.1335

Moving from the general to the specific, the dead go on to ask that they be brought from the bonds of darkness and that the door be opened for them. This request marks a quite definite shift in the imagery which the Odist deploys, for the notion of Death as a monster, and Sheol as either his lair or belly, has been abandoned. In its place stands the concept of Sheol as a dark and gloomy prison, and Death as the gaoler, developed in the Enochic literature, and probably the most prevalent idea of Death and Sheol at the time of the Odes' composition. It underlies, for example, one of the best known passages from the whole of the New Testament:

> And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it .... (Matthew 16:18)

and one of the most disputed:

> For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring
us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit; in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison ..... (1 Peter 3:18ff.)

However, the origins of this concept of Death and Sheol are far, far older. It can be traced through the Old Testament in passages such as Job 17:16, in which Job ponders on the matter of hope and asks:

Will it go down to the bars of Sheol?

and 38:17, in which the Lord questions Job:

Have the gates of death been revealed to you,
Or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?

It is also to be discerned in Isaiah 38:10:

I said, in the noontide of my days I must depart;
I am consigned to the gates of Sheol for the rest of my years.

and especially in the Psalms, from which a single example will suffice:

O thou who liftest me up from the gates of death,
That I may recount all thy praises,
That in the gates of the daughter of Zion
I may rejoice in thy deliverance. (9:13-14)\(^{35}\)

It derives ultimately from what is arguably the earliest account of the Descensus myth, Inanna’s Descent to the Netherworld. Two versions of this have been preserved, one Sumerian, the other Semitic, which differ substantially but have two important features in common. The first is that there is an insistence on what might be deemed the security aspect. Both versions state that there are seven gates to the Netherworld which are attended by a gatekeeper whose dual function it is to restrain the dead from escaping and refuse admission to anyone who may attempt to release them. In the Semitic account, this is still further emphasized by the descending Inanna who threatens to:

Smash the door and break the bolt

and later that she will:
Smash the doorpost and remove the doors.

The second feature which the versions share is that the prison imagery is combined with a royal metaphor, for Inanna is queen of the Great Above and her sister, Ereshkigal, ruler of the Great Below. Thus there is a struggle between two opposing rulers in which one endeavours to wrest power and possessions from the other. This combination of prison and royal imagery, and the battle for control and ownership, will be further discussed in the comments on the final verse of the Ode.

Above, when considering the meaning of the 13th verse, it was stated that the releasing from bonds interpretations should be rejected on the grounds that there was no indication in the context that a change in the imagery used had taken place. Here, however, it is quite explicit and may be argued that the Odist, in switching his attention from Christ's dealings with Death to his discourse with the dead, has further marked the shift by making an adjustment to the imagery he employs.

With this enlargement of the picture of the Descent to include the notion of Death as the gaoler and Sheol the prison in which the dead are held, the two terms Death and Sheol have ceased to be synonymous and have become distinct once more. The superficial contradiction involved in depicting Death here as a gaoler, there as a monster, is not a problem for the Odist, who evidently varies his usage of imagery according to his purpose, and for whom the two strands of thought can sit happily side by side. The same is true of Aphrahat, for in Demonstration XXII 4, which was quoted above to illustrate the idea of Death as the devourer of the dead, the thought of Death as the gaoler
and Sheol as the prison is so closely interwoven with the monster theme as to be inseparable from it.

Charlesworth has an extended note on the mention by the dead of the door in v17, in which he comments that according to the intertestamental literature, there is no door or exit from Hell. This misses the point which the Odist is making, namely that whatever had been the case prior to the advent of Christ has been overturned. The inviolability and inescapable nature of Sheol may be a recurrent theme in the intertestamental literature, but the Odes reflect the belief of one for whom all previous patterns have been destroyed. The thought stops short of declaring that Christ himself is the door, but this idea is found elsewhere in the Odes in what will be shown to be a Descensus context.

The reference to the door, and the apparent allusion by the dead to the fact that Christ stands outside it, raises another important point which has serious implications for the wider issue of the Christology of the Odes, that of the extent to which their Christology may be said to be docetic:

And open for us the door,
Through which we can come out to you,

It seems legitimate to infer that if Christ stands outside the door behind which the dead are held, then his condition in Sheol differs in some way from theirs. Schulthess clearly recognized the ramifications of this and proposed that the preposition lwt in the second line of v17 be emended to ’m, thereby placing Christ in the same position as the rest of the dead. Strangely, this emendation is accepted by Labourt, who with Batiffol, has argued rigorously that the Christology of the Odes is docetic through and through.
However, Schulthess's attempt at removing the docetic nuances appears to be in vain, since in the following line the dead go on to say:

For we realize that our death does not touch you.

The meaning must be that Christ did not share the same condition as the dead, and perhaps was not really dead. It may be possible to argue that the present force of the participle $\text{mtqr}b$ in the phrase $1^{\text{st}} \text{mtqr}b \text{ lk } \text{mwtn}$ be emphasized (i.e., our death does not affect you at this moment). Thus the Odist envisaged that Christ had been brought back to life first before the rest of the dead, and is drawing a contrast between Christ's former state in Sheol and his present state at the time of the dialogue with the dead. But this suggestion ignores the most obvious sense of the verse and requires that a considerable amount be read into the text, especially the verb qrb.

Moreover, this verse does not exhaust all the possible docetic strains which can be heard within Ode 42. Christ speaks with "living lips" (v14) and, as was noted in the discussion of the interpretation of v13, does not appear to be bound as the rest of the dead are. He is at least sufficiently free to be able to release them from their bonds. Again, it could be contended that he had been freed first of all, but this is not what the text says, and is little more than conjecture. It is also difficult to see how the 10th verse can be interpreted without reference to its docetic tendency:

I was not rejected although I was considered to be so,
Nor did I perish although they thought it of me.

As with v17, the idea that Christ did not perish forever could be inferred, but the Odist had the facility to insert a qualifying adverb
into the text should he have wanted, and has evidently elected not to do so.

It is perhaps surprising then that after all this docetic language, the dead proceed to ask:

May we also be saved with you,
For you are our saviour.

This request appears to contradict directly the docetic sentiment of its predecessor, since it places Christ in exactly the same position of requiring salvation as the dead themselves. It further raises the questions, by whom and from what are they asking to be saved? The response to the latter in the cases both of Christ and the dead is clearly from the thrall of Death and Sheol, but the question, by whom, is more difficult to answer. For the dead, the answer has to be by Christ himself as the second line of the verse states this without equivocation, but for Christ, the agent of salvation remains to be found. Although God is not mentioned in this Ode, apart from en passant in the appellation "Son of God" at v15b, he is the only possible candidate for this role. Christian doctrine in general emphasizes God's agency in raising Christ from the dead, and it should be noted that both in Ba'al's battle with Mot, and in Inanna's encounter with Ereshkigal, the intervention of a third party was necessary to secure their triumph.3

What, though, is to be made of this contrast between the docetic tendency of the 17th verse, and the apparent repudiation of it in the 18th? It has already been remarked that most of the docetic language can be accounted for if the assumption is made that the Odist operates with the notion that Christ was made alive before the rest of the dead, but this is only an assumption. Whilst it is possible to find support
from the wider spectrum of early Christian writing for this view, the Ode which is the present subject of enquiry does not substantiate it. It is preferable to assert simply that there are docetic elements within Ode 42 and that these have probably arisen as a result of the fact that the Odist, in his attempt to express the idea of Christ's defeat of Death, is struggling with what is an inherently paradoxical notion in the first place. The Odes only reflect the position in which many early Christian writers found themselves of trying to find the correct words to say that in his death, Christ fully participated in the condition of the dead, but at the same time remained able to operate effectively. The difficulty in expressing this idea, which always entails differentiating in some sense between the condition of Christ and that of the dead, is exacerbated for a poet such as the Odist whose chosen medium of expression is in some respects more fluid than the prose writer’s yet in others more constrained.

Christ’s statement in vv19-20 resumes the thought begun in v14 of the founding of the underground Ecclesia:

Then I heard their plea,
And took account of their trust.

I placed my name upon their head,
Because they are free but they are mine.

The second line of v19 is reported in Manuscript N only, but as Charlesworth notes, its absence from Harris’ manuscript has probably been caused by parablepsis and it does provide the link in thought between vv19a and 20a. The verb הַשָּׁמַע in v19a, with Christ as its subject, carries the same connotation as that of the equivalent Hebrew verb’s usage in the Old Testament when God is the subject, that is to say that it includes the idea of a favourable response or reaction to what has been heard. The noun and possessive suffix qhwmn has
deliberately been translated "their plea", as this is clearly what is intended. The mention of "their faith" in v19b must be a reference to the confidence of the dead in Christ's ability to release them from Sheol, which is implied by their appeal. This point may be further brought out if the verbs npwq (v17b) and ntprq (v18a) are rendered with their full future force, "we will come out" and "we will be saved", rather than with the conditional sense adopted by most translators.

The reciprocal nature of the relationship between Christ and the dead is demonstrated by the report that in addition to considering their faith, Christ also places his name on their head. Whether or not there is a baptismal allusion here (the name being equivalent to the sign of the cross) is uncertain, but the Odist spells out the most important aspect of this imposition by giving a reason for it, as a sign of possession (v20b). The dialogue with the dead ends on a high note, it began with a reference to the dead as possessions of Death (v14a), it concludes with an emphatic statement that at the close of the Lord's séjour in Hell they belong to Christ.

The thought of the dead being free but belonging to Christ may just hint at yet another picture of Death which is part of the stock of imagery from which the Odist draws, that of Death as an enemy king who captures the dead and enslaves them. This concept is that which is held by Paul, especially in I Corinthians 15 where Death is explicitly so described (vv25-26) and is ultimately mocked because his kingship has failed (v55). It is closely related to the gaoler imagery, for the words bny h*r* which occur in v20b are frequently used in Syriac writing of the status of released prisoners. Thus there appear to be three images of Death used by the Odist, monster, gaoler, enemy king.
All are connected, and all are superseded by Christ who is poisoner, liberator and Lord.

The juxtaposition of freedom yet possession by Christ is common in Christian thought and is found elsewhere within the Odes themselves. In the 10th Ode, for example, the Odist tells of the charge which the Lord has given him:

To convert the lives of those who desire to come to him,
And to capture a good captivity for freedom.

and in the following line, Christ himself states:

I took courage and became strong and captured the world,
And it became mine for the glory of the Most High,
and of God my Father.

It is therefore appropriate to render the waw prefixed to the possessive particle dyly in Ode 42:20b with its adversative sense. Furthermore, Ode 42:7b-8 spells out in precise terms the reason why there is no contradiction between belonging to Christ and being free. It is because the bond which unites the believer to Christ is in essence one of love and not oppression:

And I threw over them the yoke of my love.

Like the arm of the bridegroom over the bride,
So is my yoke over those who know me."

The final verse of the Ode not only resumes the thought of v14, but also takes up a theme found still earlier on in the Ode before the Descensus material has been introduced, that of union with Christ. In the non-Descensus section of the Ode this union is between Christ and the believers, whereas in the Descent narrative it is between Christ and the dead. It seems therefore that the Odist, in bringing the thought full circle, admits of no distinction between the dead in Sheol and the living believers. The opening verses are a meditation by the
risen Christ over his own triumph and a declaration of his love for the believers, the closing verses spell out the activities which led to that triumph and declare Christ's love for the dead. Both the living and the dead experience Christ's love for them and share in his victory over Death.

The foregoing examination of the relationship between Christ and the dead in Ode 42 has revealed several important points. Above all, it has been shown to be a reciprocal relationship of which Christ is the initiator and driving force. No prior state of righteousness on the part of the dead is assumed by the Odist, whose concern is solely with their being responsive to Christ's invitation. The relationship which exists between Christ and the dead is built on his love for them as manifested in the invitation he issues, and their faith in his ability to respond positively to their appeal. Moreover, there is no distinction drawn between them and the living believers, with whom they are united by their participation in Christ's defeat of Death.

In addition, the understanding of the Odist's wider concept of the Descent has been enhanced, for other strands of imagery which he deploys have been identified. Chief among these is the notion of Sheol as a dark and gloomy prison in which the dead are held desperately seeking release, and Death as their gaoler. To this is closely related the idea of Death as an enemy king who has captured the dead and holds them as his possessions in Sheol, his fortified castle. As with the monster imagery used in the verses which treat of Christ's relationship with Death, these images have been shown to have an ancient pedigree, deriving ultimately from the myth of Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld. Lastly, docetic strains were detected in the language of
the Ode and the failure of the attempts by some scholars to remove them was also noted.

Having broken down the Descensus material into two separate parts, it is now fitting to provide a revised translation of it as a whole, and to make some concluding remarks about its overall meaning and relationship to the context in which it is set.

Sheol saw me and began to mourn,
And Death disgorged me and many with me.

I was vinegar and bitterness to him,
Seeping down through his every limb.

Then he lost control of his feet and head,
Because he could not endure my presence.

I made a congregation of living among his dead,
And addressed them with living lips
So that my speech would not be in vain.

And those who had died ran towards me
Crying out and saying, Son of God, have pity on us,

Deal with us according to your kindness,
And bring us out from the bonds of darkness.

Open for us the door,
Through which we shall come out to you,
For we recognize that our death does not touch you.

We too shall be saved with you
Because you are our saviour.

Then I heard their plea,
And took account of their trust.

I placed my name upon their head,
For they are free, yet they are mine.
Hallelujah.

It has already been stated that the Odist is not interested in presenting a single dimensional narrative of events. This is abundantly clear from the way in which the Descensus drama unfolds in
the 42nd Ode, but in order to be able to comment on his general concept of the Descent in this Ode it will be necessary to put those events into some sort of chronological sequence. The following timetable may be tentatively reconstructed:

1. Christ is gall and bitterness to Death, whom he gradually poisons (vv11a and 12-13).
2. Christ issues an invitation to the dead, who respond with a plea for release (vv14b-18).
3. Christ hears their plea, makes them live and forms them into a congregation (vv19-20 and 14a).
4. Death disgorges Christ and those who had been dead (v11b).

From the above, it will be noted that the dead are already thought to have been made alive by Christ whilst still in Sheol and prior to being disgorged with him by Death. Daniélou’s contention that this marks a clear allusion to the vivification of their souls preceding that of their bodies appears to go beyond what the Ode itself says and to introduce a distinction between soul and body which is nowhere else apparent within the wider collection of hymns. However, his remark that it is the imposition of Christ’s name which revives the dead though they are still in Sheol, is well founded.

It is difficult to be certain precisely when the disgorging of the dead, reported in the 11th verse, is thought by the Odist to have taken place. It is likely, in view of the fact that they are said to have been disgorged with Christ, that he considers it to have occurred at the time of his resurrection on the third day after the crucifixion. Here, the thought of the Ode is similar to that in Matthew 27:52, which tells of the raising of the saints (τῶν ἑκοίμησαν ἁγίων) at the time of the Passion. Plooij observes that the Odist, unlike Aphrahat,
but with Ephraim, does not differentiate between this resurrection and that which was expected to take place on the Last Day. The reason, he continues, is because the Odist transposes all of the Descent activity and achievements into the spiritual realm. Thus in speaking of the dead, he thinks not only of the physically dead, but of the spiritually dead who have been made alive by Christ. Plooij adds that the expression hoi zōntes was already virtually a technical term for the Christians in the New Testament.

This opinion is still further developed by Frankenberg who interprets the whole of the Ode, including the Descensus material, allegorically. He states, "Die Toten sind die in den Banden des sinnlichen schmachtenden Mächte des pathētikon, die von dem zum Christus gesalbten logistikon befreit werden; durch diese Tat wird es erst recht zum ἔγεμονικόν in dem kosmos der Seele, es tritt nun triumphierend die klēromonia an, zu der es Gott unter Verfolgungen und Trübsalen erzogen hat." Yet it seems that such an internalizing and psychological interpretation goes too far. The Descent is spoken of by the Odist at considerable length, and in terms which verge on the lurid in their detail. Sheol and Death are mentioned by name and are explicitly overcome by Christ. It is better to adopt the line taken by Bieder, and followed by Plooij, that the Odist has both the spiritually and physically dead in mind.

In the comments on the last verse of the Ode, it was noted that this is plainly indicated by the resumption of the thought of union with Christ which exists between both the believers and the dead. It is signalled in v18, in which there is a move away from the language of release from bonds specific to the condition of the dead, to the wider thought of salvation with the play on the root prq. Likewise,
the 14th verse, with its mention of the *knwšt* made by Christ, would not fail to remind the Odist's audience of the gathering of the Israelites in the wilderness during the Exodus and as such would be synonymous with salvation and rebirth into a spiritual life. But in all this thought of spiritual regeneration it remains obvious that in the Odes, spiritual life is built on the knowledge that by Christ, Death has been defeated. Salvation is, above all, salvation from Death.

For the Odist, the importance of the Descent cannot be overstated. He articulates in concrete historical detail the difficult theological concepts lying behind the death and resurrection of Christ. This is achieved using the language of reversal (the poisoning of the monster) and the depiction of Christ's activities and achievements in Sheol as an overturning of all previous patterns of human experience (the storming of the inviolable prison). The *Descensus* is conceived of as a single, unique event, the effects of which will be enjoyed forever by mankind. It is because of the permanent and definitive nature of this event that the Odist can apply its effects so readily to the dead in Sheol, the audience of the risen Christ and his own contemporaries, hearers of the ascended and glorified Christ, slipping freely from one group to another.

Thus the argument that the *Descensus* narrative represents an intrusion into the context of the meditation by the risen Christ on his triumph and declaration of the love he has for his believers is unsustainable. This material is included precisely because it tells of the battle in which Christ was triumphant and underscores the universality of his love. The Ode cannot be seen as anything other than a unity, a point which is made by Harris-Mingana who suggest that the Odist works throughout the hymn with Psalm 88. Just as Christ
triumphs over his persecutors, so he triumphs over Death. As the
bridegroom loves the bride and is united with her, so Christ loves
those who know him and is united with the dead, who are in turn joined
with the believers by the bond of Christ’s love. It seems that the
10th verse, in which Christ states:

I was not rejected although I was considered to be
And I did not perish although they thought it of me.

functions as the pivot on which the whole Ode rests, summarizing the
idea of triumph which has gone before it, and anticipating the outcome
of the events which are narrated after it. It encapsulates the spirit
of the entire Ode, which is a celebration of Christ’s victory over
Death.

The Descent material in the 42nd Ode has now been examined
thoroughly, and the vocabulary, imagery and ideas used by the Odist
have been identified, the most striking of which are the concepts of
Death as a monster and Sheol as a prison. The investigation of the
Descensus motif in the rest of the collection can proceed with these
findings borne in mind.
Notes to Chapter 1

(2) The imagery of the Bride and Bridegroom is also found in Ode 36, in which the Deceiver and Error masquerade as the true Beloved and his bride. Various identities have been proposed by the scholars for these figures, it is sufficient to note at this point that the characters form a part of the stock of imagery from which the Odist draws.

(3) The notion of the Church (i.e. the believers) as Bride of Christ, her Bridegroom, is commonplace in Christian tradition, based on the Old Testament use of this symbolism to describe Yahweh's covenantal relationship with Israel. Murray has further argued that from an early date the Fathers associated the celebration of this "marriage" with the Passion itself. He suggests that the piercing of Christ's side on the cross was soon understood in the light of the Genesis tradition about the emergence of Eve, Adam's wife, from his rib. Ephraim certainly saw it this way:

There came forth blood and water, which is his Church, and it is built on him; like Adam, for his wife was taken from his side. The rib of Adam was his wife, and the blood of our Lord, his Church. (Evangelium Concordans XXI 11)


(9) H. Grimme, Die Oden Salomos: Syrisch-Hebraisch-Deutsch (Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1911), pp.97-100.


(15) W. Frankenberg, *Das Verständnis der Oden Salomos* (Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1911), pp.35-6, 44 and 47-8.


(17) Jacobs contends that unexpected strains of near-Eastern mythology can also be heard in some Rabbinic texts, and that furthermore, these texts preserve the mythology more authentically than does the biblical literature. [I. Jacobs, "Elements of Near-Eastern Mythology in Rabbinic Aggadah," *J.J.S.*, XXVIII (1977), pp.1-11.]


(19) I am indebted to Dr. N. Wyatt of the Faculty of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh for the suggestion of this translation. Driver (op. cit., p.103) renders the lines:

*Its nature (is that) a sheep excites the desire of a lioness; lo! the appetite of a dolphin (is) in the sea.*


(21) Harris-Mingana observe (op. cit., p.35) that it could be argued that the fall of Helal is not a fitting parallel for the Descent of Christ, but that such an objection had already been met by Eusebius, who speaks of the angry demons crowding round Jesus like birds of prey just as they did round Lucifer (their italics) in the passage from Isaiah. The further usage of Canaanite imagery is significant.


(23) Ephraim, *Carmina Nisibena LVIII.*


(25) It should be noted that Batiffol's interpretation of this verse and the following one is strangely at variance with Labourt's translation on which it is based. Labourt quite evidently takes the Syriac  calloc as a reference to Death.

(26) Such a thought may not be absent from the wider canon of the Odes, for example, Ode 17:10 in which Christ again is the speaker reads:

And I shattered the bars of iron,
For my own irons had grown hot and melted before me.
It will be shown that these words are spoken in a Descensus context.


(28) The inherent otherness of Christ's appearance compared with that of Death will be commented on in the chapter on Ode 33.

(29) It seems odd that Frankenberg should take the line in the latter sense that Death was physically unable to bear Christ's weight (as may be inferred from his deployment of the Greek verb *ischuein*) in view of the fact that he understands the first line of v13 metaphorically rather than physically. Perhaps in the light of his overall understanding of the Ode, which regards the Descent as a spiritual event in the life of the believer, he has been influenced by the passage in Matthew 13:29 (parallel, Mark 3:27).

(30) The thought lying behind the mention of the dead as the possessions of Death will be returned to in the discussion of the meaning of the final verse of the Ode.

(31) This matter is overlooked by Daniélou, who translates the phrase *bspwt* ἅγια as "avec des lèvres saintes".

(32) As a general guideline to interpreting the Odes, it is helpful to think in terms of a series of related ideas which emanate from one central concept (in this particular case, Christ's achievements at the time of the Descent) but which do not necessarily progress from each other in linear fashion.

(33) Grimme's suggestion that the word *mrr* in v12 be translated by "Galle" rather than by the abstract noun "Bitterkeit" loses this paronomasia.

(34) This text will be discussed in greater detail at a later point.

(35) It should be noted that in these biblical texts, the equivalence of Death and Sheol is once more in evidence. Just as the Odist equates Sheol with Death in Ode 42, ascribing to it the sense of sight and throwing it into mourning (v11), so the Old Testament writers equate Death with Sheol, speaking of his gates.

(36) It is possible that v18 should be translated:

Let us also depart with you,
For you are our saviour.

This version assumes a deliberate play on the root ἐρχομομ, and obviates the need to find a saviour of the saviour. Nevertheless, the tension that exists between Christ being in Sheol yet untouched by death still remains.

(37) A similar debate is raging about docetism in the Fourth Gospel. The passage at 10:17ff. states that Christ has power to take up his life again (thus was not truly subject to human limitations?), though there is the qualification in v18 that this is in complete obedience to the Father. In contrast, it has been suggested that
John 19:35 is directed against the crude docetism which said that Christ did not really die.

(38) For further examples of this idea in Paul’s writing, see Romans 5:14 and 17, in which the Greek verb is \textit{basileuein}, and Romans 6:9, where the verb \textit{kurieuein} is used.

(39) This term “yoke” is also found in the gospels at Matthew 11:28-30:
\begin{quote}
Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.
\end{quote}
In the above text, the yoke is synonymous with burden, whereas in Ode 42 the thought of union is probably uppermost. The parallel is interesting, however, in that the gospel passage reflects the same idea that service of Christ imposes no hardship just as possession by Christ is freedom. This thought is played on extensively by Paul, particularly in the context of sin and righteousness (see Romans 6:16-18, 20 and 22). Murray observes (\textit{op. cit.,} p.167) that Christ is spoken of as “the yoke which gives freedom” by both Aphrahat and Ephraim.


(41) This factor undoubtedly has a bearing on the matter of the frequent changes of speaker which are found in the Odes. Once seen in this light, the changes can be accounted for and are not nearly as perplexing as many scholars have maintained. The whole subject of the interchange of speakers and implied union between Christ, the dead and the believers will be returned to in subsequent chapters.
Chapter 2: Ode 33
The aim of this chapter is to defend and amplify the arguments of those scholars who have put forward a Descensus interpretation of Ode 33. In view of the complexity of many of the issues which have been debated it is advisable to begin with a neutral or working translation, with some text critical notes, for use as a point of reference.

v1. Again Grace ran and left corruption
And descended on it to empty it.

v2. And he destroyed destruction before him
And corrupted all his work.

v3. And he stood on a hilltop and sent out his voice
From one end of the earth to the other.

v4. And he drew to him all those who obeyed him
And he did not appear as evil.

v5. But a perfect Virgin stood up
Who was preaching and calling and saying:

v6. Sons of men, return
And come, their daughters.

v7. And leave the ways of this corruption
And draw near to me.

v8. And I will enter into you
And bring you forth from destruction
And make you wise in the ways of truth.

v9. You will not be corrupted
Nor will you perish.

v10. Listen to me and be saved
For God's grace I am announcing to you.

v11. And through me you will be saved and blessed
I am your judge.

v12. And those who have put me on will not be oppressed
But they will possess incorruption in the new world.
v13. My chosen ones have walked in me
   And my ways I will make known to those who seek me
   And I will make them trust in my name.
   Hallelujah

Critical Notes
(a) ḥṭbw ‘grace, is a feminine noun.
(b) This is the normal meaning of the verb ṣbq, though it seems awkward in the context.
(c) The word ḥbl can be pointed in two ways. Either ḥbala, meaning the Corruptor, or ḥbala, corruption. Both are masculine nouns.
(d) Or, "him". A masculine suffix.
(e) The pa‘el theme of the verb ṣrq has a wide semantic range including the meanings to empty, lay bare, deprive, bereave, strip or render null and void.
(f) A masculine verb.
(g) Or, "he made utter destruction".
(h) This suffix could be reflexive, referring back to the subject, or refer to another party.
(i) As (h).
(j) Or, "the Evil One". The verb ḥḥzy could also be impersonal.
(k) A feminine adjective and noun.
(l) See (c).
(m) These verbs could have an imperative sense, "Be not corrupted, nor perish."

The greatest concentration of problems for the interpreter lies within the first two verses, and the debate hinges on the identification of the parties involved. Personified Grace appears in the opening verse, but seems to drop out of the picture immediately, unless she is to be identified with the perfect Virgin, who arises in v5 and continues to speak until the end of the Ode. The meaning of the verb ṣbqt (v1a) must be investigated since its basic sense (to leave) apparently does not fit in with what is said in the rest of the verse, and the subject of the second verse must also be determined. What is evident from these verses is that the opening scene is one of great destruction.

Harris was the first to translate this Ode in 1909, but he saw no trace of the Descensus doctrine within it. He renders the first four verses in the following way:
Again Grace ran and forsook corruption, and came down in Him to bring it to nought: and He destroyed perdition from before Him, and devastated all its order; and He stood on a lofty summit and uttered His voice from one end of the earth to the other: and drew to Him all those who obeyed Him; and there did not appear as it were an evil person ....

Harris makes only a brief comment on this Ode, suggesting that the subject of vv2-4 is Christ. It may be implied from the capitalization of the word "him" in the first verse that he assumes that the Odist has envisaged some form of indwelling of Grace in Christ, hence the shift from feminine verbs in v1, where Grace is the subject, to the masculine ones in vv2-4. He construes the verb יִתְצַי in v4b impersonally and proposes that there is a shift of subject in v5 from Christ to the perfect Virgin who, he states, is a figure for Divine Wisdom (the language of the Ode being very similar to Proverbs 8) or the Church.

The expression וָשֹּׁבַת לֶחֶבֶל is translated, "and forsook corruption", which Bernard at least perceives to be an equivalent of the Latin phrase sine exitio corruptionis, meaning "pretermitted corruption" or "was not corrupted". Bernard's understanding of Harris's version seems far from obvious and Bernard himself appears dubious as his own translation reads, "and left corruption". What seems more likely is that Harris had in mind the idea of a preliminary renunciation or repudiation of corruption by Grace, building up to the more violent scene of devastation which follows. His translation of וָשֹּׁבַת לֶחֶבֶל in v2 by the phrase "and He destroyed perdition" seems to suggest that he understands לֶחֶבֶל as a synonym for חֶבֶל (v1), and that the whole of the second verse is an emphatic expansion of the final verb תָּשְׁרוּ צַי in v1. Harris provides no clue as to the setting of the difficult opening...
verses, or to what is meant by "corruption". He is unable to connect these verses with what follows.

In his 1920 work with Mingana, Harris goes some way to resolving these difficulties by suggesting that both Grace and the perfect Virgin, who is Divine Wisdom, are figures for Christ. Harris-Mingana extend Harris' original list of parallels from Proverbs 8 and state that one principal motive of the Ode is the invitation of Wisdom contained therein. The translation of the problematic opening verses is quite dramatically revised from that of the 1909 edition:

v1. Grace again ran and left the Corruptor And came down upon him to bring him to naught:

v2. And he made utter destruction from before him And devastated all his array:

v3. And he stood on a lofty summit and cried aloud From one end of the earth to the other;

v4. And drew to him all those who obeyed him: And he did not appear as an evil person;

They consider that the repointing of ħbālā(contagious) to ħaḇālā(contagious), the Corruptor, enables better sense to be made of the verb šbqt, rejecting the emendation of this verb to ʾbsṭ proposed by Schulthess and followed by Labourt. However, the apparent discontinuity of action between the first and second lines of v1, which arises from translating šbqt with its basic meaning, is not addressed by them. They appear to understand that the subject of vv2-4 is the Corruptor, but make no comment on the interpretation of these verses.

Harris-Mingana are quite evidently perplexed by this Ode, and especially its beginning. "This Ode seems to begin abruptly and unintelligibly; we suggest that something has been lost at the
Having repointed ḥbl to obtain the meaning “Corruptor” they cannot identify this character and can only point to his reappearance “in just as perplexing a form” in Ode 38. Their observation that the language of the latter part of the Ode is sapiential is undoubtedly true. It is also to be expected, given that one of their theories concerning the Odes is that the whole collection is permeated with Wisdom language, possibly in a deliberate attempt to copy that of the canonical Solomonic material. Yet there is no real effort on their part to interpret the Ode as a unit and the opening verses are virtually ignored.

Charlesworth, in his more recent work on the Odes, shares Harris-Mingana’s view of the opening verses of Ode 33 and expands on it slightly. He remarks that Grace, which is feminine in form, cannot be the subject of vv2-4 since the verbs are masculine, but that the Corruptor is indicated as the subject by the mention of the Evil One in v4. If, though, Grace is a figure for Christ (a view which is held by virtually all the commentators who believe the Odes to be a Christian composition, and Charlesworth is included in this group) then the change from the feminine verbs in v1, which are dictated by the specific feminine subject Grace, to the masculine forms of v2, where the subject is included in the verb, is not at all surprising. It is not even necessary to make assumptions about the provenance or language of composition of the Odes, backed by external evidence from other Syriac writers, to show that masculine and feminine language and even attributes were used to describe God, and by extension Christ. The 19th Ode, in which God is explicitly described as having breasts, makes this point eloquently.
In fact, this interpretation of v2, with the Corruptor as subject, presents more problems than it solves. For to whom do the "him" and "his" (or "it" and "its") lying behind qdmwhy and twqnђ in v2 refer? There are three alternatives, all of which are unsatisfactory. Either, these suffixes are reflexive so that the meaning is that the Corruptor/corruption, identity unknown, was so terrified at the advent of Grace that he/it committed an act of self-destruction. This seems unlikely if he/it is also the subject of vv3-4, and remains active, as Charlesworth believes, and Harris-Mingana imply. Or, the suffixes refer back to Grace, so that the Corruptor destroyed Grace's array in her presence. This is most definitely not Charlesworth's view given that the suffixes are masculine and he had earlier contended that feminine Grace cannot be the subject of a masculine verb. Nor is it likely to be that of Harris-Mingana, who, while accepting that Grace is a figure for Christ, elsewhere in their work capitalize pronouns and possessives in such instances to indicate that Christ is meant. The third possibility is that these suffixes introduce into the picture yet another masculine character, who is never named, and does not reappear. This is highly improbable.

This brief representative survey of the non-Descensus interpretations of this Ode is not exhaustive, but it does show that such interpretations run aground on two counts. Firstly, in their inability to make sense of its opening verses, and secondly in their failure to relate these verses to the remainder of the Ode. It is hardly surprising then that an alternative interpretation was sought by commentators from a very early date. The first of these was put forward by Barnes, just one year after Harris's editio princeps, and his translation is worth quoting in full:
v1. Again Grace hastened and left Hades (corruption), for He descended into it in order to empty it.

v2. And He destroyed Abaddon before Him, and brought to an end all his power.

v3. And He stood upon a lofty summit (i.e. in Hades) and sent forth His voice from one end of the land unto the other.

v4. And He drew to Him all who obeyed Him.

v5. And He did not appear as a malefactor, (v5) but He was as a perfect Virgin standing and making proclamation and crying out and saying,

v6. Turn ye, sons of men, and live, ye daughters.

v7. And forsake the ways of this Hades and draw nigh to me; and I will enter into you and will bring you forth from Abaddon.

v8. And I will make you wise in the ways of truth; ye shall not be corrupted neither shall ye perish.

v9. Hear me, and be ye saved, for I speak among you the grace of God: and by me ye shall be saved, and shall be blessed.

v10. I am your judge, and they who put me on shall suffer no harm, but they shall gain the new world that is incorruptible.

v11. Mine elect walk in me, and I make known my ways to those that seek me, and make them trust in my name.

Hallelujah.

Barnes' translation departs quite radically from those examined above. Convinced that the Ode speaks of the Descent, he makes this explicit by rendering the words ḥb l ʿ (v1) and ḏdn ʿ (v2), "Hades" and "Abaddon". He assumes that Grace and the Virgin are designations of Christ, and that Christ is the subject of the first five verses until he speaks in the guise of the Virgin in v6. Verses 4b and 5a form an antithetical couplet, as indicated by the connecting particle ʿl. The term ḏy ʿ in v4b does not refer back to ḥb l ʿ in v1, as Harris-
Mingana and Charlesworth maintain, but rather in the negative, to Christ.

Barnes overcomes the difficulty of translating Şbqt, removing the need to emend this verb, by rendering the waw at the beginning of v1b, "for". Thus the setting of the whole Ode from v1b onwards occurs before the action in v1a and takes the form of a flashback to the scene of destruction and promise of salvation to the captives. The verbs in vv1b-5, before the content of the Virgin's proclamation is given (vv6ff.), are almost pluperfect in sense, and the mysterious twb in v1a, ignored by other commentators, can also be accounted for if it is assumed that Christ's departure from Hades (v1a) was as hasty as his arrival (v1b).

The merit of Barnes' interpretation is that it makes sense of the Ode as a literary unit, which is not true of the attempts noted earlier. The text is interpreted as it stands, without recourse to emendation, and this is achieved using ideas which are consonant with those in the rest of the collection. For this reason, Charlesworth's contention that there is no support for the translation of ḥbl as Hades is not strictly justified.

The strengths of the Descensus interpretation evidently commended it to scholars other than Barnes. Connolly hinted at this in his rebuttal of Harnack's theory about the composition of the Odes, and Grimme, Frankenberg and Bernard all took it up and developed it in their own way.

Grimm, supposing the Odes to have been composed in a Jewish milieu and in Hebrew, suggested that the original Hebrew text of v1 read:
He takes הָדָּר (v1), with the underlying Hebrew שֵׁם to refer to the
Underworld, based on the Septuagint translation of Psalm 16:10, where
שֵׁם is translated in this way, and assumes that בּדָנ' in v2 is a
parallel to this. This allows him to remark that the only possible
subject of vv2-4 is Grace (הָדָּר), and he is able to account for the
switch from the feminine verbs of v1 to the masculine of vv2-4 in the
Syriac text by postulating an intermediary Greek translation of the
Hebrew (where there was no differentiation between the masculine and
feminine forms of the third person verb) through which the Syriac
came.

This theory, though possible, is of little help in determining the
meaning of the present Syriac text (which is all that is available),
for the implication must be that the supposed Syriac translator
understood the beginning of the Ode quite differently, or misunderstood
it entirely. If, as Grimme maintains, Grace is the obvious subject of
all the first four verses, why then does the Syriac translator obscure
this by using masculine verbs?

Grimme also considers the present Syriac text to be corrupt. The
verb שִׁבָּנְתָּה (v1), he claims, is meaningless in the context, and he emends
this to שִׁבָּנְתָּל ("senkte ..... nieder"). Likewise, on the grounds that
previous scholars had been unable to explain the relationship between
Grace and the Virgin who allegedly stands proclaiming in v5, he
proposes that the letter d has been omitted from the word בְּתַיְלָת -
virgin, and that the text should read בְּתַיְלָד -
"among the perfect generation" reflecting the Hebrew בְּתַיְלָת -
Thus Grace is not only the subject of the first five verses, but also
the speaker from v6 onwards, this is supported by his reading of v10b, "Ich, die Gnade Gottes, rede unter euch", rather than "Ich rede Gnade ......". He interprets the whole Ode in terms of Grace's message of promise and hope to an elect community. The phrase \( w^3 \) 'thzy 'yk by\( \ddot{s} \) (v4b) does not refer to Grace, but is an inadequate attempt to render the Hebrew \( w^3yn nr'h kr\ddot{x} \) which refers to the perfect community.

There are two major problems with Grimme's interpretation. Firstly, although he is able to account for the presence of the masculine verbs in vv2-4 in the Syriac text, he makes no attempt to interpret the text in its present state, which, in the absence of a supposed Hebrew or even Greek version, is all there is to go on. Secondly, whilst he manages to resolve the problem of relating Grace to the Virgin in the fifth verse by making what is admittedly only a modest emendation disposing of the Virgin altogether, he cannot identify Grace and the perfect community whom she addresses in Hades, nor suggest the background from which these ideas were drawn. His interpretation is only workable if his theories of an underlying Hebrew original, intermediate Greek version and corrupt Syriac text are all accepted from the outset. Such theories should only be adopted when all other endeavours to interpret the text as it stands have been exhausted. In view of the fact that the debate over the priority of the Syriac in general is still raging, and there is no real effort to address the Syriac text of this Ode in particular, Grimme's interpretation should be set aside, at least until all other avenues have been explored.

In the same year as Grimme, Frankenberg proposed a spiritualized reading of the Ode, which although not strictly speaking a Descensus interpretation, has many points in
common with that tradition. He argues that Grace is the subject throughout the Ode, appearing in the form of preaching Wisdom from v5 onwards. Having previously descended on Christ, she comes down from heaven a further time (twb) into the individual’s soul to destroy the corrupting and tempting influence of the sensual world, and to bring instead the truth of the invisible world. He contends that the Syriac translator has completely misunderstood vv2-4, for the original Greek clearly had charis as the subject throughout, and has mistranslated ἀπεθάνει, which stood in the original text, by ἕβης (vi), which is meaningless in the context (24). Frankenberg also considers that vv4b and 5a form a couplet and refer to Grace (with Barnes), which originally conveyed the idea that Grace did not appear inert, but rather stood as a complete Virgin who preached tirelessly. The Syriac ἕβης is a possible, though inaccurate, translation of a Greek term such as ἀτόνος or ἀσχημόν, and the adjective τελεία, rendered by γμύρτι, means complete in the sense of fully efficient.

Like Grimme, Frankenberg relies heavily on the supposition that the Syriac text is a translation, and the same criticisms levelled at Grimme apply to him too. The opening verses detail a destruction of the most violent kind and this would tend to point away from such an internalizing interpretation, though it may be appropriate to the exhortations and promises of the latter part of the Ode. This will be further investigated at a later point.

Bernard (25) also perceived a somewhat different tone in the Ode’s closing verses and suggested that the Odist has employed the technique, seen elsewhere in the collection, of transforming the Harrowing of Hell narrative, and its effects (vv1-4), into a call to the living of his own day, that they too may be delivered from destruction (vv6-11). This
call is made by the Church, for whom the Virgin (v5) stands. He follows Harris's 1909 translation of the first four verses very closely, making only slight vocabulary changes. Perhaps oddly, in view of the fact that he sees the verses as a reference to the Descent, he agrees with Harris that \( n\text{ḥt bḥ } \) speaks of the indwelling of Grace in Christ, and not the descent of Christ into corruption.

As noted above, Bernard understands the phrase 汐\( bqt lhbl' \) to mean "was not corrupted", with Grace/Christ as the subject, on the basis that the incorruptibility of Christ was especially emphasized in the Descent tradition. He takes the expression \( w1\ S'hzy 'yk byš' \) impersonally, with Harris and Grimme, "and there did not appear as it were an evil person", assuming that this is an allusion to the tradition that only the righteous featured in the Descensus.

Bernard observes that the latter part of the Ode which contains the preaching of the gospel of redemption by the Church, mirrors the opening section. Just as "Christ saw no corruption" (v1), so the Church bids her hearers to "forsake the ways of that corruption." (v7). Similarly, "He destroyed perdition from before Him" (v2) and the Church promises, "I will enter into you, and will bring you forth from perdition." (v8).

The chief difficulty with Bernard's reading of this Ode is that although it recognizes a development from the Descent at the start into a message which appears better suited to the living in the closing verses, it creates a quite definite break between vv4 and 5. Bernard himself tries to overcome this by commenting that the Church extends Christ's invitation in Christ's own words, and reflects his experiences. However, the presence of the particle 汐' at the beginning of v5 indicates a much more organic relationship than this between the two
verses, which is severed when a new character (the Church) is introduced.

The overall trends in the interpretation of Ode 33 by previous scholars have now been outlined, with the main problems highlighted and their solutions examined. There have, of course, been many other interpretations, but in general they have been but small variations of those investigated above. Before returning to the text, it will be useful to summarize the findings of this survey.

There are two common failings of the non-Descensus interpretations. Firstly, they have a profound difficulty in expressing the meaning of the first four verses, in identifying the characters involved and in elucidating their connection with one another (i.e., who does what to whom). Secondly, and as an inevitable result of the above, they show an inability to relate these verses to the remainder of the Ode, which characteristically has led either to the suggestion that something is missing from the opening, or to ignoring the extant opening altogether (29).

On the other hand, the Descent interpretations have at least addressed the problems of the opening verses. Bernard provided the setting for these verses, and what followed, but in so doing violated the Ode's inherent unity by proposing the introduction of the Church in v5. Grimme and Frankenberg saw the present Syriac text as corrupt, and, following their overall theories on the composition of the Odes, posited the medium of a Greek version, from which the Syriac had been translated, in order to account for the masculine verbs in vv2–4. This was found to be unsatisfactory, and in any case, leaves the meaning of the Syriac text unsolved. Their theory is therefore to be discounted, though Frankenberg's view, that the Ode represents an appeal to the
individual soul to forsake the material world and concentrate on the spiritual, should be borne in mind, but only, it seems, in interpreting the latter part of the Ode. Perhaps Barnes' translation is the least open to criticism, but his full understanding of this Ode can only be guessed at in the absence of any supporting notes. With all these observations and hazards in view, it is now time to return to the text.

As noted above, the only sustainable interpretation of the opening verses of the Ode has been the one which sees contained therein a reference to the Descent, and identifies Grace with Christ. However, this has never been rigorously and successfully applied throughout the Ode. The primary concern must now be to show that the Descent motif runs through the whole hymn, and to consider the way in which this is developed by the Odist. In order to demonstrate this and to be certain that there are no thoughts which exclude the notion of the Descensus, and indeed some which positively point to it, it will be necessary to examine the Ode in detail verse by verse.

Verse 1

\[ r\h^t \ d\yn \ t\h^b \ t\h^b, \ w\h^b\h^t \ h\h^b \ h^b, \ b^h \ yk \ dt\h^t \ h^b \ w\h^t \ h^t \ b^h \ t\h^b \ t\h^b. \]

Any difficulty in supposing that the feminine noun \( t\h^b \)\(^t\) refers to the male figure of Christ is imaginary rather than real in poetry of this kind (see the above comment on Ode 19). Barnes's solution to the problems of translating the verb \( \h^b\h^t \) and accounting for the presence of the word \( t\h^b \) in the first line should be accepted.

The meaning of the word \( h\h^b \) depends largely on its pointing. It is the object of the verb \( \h^b\h^t \), of which Grace is the subject. Given this relation to Grace, it must be the case, if the Ode is to be seen as
a Descensus Ode, that this word reflects in some way what is known of Christ’s activity during the Descent from the rest of the collection. Of this, three facts have been established. Firstly, that there is an incursion by Christ into Sheol. Secondly, that there is some sort of engagement between Christ and Death. Finally, that Christ liberates those who are held captive in Sheol. Clearly, the last of the three has no bearing in this context, but the first two are both possibilities. Unfortunately, this does not help solve the issue since the meaning “Corruptor” would be an appropriate title for Death, just as “Corruption” would be a fitting description for Sheol.

To some extent, the difficulty of deciding on the correct pointing of the word, and in turn judging whether it refers to Death or Sheol, reflects the confusion noted elsewhere between Sheol being variously the lair of the Death monster, and thus quite distinct from the monster, or the belly of the monster, and thus a part of it. Both translations, “Corruptor” and “Corruption”, should be kept in mind for the present until one or other appears more suited to the context. Neither is excluded by the following phrase wnḥt ʾbh. The explicit translations, “Death” or “Sheol” are inappropriate, however, on the grounds that the Odist has sought to create an atmosphere of mystery in his use of the word “Grace” for Christ, which should be preserved in the translation of ḫbl. Furthermore, this word and its cognates occur elsewhere in the Ode (vv2, 7, 9 and 12) and the more general terms “Corruptor” and “Corruption” better highlight the word play involved than the explicit and exclusive “Death” and “Sheol”.

The final point of interest in this verse is the meaning of the last word tsrgywhu, a feminine verb, of which Grace must be the subject, with a masculine suffix, referring to the masculine ḫbl. The
pa'el theme of the verb srq has a wide range of meanings, but the basic sense appears to be of an emptying or deprivation of a possession or attribute. It can be used of a voluntary renunciation (hence Charlesworth’s translation’131) but it is more common in cases where the possession or attribute is forcibly removed by another party (so Barnes and Grimme’32). This by extension implies damage and destruction (Labourt’33, and Bauer’34) or a rendering null and void (Harris’35, Harris-Mingana’36, Emerton’37, Frankenberg’38, Bernard’39, and Harnack’40). Here, where Grace is the subject and the objective pronominal suffix stands for the Corruptor/Corruption, the idea is that Christ plundered the Corruptor/Corruption of his/its possessions, the dead, and in so doing destroyed him/it. The English verb, "to spoil" commends itself as an appropriate translation of srq in that it captures perfectly the complementary ideas of plundering and damaging.

Verse 2

\[ w'wbd \ l'bdn \ mn \ qdmwhy \]
\[ w'hbl \ kh \ twqnh \]

The shift from the feminine verbs of v'l to the masculine ones here led some earlier scholars to suppose that the feminine noun Grace of v'l could no longer be the subject. In view of the fact that a good case has been made for Grace being a title for Christ, this would seem to be incorrect.

Charlesworth, following Harris-Mingana suggested that the opening phrase \[ w'wbd \ l'bdn \] with its play on the root 'bd should not be construed as a verb and direct object, but rather as the emphatic expression, "he caused utter destruction". Harris-Mingana observe that this should be noted as a Semitism’41. It seems that their
translation has been influenced by the earlier decisions that \( \textit{hbl} \) in v1 must be the Corruptor, and that this character is the subject in v2. It is unclear from their comments how they relate these two verses to each other and to what follows. This failure has already been discussed.

However, a strong argument can be advanced for taking \( w'wbd'hbdn \) as verb plus direct object if this verse is seen as a parallel to the first. That Grace is the subject of both verses, and that some kind of destruction is evidently envisaged in the two from the vocabulary used, would tend to point in this direction. In this case, just as Grace/Christ came down on the Corruptor/Corruption to bring him/it to naught, so he destroyed Destruction, which with the Descensus motif in mind, then becomes a figure for Sheol.

This in turn is of some help in settling the translation of \( \textit{hbl} \) in v1, for elsewhere in the Odes, whenever Sheol explicitly features, it is always paired with Death, for whom the Corruptor, rather than Corruption would be a suitable title (see Odes 15:9, 29:4 and 42:11). There is no specific order, Sheol has the priority in Odes 29 and 42, Death in Ode 15. The expression \( mn \ qd\mbox{why} \) refers back to the subject Christ/Grace and is probably an equivalent to \( mn \ qdm \ pr\mbox{wp}y \) in Ode 15:9, in which the root \( \textit{hbl} \) also occurs.

This root (\( \textit{hbl} \)) reappears in the second line of v2, in verbal form. Connolly notes that the literal meaning of this verb is, "to spoil" and renders the line, "and spoiled all its belongings"\(^{12}\). Whilst his observation that the spoiling of Death or Hades is emphasized by Aphrahat in his treatment of the Descensus in Demonstration XXII 4 (and for that matter, by other writers dealing with this subject) is valid, it is probably better to retain the
translation "corrupt", in order to preserve in English the word play which the Syriac has on this root in vv1 and 2. As to the translation of $twqn$ by "belongings", Connolly states that the literal sense of this word is "preparation", but that it naturally applies to any kind of acquired property. This view is apparently shared by Harris-Mingana, though their English translation, "array" connotes more the sense of preparations than it does belongings, as does the root $tqgn$ listed for $twqn$ by Payne Smith and Brockelmann, but it does not positively exclude the latter. Destruction/Sheol, to which the possessive suffix refers, could certainly be described as "possessing" the dead, but by the same token, could also be deemed to have been "prepared" or "constructed". If the latter is correct, perhaps the Odist is thinking of the fortifications of Sheol, constructed to imprison the dead, elsewhere spoken of in the Odes as "doors" and "bars of iron" (Ode 17:9 and 10).

The difficulties experienced in choosing between various translations of Syriac words in vv1 and 2, and in attempting to establish at which point Death features, and at which, Sheol, is a reflection of the Odist's consummate skill as a poet, and of the extent to which these terms are interchangeable. It is a pattern witnessed throughout the collection.

Verse 3

\[ wqm \ 'l \ rys' \ rm' \ wsbg \ qlh \n \ mn \ swpyh \ d'r' \ w'tm' \ lswpyh \]

A valid objection to the Descensus interpretation could be made if it were shown that there is no evidence to support the idea that the topography of Sheol was thought to include a hill. However, according to Tromp, in his work Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether
World in the Old Testament, there are two biblical texts which contain allusions to the presence of mountains in Sheol. In the chapter entitled "The Location and Scenery of Sheol", he cites Dahood's translation of Psalm 42:7ff., in which other well known characteristics of the Underworld are present:

My soul is very sad
because I remember you,
From the land of descents and nets
From the mountains at the rim;
(or from the mountains of torment)
Where deep calls to deep,
at the peal of your thunderbolts;
and all your breakers and your billows pass over me.

Likewise, Job 17:1ff which Tromp renders:

It is the grave for me.
Indeed the two hills are before me,
And my eyes pass the night in the twin miry depths.

He contends that the term tlym, in the Job text, which he translates, "hills" is a reference to the two hills bordering the entrance to the Nether World in U.T. 51: VIII: 4 which, he states, are a common conception among Western Semites. Whether or not Dahood's and Tromp's translations of the biblical passages are accepted, the influence of Canaanite ideas about Death and the Nether World on the Odist has already been demonstrated.

The mention of the hilltop and the emphasis on the scope of Grace's call (from one end of the land to the other) remind the reader of another biblical text, this time the call of Wisdom in Proverbs 8:1-4. Thus the scene is set for the introduction of the Virgin in v5, who speaks in the language of Wisdom.

Verses 4-5

wngd lwth lkl bylyn dl'stm'w lh
wl? thzy byk by6
These two verses will be discussed together as the connecting particle \( l' \) at the beginning of v5 suggests they should be. This relationship is breached by those commentators who assume that Grace is not the subject of v4, and to a similar degree, by those who consider that Grace and the Virgin are separate and distinct from each other.

The picture is expanded in v4 with the introduction of another party, kl \( ylyzn d'stmw \). The identification of this group with the dead is the missing third piece of the Descent jigsaw, namely Christ’s interaction with those who are held captive in Sheol, the dead. The verb \( stmw \) is more likely to be active in meaning (to obey) than passive (to be heard). It indicates that in spite of the universality of Grace’s call, the positive response of obedience is required on the part of the hearers before she can continue her address.

Labourt emended the second line of v4 to read \( thzy lwzn yk ry\) (et il leur apparut comme le chef), disposing of the problematic bys. This is an unnecessary emendation for the text is intelligible as it stands, but the difficulty which it has occasioned for commentators is apparent in the number of translations which have been noted above. Since bys must refer to Grace, any other subject of the verse having been discounted, there are three possible translations, "evil", "an evil person" and "the Evil One". Perhaps in view of the linkage between this verse and v5, in which the perfect Virgin appears in contrast (\( l' \)), a noun is called for. The choice of definite or indefinite noun must hinge on discovering what the Odist has intended to convey by the inclusion of this information. Clearly it is more than simply a vehicle to allow him to introduce the figure of the Virgin, for this
would be unnecessary as the scene has already been set by the mention of the hilltop in v3. It seems possible that the specific point being made is that Grace, in her appearance, was not only a perfect Virgin, but also unlike the Evil One, who, as a character in Sheol, becomes readily identifiable with the Corruptor. Both the Descensus Odes (e.g., 15:9 and 42:11) and Aphrahat's important passage on the Descent testify that the appearance of Christ had an immediate and devastating effect on Death and, as such, must have been inherently other than his own.

Having identified Grace with Christ, and remarked on the relationship between vv4 and 5, the Virgin must also be seen as a figure for Christ. Thus the translations of Barnes above and Bauer, "sondern sie stand da als vollkommene Jungfrau" are likely to be the most accurate. However, the thoughts contained in the rest of the Ode led some commentators to suggest that there was a shift in emphasis at this point.

Bernard proposed that the Virgin was a figure for the Church, preaching to the living, issuing Christ's invitation in her own words. Yet this identification cannot be correct, for although Bernard is able to find evidence of the Church portrayed as a Virgin, it violates the relationship with v4 and, as Bruston argues, the statement in v11 "δύνκως ἡ λήτη ἀποφθέγματος" excludes the idea that the Church is the speaker. Even if Charlesworth's contention that, "the concept of the Church was indissolubly united with the risen Lord, especially in poetry like the Odes" is correct, there is no evidence in Christian literature to support the view that the role of judge was ever arrogated for the Church, or that Christ and the Church are identical.
The distinction which Charlesworth implies between the risen and pre-resurrected Christ may enable some form of shift to be seen from v5 without a break as such, but this kind of late, refined theological distinction is essentially alien to the thought of early writers like the Odist, whose belief in the resurrection as fact led to all statements about the pre-resurrected state and activity of Christ being made in its light.

The question of whether or not there is a shift in emphasis from v5, and by extension, of how apt the rest of the Ode is as a message to the dead in Sheol will be returned to when the whole Ode has been examined.

With the introduction of the Virgin, the Odist proceeds to give the content of the speech initiated in v3. This resumption of thought is a further argument in favour of assuming that Grace and the Virgin are one and the same, and that both are figures for Christ. The preponderance of feminine terminology for Christ in these verses justifies the English translation of the masculine Syriac verbs of vv2-4 by feminine ones.

Verses 6-7

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{bny} & \quad \text{hs} \quad \text{tpnw} \\
\text{wbntrw} & \quad \text{tyyn} \\
\text{wbwq} & \quad \text{wrbth} \quad \text{dthbl} \quad \text{hn} \\
\text{wtrqrbw} & \quad \text{ly}
\end{align*}
\]

The Virgin's speech begins in language reminiscent of the summons by Wisdom, just as her hilltop platform in v3 is among those chosen by Wisdom in Proverbs 1:20-21 and 8:1-4. The plural imperative \textit{tpnw} has been translated "turn", but the idea of a restoration of property to its rightful owner, which is also contained within the meaning of the ethpa'al of the verb \textit{pn} is not entirely absent here (cf. Ode 42:20).
The noun הַרְחָבָּה, in the plural in v7, is fairly common in the Odes, and frequently refers to the way of the Lord (or one of his agents) in which the believers are to walk henceforth. Here, the audience is exhorted by Grace/Wisdom to leave the ways of הַבָּל הַנַּה, who by implication must be opposed to the Lord. That "ways" are better described as being of a person than of an object, lends support to Harris-Mingana's and Charlesworth's translation of הַבָּל הַנַּה by "that Corruptor". The experience of Christ (םָבִית לְהַבָּל, v1) is mirrored in the instruction which he delivers to his audience (םָבִית הַרְחָבָּה לְהַבָּל הַנַּה מַעַרְחַבְוְי, v7).

Verses 8-9

כּ בַּקְוָמָה
וּפּ בַּקְוָמָה בַּקְוָמָה
וּהֲמַקְוָמָה בַּקְוָמָה דָּרָרָה

1' תְּתְבָּלָה
1' תְּבָדַעְו

The climax of the previous dialogue is reached in the form of a threefold promise for the future (v8). The first part surpasses the thoughts expressed by Paul, of the believer putting on Christ (Romans 13:14, Galatians 3:27), and of the Odes themselves of being united with the Son (Ode 3). It also exceeds the effects of the Descent detailed elsewhere by the Odist. The uniqueness of this promised relationship with Christ is reinforced by the deployment of the pe'al verb ז, a hapax in the Odes, the only other occurrence of this root being in the aph'el theme at 7:1. The second promise, that the Virgin will bring her audience from Destruction, will be the completion of the activity begun in drawing them to her. If Destruction here is to be identified with Sheol as in v2, then this is the answer to the plea in Ode 42:16b-17a (in which there is a two way dialogue between Christ and the dead) and
is made possible through Grace's activity in the first two verses. The final vow is couched in similar terms to the exhortation of Wisdom in Proverbs 9:6. Although the dead do not speak in this Ode, there is a similarly reciprocal relationship between them and Christ to that in Ode 42, and the Odist underscores this by ensuring that the Virgin's commands are echoed by her promises. This relationship, which demonstrates the connection in the Odist's thinking between obedience and fulfillment, is further indicated by the juxtaposition of the Virgin's promise "to enlighten you in the ways of truth" (v8c), with the command "to leave the ways of that Corruptor" (v7a).

The same connection is apparent too in the ninth verse, since the two future verbs can also bear an imperatival meaning. Moreover, the first (1' tthblwn) reflects the command in v7a, the second (p l' t'bdwn) reiterates the promise in v8b. The mirroring of the promises to the Virgin's hearers in this verse with the activity of Grace in vv1 and 2 should again be noted.

Verses 10-11a

The two imperatives of v10a may be thought to encapsulate the content of vv6-9, which now emerges as a plan of salvation. The commonality between obedience and fulfillment is spelled out explicitly in the imperative Jtprqw "be saved", which is at once a command, and the fulfillment of obedience to it. This is still more explicit in v11a, where the agent is also specified (supporting the identification of the Virgin with Christ), and the complementary words thwn θwbn' occur.
Elsewhere in the Odes prq (and its derivatives) and ḫtwb are applied not only to the dead but to the Odist himself, and his own community of living believers. This may justify the notion that the Odist has created an almost imperceptible shift in the audience whom the Virgin addresses which is either greater than or different to the dead in Sheol.

There are two ways of interpreting v10b, assuming that ḫybwth d'lh is the direct object of ḫmmlx. The first involves taking ḫybw here in exactly the same way as in v1, so that the meaning is that the Virgin, who has been identified with Grace, is announcing herself. Bearing in mind the above observation that some shift may have occurred in the Virgin's audience, it is possible that the phrase ḫybwth d'lh stands as an ellipse for the whole of the activity of Grace in the opening verses of the Ode. Thus the idea is that the Virgin informs her present hearers that she is a divine agent and tells them of what she, as Grace, has already accomplished (vvlff.). The other possibility is that ḫybw here means something slightly different than in vvlff. and that the notion of grace as a divine quality, that is to say God's graciousness, rather than a divine agent is uppermost. The wider context indicates in this case that divine graciousness in salvation and blessing is what is meant.

These two alternatives are not mutually exclusive, for in the latter, salvation and blessing have as both their grounds of possibility and their pattern the achievement of Grace in vvlff (cf. Ode 34:6). The distinction between a divine quality (graciousness) and a divine agent (Grace) is probably artificial to the Odist's thinking. What is important is the mention of God (ḫybwth d'lh) which furnishes the Virgin with the appropriate divine credentials to issue commands.
and promises, and assures her bearers of fulfillment. The preposition b after the verb μαλλον emphasizes the point that this is not a casual speech (in which case I might have been fitting) but a direct address with dramatic consequences (cf. v8a).

Verses 11b-12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>dynkwn</th>
<th>بَنِيَ</th>
<th>يَتَي</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ṭhlnwn dibšwnny ٍ ntlmwn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ٍ nqwn bימ ٍ hdt ٍ hbl</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The picture is further broadened in these verses with the introduction of the legal language dynkwn and ntlmwn. The verb ṭlm has been variously translated by the scholars, but its basic meaning is of unjust treatment in a legal context. That it is difficult to imagine these words being put into the mouth of the Church has already been remarked on. However, they are wholly consonant with what is known of Christ’s role as Judge of both the living and the dead from the New Testament and other early Christian literature.

The idea of judging is uncommon in the Odes, occurring only here and at Ode 35:3 (dyn – judgement) yet the wider salvation context indicates that the underlying function of the Judge is not merely as a decider between right and wrong, but as a Vindicator of the one who is in the right. Thus it seems that the Odist has in mind not the threat of judgement, but the promise of vindication. Both of the main verbs in v12 are in the future tense and are therefore to be reckoned with the promises of the previous verses, as describing other facets of salvation. The first line of v12 makes it clear that vindication is achievable for those who have “put the Virgin on” and perhaps this is an elliptical and cryptic way of describing obedience to the Virgin and acceptance of her message. Whatever the meaning here is, the
action of putting the Virgin on clearly has a beneficial effect, that of future vindication. Thus the Virgin is both the Vindicator and the grounds for vindication.

The precise meaning or result of the vindication, and in turn the Odist's understanding of salvation, is spelled out in v12b with the repetition of the Ode's key term 'hbl', here in the negative. Some scholars have understood the words 1' hbl with 'm' hdt and, taking the whole phrase as the object of the verb nqawn, have translated, "they shall possess the new immortal world". But Harris-Mingana followed by Charlesworth, Emerton and Bauer preferred to take 1' hbl on its own as an abstract noun, the object of the verb, translating "they shall possess incorruption in the new world". This latter translation takes account of the preposition b prefixed to 'm' and is probably more meaningful in the context. The Odist seems to have in mind a future for those who have "put the Virgin on" which is both incorrupt and part of a whole new order.

Verse 13

The apparent shift into the past tense at the beginning of this verse, followed by two further future verbs seems discordant with the general pattern of the Virgin's invitation of the issue of commands and assurances. This is reflected in the number of ways the major commentators have translated the verse. Harris, followed by Harnack, Bernard and Labourt overcome the difficulty of the inappropriate reference to past events by translating the first verb hlkw with a present, while retaining a future sense for 'wd' and 'tkl. Similarly,
Grimme and Barnes render all three verbs with present meanings. Harris-Mingana and Charlesworth retain the perfect for the first verb and future for the remaining two verbs, but leave the difficulty occasioned by such a translation unresolved. However, the problem was overcome by Frankenberg, followed by Bauer and Emerton, who recognized that the plural imperative was identical to the third person plural perfect of the Syriac verb and therefore translated $\text{hlkw}$ as an imperative and $\text{yd}^\text{c}$ and $\text{tkl}$ as future promises, thus in keeping with the overall tenor of the Ode.

The Virgin's instruction to "walk with me" recalls the idea common in the Old Testament of walking with God, with the dual connotation of obedience and fulfillment. Mention of the elect or chosen ones is also found in Odes 4:8 (where the reference is to the archangels), 3:18 (where Christ states that the elect have been set at his right hand), 23:2 and 3 (with the echo of Wisdom 3:9 and 4:15, and apparent parallel of the elect with the holy ones of v1) and 22:8 (in what is probably a Descensus context). It seems unwise to assume from these examples that the Odist is operating with a fully fledged doctrine of election in mind. The parallel between the exhortation to walk with Virgin in the first line and the promise that she will make known her ways in the second suggests that the elect ones should be taken as a parallel to "those who seek me".

The second line of this verse is very similar in thought to the third line of v8 (see comment ad loc.). Here "my ways" are substituted for "ways of truth", the verb $\text{yd}^\text{c}$ for $\text{hkm}$ and "those who seek me" for "you". This final point of comparison again strengthens the notion that the Virgin is addressing an audience wider than or different to the dead in Sheol. The resumption of ideas expressed in previous
verses of the Ode is also apparent in the implicit reciprocity of action initiated by the Virgin between herself and her hearers (my chosen ones ..... those who seek me) and in the connection between command and fulfillment. In the latter case, the instruction is expressed positively and is Virgin-oriented (as in vv7b and 10a) rather than negatively and Corruptor-oriented (as in v7a). Thus effectively the Corrupter drops out of the picture completely and only the Virgin remains, taking her rightful place, based on Grace's victory, in the foreground, with sole claim to be heard.

Charlesworth contended that, "The idea of making 'the chosen ones' to trust is poor theology, and inconsistent with the general tone of the Odes." He therefore rendered the final phrase of the Ode, "And I will promise them my name", commenting that this is a possible translation of the aph'el theme of the verb tkl<IBa The majority of scholars, however, appear happy to retain the essentially causative meaning of this verb, albeit in a somewhat modified state. It seems too that Charlesworth's observation that such a meaning is poor theology and inconsistent with the general tone of the Odes is misplaced. Having given a series of assurances to her hearers, the Virgin makes a final promise of confidence in her name. In choosing the aph'el theme of the verb, the Odist makes it clear that even in the matter of trust, the Virgin is the driving force, the initiator, not only the grounds for confidence, but the awakener of that confidence, and it is on her that her audience is utterly dependent. A similar thought occurs at Ode 6:7 where it is implied that even praise cannot take place without first being given by the Lord.

The mention of "my name" supports the identification of the Virgin (who is not otherwise named in the Ode) with Christ and must be
construed in the light of the ancient world understanding of a name as an indicator of personality, qualities, actions, status and essential nature.

Having examined the Ode verse by verse, it is now possible to provide a revised translation and make some concluding remarks on the picture of the Descensus contained therein.

v1. Again Grace ran and left the Corruptor, For she had descended on him to spoil him.

v2. And she destroyed Destruction before her, And corrupted all its array.

v3. She stood on a hilltop and called out From one end of the land to the other,

v4. And she drew to her all those who obeyed her. Yet she did not appear as the Evil One

v5. But stood as a perfect Virgin, Who was preaching and calling and saying;

v6. Turn, 0 sons of men And come, you, their daughters,

v7. Leave the ways of that Corruptor And approach me.

v8. I will enter into you, And bring you out of Destruction, And enlighten you in the ways of truth.

v9. You will not be corrupted, Nor will you be destroyed.

v10. Obey me and be saved, For I am proclaiming among you the grace of God,

v11. And through me you will be saved and blessed. I am your judge,

v12. And those who put me on will not be treated unjustly But will possess incorruption in the new world.
v13. Walk with me, O my chosen ones.
And my ways I will make known to those who
seek me.
And I will make them trust in my name.
Hallelujah.

The content of the Ode may be summarized in the following way. It begins with the hasty departure of Grace, who stands for Christ, from the realm of Death (v1a) and immediately flashes back to detail the destruction he caused whilst there (vv1b-2) and his summons to the dead (vv 3-4a). The appearance of Christ is described as that of a perfect Virgin (vv4b-5a) whose words are reported in a series of commands and related assurances to his hearers (vv6-13).

The central character remains the same throughout the Ode. Christ appears first as Grace, the protagonist in a narrative, and then as the Virgin, the speaker issuing an invitation. The attempts of previous scholars to suggest that the introduction of the Virgin in the fifth verse signals a break in the thought have been shown to be misguided, but the question remains as to why the Virgin is mentioned at all. Why does the Odist, having used the term Grace to designate Christ at the beginning of the hymn, then choose a different title, the Virgin, in the latter verses?

The construction of the Ode, its overall coherence and unity, the careful mirroring of the commands and promises in the latter part with the activity in the opening all militate against this description of Christ's appearance being some sort of parenthesis or casual digression. So too does the fact that the description is stressed, for it is given in both positive (as a perfect Virgin) and negative (not as the Evil One) aspects. There must be a quite definite reason lying behind the mention of the Virgin, and it is legitimate to infer that
this must be bound up with the overall picture of the *Descensus* which the Odist has sought to communicate.

The general thrust is clear and unequivocal. Death has been defeated by Christ. The language of the opening verses may be poetic in nature, with the characters at first sight difficult to identify, but the choice of vocabulary, and in particular the repetition of the key word ἰη, paint a picture of the utmost clarity. Christ has battled with Death and emerged the victor. This triumph is underlined in, and forms the basis for, the commands and promises which he then issues to his hearers. These are expressed in various ways, but have at their heart the simple message to leave Death and live. This Ode demonstrates, as so many others do, the writer's deep seated conviction that in Christ, Death has been overcome, and through him, those who have heard his message are assured of eternal life.

Returning now to the question of the motive for the mention of the Virgin and of how she enhances this overall message, it is worth looking again at the observation made by several scholars that the Virgin's address in Ode 33 is very similar in language and tone to that of Wisdom. Yet the similarity extends to include the task which both perform. In the book of Wisdom, Wisdom appears in her classical role, preaching tirelessly, and promising immortality. This is precisely the function of the Virgin in Ode 33. By describing Christ's appearance as that of a perfect virgin, the Odist recalls Wisdom and all that she stands for, thereby prefiguring the address which he is about to deliver.

Winston* has suggested that Wisdom is undoubtedly a hypostasis in that she is a quasi-personification of certain attributes proper to God. Such personification of qualities or concepts also took place in
Egyptian, Sumerian and Akkadian culture and in some cases the hypostases evolved into independent deities. He continues that the book of Wisdom contains resonant overtones of the goddess Isis tradition and its author has skillfully adapted the Isis aretalogies to depict the central character, Wisdom herself.

In the light of the Descensus interpretation that has been proposed for Ode 33, it seems that Christ's portrayal as the perfect Virgin may further recall the more specific traditions of the descent of the virgin goddess from Mesopotamia and Greece. The Sumerian myth of Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld has already been discussed in relation to the prison imagery which features in the 42nd Ode. In Greek culture, the story of Persephone (daughter of Demeter, goddess of the harvest and fruitfulness) who was abducted by Hades (god of the Underworld) was also well known. However, of particular interest to this study is the depiction of Anat, wife/sister of Ba'äl in the Canaanite Ba'äl cycle.

Despite the fact that Anat appears as Ba'ål's consort in the text, and their coupling as a bull and a heifer is explicitly described in one passage, there is a repeated stress on her virginity. Kapelrud offers an explanation for this. He states that the term virgin was probably used of a goddess in order to emphasize her everlasting youth and beauty and, to a degree, her power. Even the wild and sexually insatiable goddess Ishtar (= Inanna) was called "the virgin Ishtar".

In the previous chapter it was noted that it is Anat who mourns for Ba'ål after he has been captured by Mot and she who eventually slays him so that she can rescue her husband. Kapelrud stops short of proposing that Anat is Ba'ål's alter ego in the Ugaritic texts, but remarks that god and goddess certainly operate as a unit and share an
identity of purpose in their opposition to the forces of chaos, sterility and death symbolized by Yam and Mot. Naturally, neither could secure a return to fecundity alone, rather they had to work together, male and female were both needed. Thus it seems that while Christ may be indirectly identified with Ba'al in the final hymn, here in Ode 33 he is perhaps obliquely represented as the female element of the partnership, Anat, who preaches in the language of Wisdom.°°°.

This in turn raises the issue of the nature of the audience whom the Virgin addresses, since Wisdom speaks not to the dead, but to the living. It was noted above that the closing verses of the Ode indicate that there could be a shift in the Virgin’s audience. Evidence for this may be found in the use of language such as prq and ṭwbn (v11), when this is compared with the usage of these terms elsewhere in the collection. It is also apparent in the move away from the specific and immediate use of the second person plural verbs of the hearers to more general third person expressions such as “those who have put me on” and “those who seek me” (vv12 and 13).

Further discussion of this issue was postponed until a greater understanding of the Ode as a whole had been achieved. Having now reached this point, it is evident that any efforts to define precisely the place at which such a shift occurs are misguided. The thought of the Ode is so closely interwoven, with each new verse developing a previous thought, and the repetition of key terms indicating that the Odist has never moved away from his central theme, the defeat of Death and resultant promise of immortality, that such an attempt is rendered impossible. It is likely that the Odist, operating with a post-resurrection perspective, and convinced of Christ’s resurrection as fact, does not clearly distinguish between the risen Christ addressing
himself and his contemporaries, and the pre-resurrection Christ addressing the dead. This pattern is firmly established within the Descensus Odes, in which the Odist slips freely from discussing the situation of the dead to that of himself and his fellow believers. Thus it is incorrect to think in terms of an actual shift in the Virgin’s audience, for there is never a point at which either the living or the dead are excluded.

Related to the identification of the Virgin in this Ode with Wisdom, and of her hearers with the living as well as the dead is the question of whether an internalized interpretation of the latter part of the Ode (i.e., that of Frankenberg for the entire Ode), in which corruption has a moral as well as physical dimension is appropriate. Investigation of this matter was also deferred until a better appreciation of the thought of the Ode had been gained.

Support for Frankenberg’s reading may be adduced from the parallel with Wisdom, for her promise of immortality is preceded by the exhortation to live righteously. It is implicitly present too within the Ode in the mention of the Evil One (v4b), who has been identified with Death, and in the promise of vindication for the one who has put the Virgin on (vv11b-12a). However, the Odist displays a consistent lack of concern over the whole issue of sin (the word itself never occurs), repeatedly concentrating instead on the thought of eternal life, the hallmark of early Christian literature. This is emphatically demonstrated in Ode 33:12b in which the assurance of vindication is immediately followed by the double promise of the possession of incorruption in the new world. With this in mind, corruption and salvation are far more likely to refer to death and immortality, the idea of moral decay being at best secondary.
This Ode, like so many others, has one central idea, which generates a series of concentric thoughts. In this case, that is of Christ's defeat of Death, which opens up the possibility of eternal life. The idea itself does not change, but the area in which its effects are felt becomes wider and wider. All of this is expressed by the repetition of key terms and the perfect mirroring of Christ's achievement with his commandments, and of his commandments with his promises. The Descensus interpretation of Ode 33 has successfully been shown to be the only one possible for the opening verses, and detailed examination of the hymn as a whole has revealed not only that it is sustainable throughout, but that its central theme is developed by the Odist in precisely the same way as in the other Descensus Odes.
Notes to Chapter 2
(1) It seems legitimate to suggest that Grace is personified since she runs, and interacts with corruption in some way.


(5) Harris-Mingana (*ibid.*, p.374) give the following textual notes:
   (a) Lit. but again.
   (b) i.e. the Corruptor.
   (c) Lit. And He (sic) destroyed the destruction.
   (d) Or, as the Evil One.


(9) Ibid., p.377.


(11) His translation differs only marginally from theirs, most notably in v1 where he renders the difficult verb šbqt, "dismissed", which still leaves a tension between the two parts of the verse. He also weakens the force of tsrgwyh (v1b) quite considerably. Charlesworth is presumably convinced that there is no reference to the violence of the Descent, by choosing to translate this verb, "renounce".

(12) It should be admitted that Charlesworth confines his notes to textual criticism rather than exegesis, so his understanding of the Ode as a whole is not, strictly speaking, stated. Nevertheless, these objections seem well founded.


(14) This word is not capitalized in Barnes' text, but must be a typographical error.

(15) There are no accompanying notes. The following comments are made on the basis of Barnes' translation only.

(17) R. H. Connolly, "The Odes of Solomon: Jewish or Christian?," J.T.S., XIII (1912), p.302. He regards v2 as the key to this interpretation, comparing Aphrahat's Demonstration XXII 4 which treats of the Descensus.


(19) The choice of Hebrew verb here seems somewhat peculiar, given Grimme's emended Syriac (𒉺𒋝) and German niedersenken/niederlassen. Perhaps ᵇq is a misprint for ᵇq, which is closer in meaning to both the Syriac and German verbs.

(20) Grimme argues that the Greek translator of the Hebrew has translated ḫsd (a masculine noun, followed by third masculine singular verbs in agreement) by charis, a feminine noun, followed by third person singular verbs which could be either masculine or feminine. The Syriac translator, working from this Greek model, has used ṣbwt, also feminine in Syriac, to render charis, but, faced with the choice of translating the Greek verbs of vv2-4 as feminine or masculine, has mistakenly chosen the latter.

(21) The initial b is not the first letter of the noun, but rather the preposition b.

(22) Grimme, op. cit., p.30.

(23) W. Frankenberg, Das Verständnis der Oden Salomos (Giessen: Alfred Topelmann, 1911), pp.29-31, 42 and 92-3.

(24) Though ᵇq can translate one of the meanings of the Greek verb aphiemi, Frankenberg implies that apheken in this context means "to send forth" and compares v3, in which Grace sends forth her voice throughout the land.


(26) The description of the Church as a virgin is not uncommon in early Christianity. Bernard cites an example from the Epitaph of Abercius, Harris from Clement of Alexandria (Paed. I 6) and Charlesworth from the fourth vision of the Shepherd of Hermas.

(27) Though the translation he gives reads "left corruption".

In order to avoid an excessive number of notes to this verse by verse analysis of the Ode, the general page references will be given against the first mention of the commentator's name only. An exception will be made in cases of direct quotation, and where a more precise reference is required.

Of the previous scholars who have adopted the pointing ḥabālā'—the Corruptor, only Drijvers, who argues that the Odes are an anti-Manichaean polemic and that the Corruptor here and more particularly in Ode 38 is intended to represent Mani, is able to identify this figure. [H. J. W. Drijvers, *East of Antioch: Studies in Early Syriac-Speaking Christianity* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1984), p.167.]


The opening lines of *Demonstration* XXII 4 read:

When Jesus, the Slayer of Death, came and put on a body from the seed of Adam, and was crucified in His body and tasted death; realizing that He had descended to him, he (Death) was shaken from his place and trembled at the sight of Jesus . . . .
It is possible that the word 'yk stood before btwl̄ gmyr̄ in the original text of v5 and that it has been omitted through parablepsis with the preceding line.

Quoted by Charlesworth, *op. cit.*, p.121, note 7.

Grimme's interpretation of this line, in which he takes the expression ṣbw̄ d'lb̄ to be in apposition to 'n̄, has already been discussed. It arises in part from his emendation of v5 so that it contains no mention of the virgin. This emendation of the fifth verse has been shown to be unnecessary and the word order here suggests that his understanding of the 10th verse is also incorrect.

Harris-Mingana (*op. cit.*, p.376) note that Connolly emends dykn̄ to znkn̄ ("your armour") and that Barth prefers to read dykkn̄ ("yours"). Though Harris-Mingana consider that Connolly's emendation is appropriate, neither his, nor that of Barth, is likely to be correct since the legal metaphor is clearly intentional as the use of the verb ṭlm shows.

The verb ḫr̄ occurs frequently in the Odes with a direct object and is generally used to describe something which the believer/speaker/Odist has done, will do or is exhorted to do (the tenses vary) in relation to an attribute, agent or gift of the Lord (Odes 3:1, 4:6 and 8, 7:4, 13:3, 15:8, 20:7, 21:3, 23:1 and 3 and 39:8). Of particular interest are the occurrences at 15:8 (in a Descensus context) and 20:7, where the objects of the verb are ḥbl̄ and ṣbw̄ dmr̄, respectively, and especially at 4:6 where the object is ṣbwtk and the verb ṭlm is also found.

The New Testament usage of the verb enduein (e.g., Romans 13:14, I Corinthians 15:53ff, II Corinthians 5:3, Ephesians 4:24) will be discussed more fully in the chapter on Ode 17, with reference to the clothing metaphor in Odes 21 and 25. However, that at Galatians 3:27 in a context dealing with justification should be noted here.

For example, Harris, Bernard, Frankenberg, Barnes, Labourt and Harnack. Grimme, who also construes the line in this way, renders the word ṭlm by "Leben", assuming the underlying Hebrew ḫl̄d.


In her sorrow at her daughter's departure, Demeter refused her gifts, bringing famine to the earth. But Persephone could not be released from Hades' clutches because she had eaten a pomegranate whilst in the Underworld. A compromise was effected by Zeus; Persephone stayed with Hades for a third of each year, then returned to her mother.

(58) It has already been shown that the Odist feminizes God in the 19th hymn and the depiction of the Holy Spirit as Mother in Syriac Christianity is well documented. There are potential allusions to the latter within the Odes at 28:1 and 36:3. Murray tentatively alleges that the idea of the feminine Spirit only waned in the Syriac Church "because the human need to find the feminine close to the Godhead became increasingly satisfied by devotion to Mary and the Church, mutually typifying each other." [R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge: University Press, 1975), p.319.] Certainly a good deal of ancient Near Eastern mother/fertility goddess material (in Syria, via the cult of Atargatis) was successfully incorporated into the developing Christian image of the Virgin Mary.
Chapter 3: Ode 22
v1. The one who makes me go down from on high,  
And come up from below;

v2. Also gathers the middle things,  
And refers them to me.

v3. The one who scattered my enemies  
And my adversaries;

v4. Also put me in charge of the bonds,  
So that I could undo them.

v5. (You are) the one who defeated by my hand  
the seven headed dragon,  
And you placed me at his very core so that I  
could destroy his seed.

v6. You were there and you helped me,  
Everywhere your name surrounded me.

v7. Your right hand obliterated his evil venom,  
And your hand levelled the Way for your  
believers.

v8. You chose them from the graves,  
And separated them from the dead.

v9. You took dead bones,  
And clothed them with flesh.

v10. And to those who were not stirring,  
You gave vitality.

v11. Indestructible was your Way, and your face.  
But you brought your world to destruction,  
So that everything could be dissolved then  
renewed,

v12. And too that the foundation of everything  
might be your rock.  
Upon it you have built your kingdom,  
And it has become the abode of the holy.  
Hallelujah.

The task of interpreting the 22nd Ode should be made easier for the reader since it is one of the five cited in the Pistis Sophia. There are three extant recensions of the whole Ode; two in Syriac and the one in Coptic, the latter being widely acknowledged to have been derived from a Greek edition. In addition to citing the Ode, the Pistis Sophia gives both a gnostic targum and a detailed commentary on it.
On the whole, the quotations which the *Pistis Sophia* makes from both the Odes and biblical Psalter are reasonably faithful. It is only in the targums and commentaries that the more developed gnostic speculation is found, with every possible term being altered to give a gnostic sense. The importance of the *Pistis Sophia* to the study of the Odes should not therefore be underestimated. It is usually thought to have been composed during the third century, and as such represents the earliest available understanding of five Odes from the collection.

Already then a possible line of interpretation has been suggested for Ode 22. At the least it must be recognized that the hymn is susceptible to a gnostic interpretation. Newbould has argued, not only on the strength of its deployment in the *Pistis Sophia*, but from other evidence of gnostic ideas which he detects within the wider collection, that this Ode depicts the theme of the gnostic Redeemer’s descent from the highest realms of the spiritual world to the world of matter. Other commentators, prompted by the mention of the seven headed dragon in the fifth verse, have sought to identify it with a specific historical figure, and to interpret the Ode against a possible background of persecution. The well known problems surrounding the date of composition of the collection makes such an operation hazardous, and it is difficult to see how this interpretation can be applied throughout the whole of the hymn. Frankenberg, in line with his overall understanding of the wider collection, therefore prefers to interpret this Ode as a description of the presence of the *nous* or *logos* in the human soul, and the battle it must wage against evil passions.

There are clearly a number of possible interpretations for the Ode. Another, which several scholars have hinted at, but few have fully
explored, is that of Christ's *Descensus ad Inferos*. The main concern of this chapter will be to defend this interpretation and to examine the way in which the Descent theme is developed by the Odist, with the findings from the surveys of Odes 42 and 33 borne in mind. Before embarking on this journey, it is appropriate to mark out the route which will be taken.

It is often remarked in studies of the Odes that one of the main obstacles to a satisfactory understanding lies in their frequent interchange of speaker. In the case of Ode 22, the speaker apparently remains the same throughout, but his identity is uncertain and can only be surmized from the content of the hymn. The matter is further complicated here because the addressee is also unnamed, and at first is spoken of indirectly as "he who", but is later addressed directly as "you". Such problems evidently demand that the Ode be fully interpreted before any identifications of the speaker and his addressee are made, and that any attempt to interpret must proceed, as far as is possible, with the absence of presupposition as to their identities. For this reason, the departure point must be an investigation into the five sets of imagery or figures which are used in the first ten verses of the Ode. These five may be broadly defined as the cosmological imagery, the bond imagery, the figure of the dragon, the thanatological imagery and the figure of the way. At a glance, this imagery and the figures seem unrelated to each other, so a further condition imposed on the interpretation must be that it is capable of being sustained for the entire Ode. It is only when the first ten verses have been shown to exclude all possible meanings other than the Descent, and the identities of the speaker and addressee have become clear, that the final part of the journey, an examination of the Ode's closing verses,
can take place. This will focus on two issues. One will be the Odist's depiction of the Descent as a renewal, and its connection with eschatological hope for the future, and with the language and imagery borrowed from accounts of the creation in Genesis and other biblical texts. The second will concentrate on his usage of the charge to Peter at Matthew 16:18ff., noting support for such a usage in a Descensus context from the Syriac tradition.

[A] The Cosmological Imagery

He who makes me go down from on high,
And come up from below,

He who gathers the middle things,
And throws them to me.

This is a literal translation of the version preserved by Burkitt's Syriac manuscript. Harris' Syriac simply omits the word ihyn in the second line of v2<sup>19</sup>, but the Coptic differs slightly. It is rendered by Macdermot in the following way:

He who brought me down from the high places which are above has brought me up from the places in the depth below.

He who there has taken those that are in the midst has taught me of them.<sup>17</sup>

For the moment, discussion of the preferred reading for the second verse must be suspended, since the most crucial issue for the interpreter rests with determining the meaning of the three phrases "on high" or "high places", "below" or "places which were deep down" and "the middle things". More accurately, it depends on the localities with which the latter two terms are to be identified, for there is general agreement as to the meaning of the first.
Newbold has argued that the term Midst or Middle was used by the Gnostics to refer to the Hebdomad, or region of the seven planets, which was situated directly above the earth, or world of matter, separating it from the realms of light. Thus in his interpretation, the Syriac term 
\[ mwrm \] refers to the realms of light, \( t\, h\, r\, y\, t \) to the world of matter, and \( m\, c\, r\, y \) to the regions between. The descent which is depicted in these verses is that of Christ, who is the speaker, as the gnostic Redeemer. He comes down from heaven to earth in order to free the sparks of light trapped in the darkness of matter. Likewise, Grimme also thinks that the three terms refer to heaven, earth and the aeons situated between, but that the first line of vi alludes to the midrashic notion that the human soul was stored in a celestial treasury awaiting union with a body. He considers that the Jewish believer is the speaker, but does not comment specifically on the meaning of the second line or of v2. In contrast, Frankenberg sees no reference to any kind of descent whatever in these verses, but believes that the localities involved probably allude to the position of man's nature as the border (methorion) between angels and demons.

Yet it seems obvious that some form of a descent is envisaged, and an alternative to Newbold's concept of the Ode's cosmology would be to take the phrase "below" or "places which were deep down" as a reference to the Underworld, the region beneath the earth, and to construe the term for the middle things as a reference to the earth itself, which stands between heaven and the Underworld. In this interpretation, the descent which is envisaged could be that into Sheol, and the speaker Christ.

A similar argument over the meanings of these various terms and phrases is also found in a different language in another early
Christian text. At Ephesians 4:8ff. the Greek phrase eis ta katotera merē tēs gēs is pivotal in judging whether or not a Descensus interpretation is appropriate. The debate surrounding this New Testament passage is so complex that it provides little help to the present enquiry, but perhaps the Odes themselves can be of assistance in deciding how tht and mcyt are to be understood. Unfortunately, each of these words is found only once more in the collection. Charlesworth translates Ode 34:4-5, where the term tht occurs, in the following way:

The likeness of that which is below
Is that which is above.

For everything is from above,
And from below there is nothing,
But it is believed to be by those in whom there is no understanding.

The commentators seem reluctant to identify the places lying behind the terms "above" and "below" except for Bernard who, using an expression borrowed from Milton, states in his interpretation of Ode 34, "earth but the shadow of heaven". Such an identification of tht with the earth is confirmed by Payne Smith who lists "earthly things" as a possible meaning of mcyt, the word found in Ode 22.

The single other occurrence of the term mcyt is at Ode 30:6. Harris-Mingana translate:

And it came unlimited and invisible;
And until it was set in the midst they did not know it.

This verse forms part of the debate over the Odes' language of composition, which raged immediately following their discovery. Connolly observes that the expression "set in the midst" is hardly of Semitic origin, but that it represents an attempt to render the Greek es to meson tithēnai. Abbott countered that the Syriac translator
has used the same Syriac term in the Peshitta as that which is found in the Ode, to correspond to the Hebrew "in the middle" at Numbers 35:5. Although the language debate is beyond the scope of this enquiry, Connolly's further reply to Abbott is significant. In it, he maintained that the expression is used in the biblical text to refer to a real local middle and is not a true parallel to the usage in the Ode, which has an idiomatic non-local sense. Thus it seems that this other instance of mc'yt at Ode 30:6 has no direct bearing on the usage in the 22nd Ode. At best, the wider context in Ode 30, which speaks of the living fountain of the Lord (variously understood by the commentators, depending on whether they regard the Odes as a Christian composition or not) indirectly suggests the presence of the fountain on earth.

Comparison of these two words ῥήτητ and mc'yt with their other occurrences in the Odes has proved largely inconclusive. It is now appropriate to consider which reading of the second verse is to be preferred, since this might provide a clue as to the identity or locality of the latter term mc'yt. Some of the commentators are evidently perplexed; Harnack, for example, states simply that he does not understand the verse, but prefers the Syriac. But Gunkel is convinced that both the Syriac and the Coptic manuscripts reveal a misunderstanding of the Greek text of the Ode from which they were translated. He suggests that the original verb in the first line was kathairō "to purify", and not kataireō which the Coptic has read. Thus he renders the verse:

He who purifies that which is in the middle,
Throws it to me.
The term middle, he states, is used in gnostic terminology and the *Pistis Sophia* to denote the present world (*contra* Newbold) and that its purification refers to the separation of what is good from what is bad.<br

Bruston, in contrast, wishes to promote the priority of the Syriac/Aramaic and has contended that the Coptic version has arisen as a result of a misreading of the verb *rd* in place of *rm* in the second line of the original Semitic text. He goes on to observe that the meaning of *rm* here is "to give as a share". His interpretation is apparently endorsed by Bauer, whose German translation reads "und es mir überweist".<br

Curiously Newbold, who argues for a gnostic interpretation of the Ode, rejects the *Pistis Sophia* variant. He maintains that his understanding of the word *mc*yt as the place between the world of matter and the realms of light (the Hebdomad, in gnostic thought) is strengthened by the mention in the Syriac versions of a gathering in the first line. The Hebdomad is the region of the seven planets which are assembled and sent to meet the descending Redeemer, a theme which is also dealt with in Ode 23:17 and is a feature common to many gnostic texts.<br

Against Newbold it may be argued that the verb *knš* and its derived noun *knwšt* are found elsewhere within the Odes in contexts which suggest that the thought of an assembly of believers is the dominant idea. This is the case at Ode 10:5, and of particular interest are the instances at Ode 17:15 and 42:14, both of which appear to be in a *Descensus* context. The verb *rm* in the second line of Ode 22:2 clearly has a wide semantic range and, it seems that if Bruston and Bauer are correct with their notion of referral or attribution, which
could also be inferred from the Coptic version of the whole verse, this line may anticipate the bestowal of authority over bonds which is spoken of in v4.

It is probable that on the basis of the evidence from its opening verses alone, a verdict of "not proven" must be returned in the case of the Descensus ad Inferos versus the other interpretations of Ode 22, of which there are several. Harris-Mingana's assertion, "we are confident that Christ Himself is the speaker in this Ode, and apparently Christ ascending from Hades" is obviously not shared by all commentators. It seems that at the crux of the debate are the doubts as to the speaker's identity, and the Odist's understanding of the universe. The matter can only be resolved when the wider context of the Ode and its imagery have been studied.

[B] The Bond Imagery

The one who scattered my enemies
And my adversaries;
Also put me in charge of the bonds,
So that I could undo them.

The bond imagery is immediately preceded by an emphatic reference to the scattering of the speaker's enemies in the past tense, which contrasts with the gathering of the middle things described in the second verse. The overthrow or abasement of enemies, sometimes called persecutors, is a common enough feature in the Odes, but it is especially evident in contexts dealing with the Descent. The denunciation of the persecutors in the Passion context which comes before the Descensus narrative of the 42nd Ode has already been discussed in the chapter dealing with that Ode, but to take a further example, at Ode 29:5 the speaker states:
And I humbled my enemies,
And he justified me by his grace.

This thought is echoed later in the 10th verse:

And he overthrew my enemy by his word,
And he became like the dust which a breeze carries off.

On closer reading, the 29th Ode appears to be a psalm of thanksgiving. The speaker expresses his gratitude for the exalted and powerful position which he now occupies through the activity of the Lord and his agents. In particular he states:

And he caused me to ascend from the depths of Sheol,
And drew me from the mouth of Death. (v4)

Newbold, whose reading of Ode 22 is the most inimical to a Descensus ad Inferos interpretation, does not appear to be able to account for this mention of the dispersion of the speaker’s enemies in v3. However, he is clear as to the meaning of the fourth verse, which he translates:

Thou that didst give me power over the prisoners
That I might release them.

He believes that the primary reference is to Christ’s releasing of the sparks of light which are held imprisoned in varying degrees of darkness. In order to arrive at this meaning, he is forced to read "prisoners" for the noun "bonds", a reading which neither of the Syriac manuscripts, nor the Coptic, supports and which is not shared by any other commentator.

Batiffol continues to equivocate in his interpretation of the Ode, stating that there may either be an allusion to the people on earth held captive to iniquity, or to Christ’s preaching in Hell. Frankenberg though is more certain as to the meaning of these verses, remarking that the enemies of the nous or logos, who is the speaker, are the
demonic logismoi in the human soul, on account of which mankind has been enslaved and fettered to the earthly. The nous/logos now rejoices, he states, in receiving the power (exousia, with the Coptic) from God to release these bonds.

But a further interpretation is possible, for the idea of authority over bonds (the Syriac literally reads "power of bonds") and their consequent loosening is wholly compatible with the Odist's picture of the Descent, and in particular his concept of Sheol as a prison where the dead are bound. The origin of this picture has been investigated in the chapter on Ode 42 where it is also found, but the Odist's description of the bonds and their loosening is given fullest expression in Ode 17 in what is also clearly a Descensus context:

From there he gave me the way of his steps,
And I opened the doors which were closed.

I shattered the bars of iron,
For my own iron had grown hot and melted before me.

Not a thing appeared closed to me,
Because I was the opening of everything.

I went towards all my prisoners to free them,
Leaving behind neither captive nor captor.\(^{124}\)

The notion of the gift of authority echoes Christ's statement in the Fourth Gospel that he speaks not on his own authority but on that of the Father (14:10), and recalls the necessity perceived by the Odist for the Lord's intervention in the battle with Death in Ode 42.

[C] The Figure of the Dragon

(You are) the one who defeated by my hand the seven headed dragon,
And you placed me at his very core so that I could destroy his seed.
You were there and you helped me,  
Everywhere your name surrounded me.  

Your right hand obliterated his evil venom,  
The introduction of the figure of the seven headed dragon marks a  
sudden change in the tempo of the Ode and too, a shift from the third  
person subject to the second. The general tone of the opening verses  
gives way to a dramatic description of the encounter between the  
speaker and the dragon, the language of which is explicit and violent  
in nature. On the basis of his research into the usage of this name in  
the Old Testament, Grimme suggested that the dragon be identified with  
Pleiades. Originally, he maintains, the Pentecost celebration belonged  
to the cult of Pleiades, but was appropriated by Yahwism, thereby  
asserting Yahweh's supremacy and relegating Pleiades to the rank of  
enemy demon. Pentecost grew to be associated with the freeing of the  
soul, thus the seven headed dragon became symbolic of the principle of  
evil within humanity. This rather internalized interpretation of the  
dragon figure is shared by other commentators. Batiffol states simply  
that it represents the power of evil and transgression, Frankenberg, in  
line with his general spiritualized reading of the Odes, that it is a  
metaphor for the seven evil passions of monastic asceticism.  

The majority of scholars, however, prefer to identify the dragon  
with a specific figure, as the violent and explicit language of the Ode  
suggests it should be. Most are drawn to the mention of the seven  
headed dragon in Revelation (12:3), and specifically its identification  
with the Devil and Satan:  

And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent,  
who is the Devil and Satan ..... (Revelation 20:2)  
The inherent difficulty of establishing whether the Apocalypse was  
known to the Odist can be overlooked, for it is clear that the writer
of Revelation employs imagery which must have been both well known and of ancient pedigree. It is perhaps surprising then that the commentators are virtually united in their reluctance to pursue the quest for the origins of this imagery, particularly since it almost certainly provides the key to the interpretation of the whole Ode.

Harris, in his attempt to identify the dragon, goes back to Psalm 74:13-14:

Thou didst divide the sea by thy might;
Thou didst break the heads of the dragons on the waters.

Thou didst crush the heads of Leviathan,

Bernard confidently asserts that the figure in the Psalm is to be identified with Tiamat, the Babylonian monster. But Day's recent study of the biblical imagery dealing with this subject has contended that the biblical writers were more likely to have been indebted to Canaanite mythology than that of the Babylonians. This is especially significant, for the Odist's knowledge and usage of imagery which is Canaanite in origin in his treatment of the Descent has already been demonstrated.

Returning then to the Canaanite material, it is clear from the Ba'al cycle that before Ba'al's encounter with the insatiable Mot, which was referred to in the study of Ode 42, a battle has already taken place between Ba'al and the chaotic sea, Yam. Ba'al emerged victorious from this conflict, thus securing harmony, order and the regulation of the life giving waters on which the fecundity of the land depended.

Yam is not described physically at this point, but his appearance is alluded to later by Mot who, in contrasting Ba'al's earlier triumph with the defeat he himself expects to inflict, refers to the wriggling, twisting serpent, a tyrant with seven heads.
In fact, the relationship between Yam and Mot goes deeper than that of mere acquaintance, for Mot in detailing his own voracity speaks of River, another name for Yam, as his cup bearer. It seems that Sea and Death should be seen as wet and dry versions of the same principle. Structurally, they serve the same mythological purpose, cooperating in their anti-cosmic activity and hostility to life and order. Furthermore, their equivalence is underlined by the evidence from Canaanite cosmology as it is depicted in the texts. The habitable world is surrounded by the waters of chaos, represented by Yam, beyond these waters and indeed in them dwells Mot, whose abode is distinctly watery:

Where a pool is the seat of his enthronement,  
A quagmire the land of his inheritance.

The connection between Sea and Death is also found in biblical texts of all periods. Amongst the earliest is in Exodus 15, where the two themes of water and earth (= Sheol, = Death) are combined in an extended metaphor. The Hebrew nouns for sea and earth have no article here, suggesting that they are far more than mere literary personifications but actual mythical figures:

Thou didst blow with thy breath, Sea covered them  
.....  
Thou didst stretch out thy right hand, Earth swallowed them.

Still more explicitly, Jonah speaks of his swallowing by the great fish in the following way:

I called to the Lord, out of my distress,  
and he answered me;  
out of the belly of Sheol I cried,  
and thou didst hear my voice. (2:2)

Even as late as the book of Revelation the parity between Sea and Death still persists:
And the Sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them ..... (20:13)

"Sea" has been capitalized here to indicate that this is not just a prosaic allusion to those who have drowned, but synthetic parallelism.

Thus the search for the identity of the dragon has come full circle, from the New Testament through the Old Testament to Canaan and back again. The importance of the findings justify the length of the digression, for two things have become clear. Firstly, that the sea monster or dragon continues to rear his head throughout the Bible, and as such forms part of a stock of imagery which would be well known to the Odist and his audience. Secondly, and more significantly, that just as Sheol and Death are frequently thought of as identical, so too are the dragon and Death, Sea being Death's alter ego. In introducing the figure of the dragon, the Odist alludes to a living mythical tradition and plunges his audience directly into another encounter with Death.

This change of costume (if not of role) for one of the protagonists in the battle scene frees the Odist to draw on other imagery in order to clothe his picture. Many commentators have observed that the language of Ode 22:5 is strongly reminiscent of God's curse on the serpent in the garden of Eden:

I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your seed and her seed;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel. (Genesis 3:15)

The similarity is brought out even more forcefully in the Coptic version of the Ode, which in place of the Syriac verb shp, meaning to vanquish or destroy, contains a word derived from the Greek patassein, meaning to wound or smite. It has already been shown that the Odist conceives of the Descent as a definitive overturning of all patterns of
existence that have gone before, and the scope and reach of this are stressed here by a deliberate allusion to the antiquity of the previous pattern. The second line of v5 not only recalls the Genesis tradition, but also the Odist's own picture of the Descent as a permanent and all pervading event. It has been argued that Ode 42:12b be interpreted with the sense that Christ's poison left no part of Death unaffected, both forcing him to vomit up what he has already consumed and rendering him incapable of any further gorging, and Ode 22:5 makes the same point. Here, Christ is set at the dragon's roots, his core, the very ground of his being, in order to destroy his seed, which should be understood with the extended sense of future power.

The sixth verse serves to underline the speaker's dependence on the Lord's help and again recalls the need for El's intervention in order to secure Ba' al's victory in the conflict with Mot. There is a variant reading in the second line of the verse; Harris' manuscript reads wbkl 'tr šmk bryk hw' ly, whereas that of Burkitt, supported by the Coptic, has wbkl 'tr šmk kryk hw' ly. Charlesworth claims that this variant "reveals the originality of the Syriac, precisely because it is easy to confuse a Beth with a Kaph." However, he unnecessarily assumes that such a confusion arose at the beginning of the Odes' history when it could equally well have been a later copyist's error. Scholars writing after the publication of Burkitt's manuscript have tended to prefer its version to that of Harris. The thought neatly mirrors that expressed regularly in the Psalms that it is the darkness of Sheol and the cords of Death which surround the speaker. Once more, the contrast between previous events and the present situation is evident. The implication in the Psalms is that Sheol is Mot's realm and as such God is both absent and has no power there.
The Ode expresses the view, albeit by circumlocution ("your name surrounded me") that this is no longer the case.

The periphrastic language continues into the seventh verse. The first line contains a further variant between the versions, with the Coptic reading "thy right hand has destroyed the poison of the slanderer". It is possible that these words have been included under the influence of the identification of the dragon with Satan, and of Satan's original function as the Accuser, but they scarcely affect the sense of the verse either way. The allusion to the poison or bitterness recalls the poisoning detailed in Ode 42, where it is Christ who poisons Death. Here, it is Death's own venom, stemming from his identification with the dragon or serpent, which is destroyed. The word ἄρτι and its related terms occur only five times in total in the whole of the collection. Of these five instances, four appear to be in contexts directly connected with the Descent or Passion. The occurrence at Ode 42, where Christ's bitterness to Death (v12) is contrasted with his kindness to the dead (v16) has already been discussed. A similar contrast is drawn at Ode 28:16 where the wider context evidently treats of the Passion:

But I was carrying water in my right hand,
And their bitterness I endured by my sweetness.

Furthermore, at Ode 31:12 Christ, who is apparently the speaker, states:

And I bore their bitterness because of humility,
That I might redeem my nation and instruct it.

This too will be shown to be a Descensus context.

[D] The Figure of the Way

And your hand levelled the Way for your believers.
Newbold, pursuing his interpretation of the hymn as a reference to the
descent of the Redeemer from heaven to earth, sees in this verse an
allusion to the same idea as that found at Ode 23:15 of the preparation
of the way. In the 23rd Ode, Christ is symbolized as a letter sent by
God like an arrow from a bow (vv5-6), descending from the highest
realms of the spiritual world to the world of matter. In the course of
his descent, he brushes aside every obstacle (vv13-15a) and makes a
broad way (v15b). This image, Newbold states, represents the path by
which the imprisoned sparks of light are to travel from the regions of
darkness to the realms of pure light. It is regularly found in the
gnostic writings, often taking the form of a trail of light, and also
underlies Odes 7 (especially "the traces of his light" in v14) and 39
(especially "the footprints of our Lord Messiah" in vv10-11).

However, the figure of the way is common enough in the wider non-
gnostic Christian tradition, with its roots lying in the Old Testament
notion of "the way of the Lord". From these roots are derived the
ethical teaching of the two ways found in the Qumran Community Rule,
Pseudo-Barnabas and the Didache and additionally Christ's usage of "the
Way" as a self appellation (John 14:6) and the designation of the
Christian community in Acts as ἡ θεωρία. Moreover, Murray has argued
that this image is developed in the Syrian Church in a specific manner.
The thinking reaches its fullest expression with Ephraim, for whom he
states, "The Way is neither a moral figure nor a title of the Church,
nor (as in Dante and Bunyan) a symbol for the course of human life; it
stands for the whole heilsgeschichtlich process, the pilgrimage of the
human race through time."130

Searching for the possible source of Ephraim's heilsgeschichtlich
sense of the image of the Way in Syriac tradition, Murray is led back
to the Odes. The Syriac noun *wrh* and its plural are found frequently in the collection (3:10, 7:2,13, 11:3, 12:6, 22:11, 23:15, 24:13, 33:7,8,13, 34:1, 38:7, 39:7,13, 41:11 and 42:2) and in general, he maintains, are used with the moral rather than heilsgeschichtlich import. But there are two further instances revealing a traditional formula from which Ephraim's thinking may have originated. In them, Christ is described, having broken down the gates of Sheol, as treading a Way ahead of those whom he has redeemed. The first is at Ode 17:9:

And from there he gave me the Way of his steps

The second is in the verse currently under discussion.

The same notion is found too in the Acts of Judas Thomas (alongside the usage of *wrh* with its moral and titular sense).

Connolly cites two passages from this text:

And thou didst descend to Sheol, and go to its uttermost end; and didst open its gates and bring forth its prisoners, and didst tread for them a path (leading) above.

and:

Thou didst descend into Sheol with mighty power, and the dead saw thee and became alive, and the lord of death was not able to bear (it), and thou didst tread for them a path (leading) on high; and in thy footsteps all thy redeemed followed.

Aphrahat provides a particularly significant parallel to the thought of Ode 22, for not only does he refer to the treading of a path for the believers out of Sheol, he also compares the conquest of Sheol with the passage through the Red Sea:

Moses divided the sea for them and led them through; and our Redeemer divided Sheol and shattered its doors, he went in and opened them and trod a way for all those who believed in him.

(Demonstration XII 6-7)
This comparison of the two themes by Aphrahat strengthens the case for the identification of the dragon in the Ode with Yam, the sea monster, and suggests that he also understood there to be an equivalence between Sea (= Yam) and Sheol (= Death).

Murray finds further examples of this limited and well defined usage of "the Way" in the Manichaean Psalms and by Cyrillona, but concludes that it is the eucharistic anaphora in the Testamentum Domini (presumed to be older than the work as a whole) which shows that such usage became fixed through the liturgy. Although the figure of the Way has only the briefest of mentions in Ode 22, it clearly contributes to the argument for a Descensus interpretation.

[R] The Thanatological Imagery

You chose them from the graves,
And separated them from the dead.

You took dead bones,
And clothed them with flesh.

And to those who were not stirring,
You gave vitality.

There is some disagreement amongst the scholars as to the subject of these lines. The Coptic contains unambiguously second person singular verbs, but the Syriac has a form which, in an unpointed text, could be taken either as the third feminine singular or second masculine singular.\(^3\) Charlesworth and Harris-Mingana have assumed that the Odist continues working with "your hand" from v7b as the subject ("and it chose" etc.), whilst the rest of the commentators consider that he has reverted to the "you" of vv5-6. There is consensus, however, that the source of the Odist's inspiration for these verses is the passage concerning the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37:
Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord. So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. Behold, I will open your graves, and raise you from your graves, 0 my people.

Harris-Mingana state that there are sufficient linguistic parallels between the Ode and the Peshitta to suggest that it is the Syriac version of Ezekiel 37 which was used by the Odist. They cite the usage of the verb *qrm* in v9b (Ezekiel 37:6) and the root *zw* in v10a (Ezekiel 37:7).

Frankenberg and Batiffol propose a demythologized and internalized reading of the verses, stating that they speak of a spiritual anastasis in the believer. The plural forms of the direct object which becomes the subject in v10a militate against this interpretation, as does the mention of the believers in v7a, which Frankenberg is forced to construe as a reference to the powers in the soul that believe in God. Still more importantly, the vividness and detail of the preceding verses suggest a real physical battle is in progress, and that such spiritualization belongs rather within the mind of 20th century scholarly reflection than of early religious euphoria. In contrast, Harnack (who sees no trace of interpolation in this Ode) and Grimme consider that these verses refer to the resurrection of the just expected at the End Time. The perfect forms of the verbs, they state, are therefore to be understood with a sense of future hope, as is the case in the prophetic writings of the Old Testament. Though their understanding does not present the same problems as that of Frankenberg and Batiffol, it is not without its own inherent
difficulties, for it fails to relate fully these verses to those which
precede, and as such gives no consistent interpretation of the Ode as a
whole.

Clearly, only the Descensus ad Inferos interpretation is left as a
viable alternative. Support for this may be adduced from the fact that
Ephraim evidently used the same text from Ezekiel in his treatment of
the Descent. The following passage from the Nisibene Hymns is quoted
as evidence by Harris-Mingana33:

I saw in the valley that Ezekiel who quickened the
dead when he was questioned; and I saw the bones
that were in heaps, and they moved; There was a
tumult of bones in Sheol, bone seeking for his
fellow, and joint for her mate; ........
Unquestioned, the voice of Jesus, the Master of all
creatures, quickened them.

Connolly, who also cites this passage, adds that it is clear from some
of the variants in the Gospel of Nicodemus that Ephraim is here
reproducing an earlier written source34.

Looking again at the specific content of vv8-10, it must be asked
whether, in contrast with the depiction in Ode 42, the Odist has here
restricted the possibility of release from Death's clutches to a limited
number only of the dead. The Syriac verb gbyt in v8a is usually
translated with the sense "chose", perhaps implying that not all the
dead were freed. The second line echoes this with the mention of
separation, and by extension, the suggestion that some of the dead
remained behind. Thus Ode 22 may reflect the view found in many
Descensus writings that it is only some of the dead, usually the just,
who were rescued35. It would be possible to argue that the Syriac
verbs gb and prš in v8 should be rendered with their less common
meanings. The verse could then be translated:
You collected them from the graves,  
And differentiated them from the dead.

thereby removing the notion of selection, and implying merely a gathering (compare Ode 42:14) and a change in appearance. This, however, ignores the most obvious meaning of the verbs and, in the case of the second line, really requires that a noun and suffix (for example, "their faces" or "their bodies") be substituted for the simple pronoun تراث which stands in the text. A more likely explanation of the apparent selection which is implied in this verse is that the pronoun "them" refers back to "those who believe" in v7. The idea that belief of some sort is a prerequisite for rescue from Sheol is compatible with the picture in Ode 42, in which the Odist refers to the faith of the dead (v19) and their acknowledgement that Christ is the son of God (v15).

There is a further manuscript variant in the second line of the v10. Harris' manuscript contains the noun مكون meaning help or assistance, whereas Burkitt's reads مكون, a noun which has a wide semantic range encompassing the meanings energy, activity or motion, and which is derived from the root فذ. The Coptic agrees with Burkitt's Syriac, preserving the Greek word ενεργεία. It is possible that the scribe responsible for Harris' manuscript has used the noun مكون influenced by the sixth verse, in which the verbal form فذ occurs. The sense is little affected either way, for it is clear that the Odist is simply expanding on the covering with flesh in the ninth verse.

Charlesworth is likely to be correct in rendering the waw at the beginning of v10a with its antithetical sense. The verse then emphasizes the completeness of the resurrection which is accomplished.
Firstly, the external form of the dead is restored, they are given back their bodies. Secondly, their internal force is returned, they are given back their vitality. Grimme's Hebrew retroversion brings out well the thought which appears to be uppermost, namely that the imagery is based on the Old Testament picture of the dead as shades, shadowy forms trapped in Sheol, incapable of activity. There is just a hint too in the phrase \textit{wl} \text{mtz}\text{zy'yn hww} of the bonds which hold the dead in a state of fixed imprisonment. It should be noted that Batiffol is alone amongst the scholars in his construction of this phrase which he takes \textit{in bonam partem}, understanding the verb \textit{hww} to mean "became". He translates, "Ils devinrent solides", remarking that this means that the dead acquired stability. Such a translation of \textit{mtz}\text{zy'yn} is far from obvious, as is his extended interpretation, acquired stability. Moreover, the widely recognized dependence of the 

This completes the examination of the five sets of imagery identified in the introduction as indicating that the main theme of the Ode is the Descent into Hell. Whilst some of this imagery might be capable of bearing other interpretations, these alternatives have been shown to fail in one of two major ways. In the case of Newbold's understanding, for example, it is difficult to see where the figure of the dragon and the mention of the clothing of dead bones with flesh fit in at all. His interpretation must therefore be regarded as inconsistent. On the other hand, Frankenberg, and the rest of the commentators who construe
the Ode in an internalized manner, are often excessively spiritualizing in their reading and at times, it appears, purely speculative. The Descensus interpretation, however, is open to none of these charges and is evidently the only one possible for the whole of the Ode. It has been demonstrated that in the matter of the prison imagery and the figure of the dragon (mutatis mutandis), the Odist employs precisely the same ideas as those found in the unequivocal Descent language of the 42nd Ode. The remaining imagery, cosmological, thanatological and the figure of the Way, has additionally been shown to be a development of this theme, and to be used by other writers dealing with the subject of the Descent. It must be that the speaker in the 22nd Ode is Christ, who offers praise and thanksgiving to the Father for his assistance in the defeat of Death.

The two final verses of the Ode were omitted from the above examination since at first sight their content appears unrelated to the Descent. Having established that the theme of the Descensus is applied so rigorously throughout the Ode and that the words are spoken ex ore Christi, it is now appropriate to consider whether these lines too are part of the Odist's thinking on this matter. The thought is apparently of destruction, followed by renewal, and the establishment of a kingdom.

There is some debate between the scholars as to the order in the 11th verse. At the crux of the argument are the questions of where and how to take the noun and suffix prcwphk. Harris chooses to translate:

Thy way was without corruption,
And thy face brought thy world to corruption:
That everything might be dissolved, and then renewed,

He construes the noun and suffix prcwphk as the subject of the verb ἡττυτ in the second line. This is unlikely to be correct, for the
unpointed form of this verb must be either first person singular, second masculine singular or third feminine singular. But the Syriac noun prcwkp, a loan word from the Greek prosopon which is neuter in gender, is always treated in the Odes as masculine, and followed, when it is the subject of the phrase, by a verb in the masculine form (Odes 11:14, 25:4 and 31:5).

A second alternative is proposed by Newbold:

Indestructible was thy way,
And thy face thou hast brought to thy world for (its) destruction
That all things should be dissolved and renewed.

This reading of the verse, which is shared by Frankenberg (37) and Bruston, takes the noun and suffix prcwkp as the direct object of the verb *ytyt in the second line, thus avoiding the problem of gender agreement mentioned above. It does, however, raise some difficulty in interpreting the second line, for it is uncertain whether these commentators think that the destruction spoken of in the second line applies to "thy face" or "thy world". The latter appears the more likely.

Similarly, Labourt also deems prcwkp to be the object of the verb *ytyt, but his French translation resolves this ambiguity by making it clear that it is the destruction of "thy face" which is envisaged:

Immortelle était ta route, mais tu as introduit ta personne dans le monde qui t'appartenait, pour qu'elle fût soumise à la corruption; afin que l'univers fût anéanti, puis renouvelé,

He understands prcwkp to be a reference to Christ as the visible face or form of God in the world, and sees in the verse an allusion to Christ's pre-existence, Incarnation and act of redemption. It is evident from the accompanying notes to his translation that he regards the Syriac lḥbl as a reference to the death of Christ. Thus this
single word stands as an expression meaning that the pre-existent Christ, by nature immortal, was subjected to mortality for the salvation of the world. It may be objected that a considerable amount must be supplied to the term lhbl (i.e., pour qu'elle fut soumise) before this meaning can be reached. Although the Odes are often elliptical in nature, it is seldom to this extent. In addition, the allusion to the dissolution and renewal of everything in the third line appears to be a development of the thinking on the destruction of the world.

Other commentators have therefore preferred to follow the Pistis Sophia and take prwpk with the noun and suffix ḫwrh in the first line, rendering the verse:

Your way was without corruption and your face,
You brought your world to corruption,
So that everything would be dissolved and renewed.

The difficulty of the third feminine singular verb hwt having as its subject two nouns (one feminine and one masculine) in the first line is not at all problematical as in the case of Harris' reading, for it must be assumed that the emphasis is on the incorruptible nature of the Way, the Syriac noun ḫwrh being feminine in gender. Such stress on the incorruptibility of the Way would be quite natural since this image has figured earlier on in the Ode. On the whole, this order appears the most appropriate since it achieves the best balance between the lines and is the most straightforward.

Having established the order of the words in vii it is now appropriate to consider their possible meaning. The resumption of the figure of the Way tends to suggest that the Odist has not abandoned the Descent theme with which he was working. In v7 it was introduced, and in that context signified the divinely appointed escape route by which the dead were enabled to leave Sheol. In the 11th verse the
nature of that way is described, for it is said to be incorruptible. Grimme's retroversion into Hebrew, which uses the adjective \( \text{tm} \), indicates that he has construed the words \( dl' \ hbl' \) with their moral rather than physical sense. However, it has been argued that the Odist uses the root \( hbl \) with the latter meaning to refer to Death, and that the whole of the 33rd Ode contains an extended play on this root depicting the Descent. Here, the noun \( hbl' \) is preceded by the negative particle \( dl' \) and is used adjectivally to emphasize that the exit set up from Sheol is a permanent and enduring one. It is possible that "your face" is a circumlocution by which Christ as the speaker emphasizes that he was not held by Death, or that as Newbold states it refers to the indestructible nature of the "virtual or spiritual" presence of God\(^{39}\) and is in some sense parallel to "your hand" of the earlier verses. The meaning is little affected either way, since it is clear that a contrast is being drawn between the nature of the divine and the nature of the chthonic.

A further contrast is made in the verse with the assertion that the Way was incorruptible being followed by a statement that the world was brought to corruption. With the mention of the world, the Odist seems to have moved out of Sheol and appears to be expanding the scope and effects of the Descent over a far broader range. Batiffol, who interprets the Ode in an internalized spiritualized manner without reference to the Descent, and takes \( prcwpk \) as the object of the second line seeing in it a reference to the Incarnation, maintains that the Syriac text as it stands undoubtedly does refer to the destruction of the world\(^{40}\). This, he insists, presents a problem of historical accuracy, since it is clear that the advent of Christ did not lead to the destruction of the world. He therefore contends that the alleged
Syriac translator of the original Greek version of the Ode has injected an eschatological note into the verse where once only a soteriological one existed. This misunderstanding, he observes, has arisen from the presence of the Greek verb *luein* in the third line of the original recension of the Ode, a verb which has two possible senses, one of which could be translated by the Syriac šr* to dissolve*, but the other meaning "to redeem" or "to liberate". This prompts Batiffol to remove the mention of destruction from the verse entirely, and to propose that it once read:

Immortelle était ta route.
Et ton visage tu l'as introduit dans ton univers
pour le délivrer,
Pour délivrer l'univers et le renouveler.

The word order favoured by Batiffol has already been rejected on other grounds, but the sense with which he construes the verse appears highly improbable. Even in his own words the correction involved is "un peu énergique". His comments appear to have arisen from a literal-minded insistence that an actual historical cataclysm lies behind the destruction of the world which is described in the Syriac text.

Yet the observation that the tone of the verse appears eschatological in nature requires further investigation, for it is generally agreed that the Odes are remarkably free of eschatological expectation. Many commentators have noted that the language of this verse is very similar to that used to describe the events anticipated on the day of the Lord in II Peter 3:10-12:

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be
kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire!

In this text, contra Batiffol, the Greek verb luein is used with its sense of destruction but unlike the Ode, where the main verb (Oytyt) is in the past indicating that the action has already taken place, all the verbs are future in form. The tone of the verse in the Ode may be eschatological but the thinking is clearly of a realized eschatology. Batiffol is misguided in his efforts to remove the reference to the bringing of the world to corruption in the second line of the verse entirely, for the third line makes it clear why this was necessary. The realized eschatology is inseparable from the soteriology of the Ode; destruction had to take place before everything could be renewed.\(^{42}\)

It may be asked why it was necessary for the Odist to so emphasize that destruction was required before renewal could be accomplished. When viewed in the light of his understanding of the Descent, this question becomes easy to answer. To begin with, there is evidently a word play on the root ḫbl, which has already been noted. In addition though, the idea must be that prior to the Descent, although the world belonged to the Lord (your world) it had been under the control of Death. The Odist's depiction of the Descent as a complete and permanent reversal or overturning of previous patterns has already been remarked on, and it is once again in evidence here. What is envisaged is the obliteration of the old order, the world which has been subject to Death, and its replacement with something new. Thus the thought behind the second line of the 11th verse resumes, with cosmological implications, the battle theme of the fifth and the overthrow of the dragon. There is just a hint too in the third line of
vII, with the deployment of the verb šēr, of the loosening of bonds in v4, again with cosmological significance.

It is clear that in Ode 22 the Odist has pictured the Hollensturzung using language borrowed from the Chaoskampf. Day has recently argued that in some Old Testament passages the battle with the sea is associated with creation and that the imagery used is appropriated from the Canaanites. In the Ode, the idea that the Descent effects a renewal or re-creation seems to be emphasized using language and imagery from Genesis. The similarity of thought between the destruction of the dragon's seed in v5 with the curse on the serpent in Genesis 3:15 has already been noted, and the gathering of the middle things in v2 is certainly evocative of the gathering together of the waters in Genesis 1:9-10. The covering of the dead bones with flesh in v9 further recalls the garments of skin made by the Lord for Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:21.

The thought of renewal reaches its climax in the 12th verse with the establishment of the kingdom. Burkitt's manuscript reads:

And that the foundation of everything might be your rock.
Upon it you have built your kingdom,
And it became the abode of the holy.

Harris' Syriac varies slightly in reading a second person singular verb in the third line (i.e. you became etc.) but the Pistis Sophia is substantially different. It states:

.... and that thy light should become a foundation for them all.
Thou hast built thy wealth upon them, and they have become a holy dwelling place.

Of the commentators, Grimme alone prefers the Coptic reading "light" in the first line. He justifies this choice by contending that the
supposed Syriac translator of the original Hebrew of the Odes has misread the noun šwr "rock" in place of ʿwr "light", the Hebrew letters šade and ʿayin being easy to confuse. But the Pistis Sophia makes much use of light imagery and it seems that its reading of the verse must be regarded as tendentious.

The first line of the verse should be construed with the last of the previous one, as part of the purpose for which the world was brought to corruption. This is indicated by the future tense of the verbs which depend on ḫtyt, and the presence of klm.dm in both lines. The mention of the rock introduces yet another image into the Ode, already replete with them. All the scholars, with the exception of Grimme, have commented on the close resemblance between the language of the Ode at this point and that of Matthew 16:18ff. The two main terms "rock" and "build" feature in both texts, but where the gospel has "Church", the Odist has substituted "kingdom". It is difficult to see what the connection is between Christ's charge to Peter and the Descensus theme here, except that both contain the idea of establishment. Clearly, the way forward is signposted by discovering who or what the Odist intends the rock to designate. The sudden introduction of Peter or the Church into the Ode at this point seems unlikely, so an alternative identity for the rock must be sought.

Other occurrences of the noun kʾpʾ are found at Odes 9:9 and 31:11. The instance in the ninth Ode provides little assistance to the enquiry for the meaning of the verse in which it is found is highly obscure, but that in Ode 31 is more helpful. Harris-Mingana translate its 11th verse as follows:

But I stood unshaken like a firm rock,
That is beaten by the waves and endures.
Evidently it is the speaker who describes himself as standing like a firm rock, but who is the speaker and, perhaps more importantly, what is the context? The answer to these questions lies in the earlier verses of Ode 31 which describe the condemnation of one who is innocent, the division of his spoil, his endurance and silence. It is obvious that they allude to the Passion and in particular the gospel accounts of Christ's trial, so it must be that Christ is the speaker. Furthermore, there is much evidence to suggest that the opening verses of this hymn treat of the Descent of the 31st Ode is that the Odist deploys this as an epithet of Christ, and in a Descensus context.

Moving away from the Odes themselves, Murray has extensively argued that the term "rock" was a common title for Christ as well as Peter and the Apostles in the Syrian Church. Moreover, the noun k'p was used by Syriac writers to render many of the other terms for rock and stone found in the biblical testimony texts (for example, Psalm 118:22, Isaiah 28:16, Luke 20:18, Daniel 2:34-44 and Zechariah 4:7). In particular, he notes the usage by the Syriac writers of this noun with the adjective šryt to designate Christ. This expression, "firm rock", is precisely that found at Ode 31:11.

Thus there is plenty of evidence, both within the Odes themselves and in the wider Syriac tradition, to support the identification of the rock with Christ. In Ode 22, since Christ is the speaker, this seems to be a self reference, in which the Odist puts into Christ's mouth the words Christ himself uses to Peter in the gospel passage. Yet the connection between this text and the Descent into Hell has still not been established. It would be legitimate to suggest that the Odist, now
preoccupied with the thought of renewal and (re)building has forsaken the Descensus theme in its favour, but this may not quite be the case.

The Ode furnishes only a partial version of the charge to Peter. In the gospel, after the mention of the rock and the building of the Church thereon, Christ goes on to say, with reference to the Church *kai pulai Haidou ou katischuscousin*. Murray has further suggested in his examination of the rock imagery in the Syrian Church, that this phrase was understood in a very specific way and particularly so by Tatian in the Diatessaron. His first point is that the Syriac Diatessaron renders the Greek verb *katischuein* with the word *ḥṣn*. This Syriac term is usually translated, just as *katischuein* is, with the sense "to prevail" or "to overcome". More strictly, however, the verb connotes the exercise of strength against an adversary, and is not restricted to an attacking sense, but can mean "to withstand". Murray's second line of argument is that the Syriac Diatessaron read not "gates of Hell" but "bars of Hell", and that since the natural function of bars is defensive, it would be strange to use them as a symbol of attack. The Syriac noun for "bars" in the Diatessaron is the same as that used by the Odist in the verses from Ode 17, also in a Descensus context, cited above. Murray then states that in the Syriac Church's understanding of Matthew 16:18ff., "Our familiar picture of the embattled citadel on the rock, doggedly resisting attack, changes to - or at least has an alternative in - the vision of the Church sharing in Christ's eschatological victory over death, carrying the battle before her and breaking in the very doors of the kingdom of death, even as Christ did in his Resurrection."*47*

It has already been observed that a reference to the Church in the Ode is unlikely to be intended, and that the Odist puts the gospel
charge to Peter in Christ's own mouth as a self reference, but this does not invalidate Murray's theories. It is clear that in adjusting the meaning from an attacking sense of the gates of Hell to a defensive one for the bars of Sheol, the Syriac tradition at least admits of a possible reference to the Descent in this logion. Although the Ode falls short of citing the gospel text in full, it is reasonable to assume that it would be sufficiently well known to the Odist's audience for its opening words to conjure up a vision of the whole. If Murray is correct, then the Descensus connotation would also be immediately apparent.

Before leaving this subject, it is necessary to make a final comment on the Odist's usage of the term mlkwt to designate the construction which is built on the foundation of the rock. It has already been noted that he substitutes it for the word ekklesia which is found in Matthew 16:18, though the kingdom does feature later in the gospel text. Perhaps the allusion to the Church has disappeared because the primary reference is to Christ himself, but an alternative explanation for the substitution is possible. In the discussion of the meaning of the 42nd Ode, it was noted that the Odist's concept of Death has royal overtones, which are clearly echoed in the New Testament. These overtones can also be heard, albeit distantly, in the 11th and 12th verses of Ode 22. Here the familiar concept of the Descent as a reversal of the norm carries with it the implicit notion that it is the sovereignty of Death, his reign of terror, which is destroyed and replaced by the reign of the Lord. The choice of the term mlkwt in v12 to signify what is built on the rock emphasizes this point by contrasting with the word 'em' in v11. It is the world which is brought to destruction, but the kingdom that is built in its place. The
realized nature of the eschatological thinking is again in evidence, for the building is spoken of as an accomplished fact.

Each of the manuscripts suggests a different subject for the final line of the Ode, preserving the verb in three variant forms. Harris' version reads the second masculine singular form of the verb hw', indicating that the addressee is the subject. The Pistis Sophia has a third person plural verb, indicating that "all things" are the subject. It also construes the final phrase as a noun plus adjective "a holy dwelling", whereas both Syriac manuscripts read "a dwelling of the holy ones". The majority of scholars have preferred the version contained in Burkitt's manuscript, of a third feminine singular form of the verb hw', which must have as its subject the feminine noun mlkwt from the previous line.

This line requires little further comment, save that it completes the picture of the establishment of the kingdom with a statement of its function as the abode of the holy. Once more, this picture of a divinely appointed dwelling place is not expressed in terms of hope for the future, but as an already achieved, abiding reality. Underlying it is a wide range of biblical imagery concerning dwelling in the presence of the Lord, with the attendant thought of proximity to God and being in a state of rest and blessing. The holy ones are to be seen, with appropriately extended cosmological import, as parallel to the believers in v7.

Finally, the mythical substructure beneath v12 must be noted. It has been shown that the Odist's treatment of the Descensus theme in this hymn powerfully echoes the biblical accounts of the Chaoskampf, which are in turn redolent of Ba'el's conflict with Yam as it is reported in the Canaanite texts. Here, Ba'el's defeat of Yam
establishes his right to be king over the other gods of the pantheon under the ultimate supremacy of El. However, a king without a palace was no king at all and so Anat, Ba'\text{al}'s consort, pleaded with her father, El, to allow Ba'\text{al} to build a palace in the heavens which would recognize and reinforce his position of authority.

The palace was represented physically on earth by the temple at Ras Shamra and as Craigie has remarked, ".... the role of religion, in Ba'\text{al}'s earthly temple, was the recognition of Ba'\text{al}'s kingship and authority, and the attempt to secure it permanently against the ever threatening forces of chaos, whose return could culminate in drought and starvation." In Yahwism, the palace becomes the Temple built on the Rock of Zion, the construction of which is described in the Jerusalem Talmud:

When David came to dig the foundations of the temple he dug fifteen hundred cubits and did not reach the Deep (\textit{Tehom}). At length he came upon a potsherd and wished to raise it. (The potsherd) said to him, 'You cannot [lift me up].' 'Why?' he asked. 'Because I am here to suppress the Deep (\textit{Tehom})', (replied the potsherd). 'And since when have you been here?' asked (David). 'Since that hour when the Merciful One made his voice to be heard on Sinai (saying): "I am the Lord your God". Then the earth shuddered and began to subside, and I am here placed to suppress the Deep (\textit{Tehom}).' According to the parallel version in the Babylonian Talmud what was written on the potsherd was the Ineffable Name and it is David who puts it in place. But in the Jerusalem Talmud, the implication must be that it is God himself who performs this act to protect his universe from the threat of chaos, which evidently seethes immediately below the surface, all the while threatening to overwhelm it.

In conclusion, it may be stated that the objective set out at the start of the chapter has been accomplished. Ode 22 has been shown to
treat of the Descent, and its other interpretations have been revealed as either flawed or otherwise unsustainable. The five images or figures used in the hymn all clearly relate to the Descensus theme and, whilst alternative meanings may be feasible for individual concepts, none can be applied throughout. Some of the arguments for the Descensus interpretation have been based on the usage of imagery which is parallel to that in Ode 42, but the picture of the Odist's thinking on this subject has also been enhanced. His concept of the universe, for example, has been shown to be of a simple three tiered structure, heaven above, Sheol below and earth between, and his usage of biblical material has also been commented on. In addition, the knowledge gained from his depiction of Death in this Ode as a seven headed dragon, or sea monster, has been considerable. It may well be invaluable in unlocking a vast range of water imagery in the wider anthology which has hitherto proven elusive.

The latter part of the chapter, which dealt with the Odist's expansion of the Descensus theme to include the idea of renewal and rebuilding, has been identified as having at its heart the familiar notion of the Descent as a reversal of all previous forms of existence and their replacement with something new. Strains of the Chaoskampf were detected in vv11-12, as was the underlying mythological pattern of Ba'\'al's construction of his palace following the victory over Yam. Yet unlike Canaanite religion, which required regular worship, rituals and sacrifices in order to guarantee the continuity of Ba'\'al's triumph over chaos, the Odist sees Christ's victory as definitive and enduring. It further appears that the Odist has interpreted the gospel passage at Matthew 16:18ff. in the same specific manner as other Syriac writers have done, and has used this text to enlarge on his picture of the
Descent. His development of this theme is made, as in other Descensus hymns, with cosmic significance, and the eschatological tone detected in the final verses of the Ode must be seen as realized in nature.
Notes to Chapter 3
(1) The argument for an underlying Greek text to the Coptic is made on the basis that there are many Greek terms embedded within the Coptic version. It is not within the remit of this enquiry to become involved in the debate concerning the Odes' language of composition. The readings of the Pistis Sophia will be taken into consideration only insofar as they impinge on the matter of interpretation.

(2) W. R. Newbold, "The Descent of Christ in the Odes of Solomon," J.B.L., XXXI (1912), pp.168-209. Newbold acknowledges that the whole of the debate concerning the extent to which the Odes may be deemed gnostic, or embody gnostic ideas, is dominated by uncertainty as to the meaning of the term "gnostic". He qualifies this by remarking of the Odes, "It seems to me indisputable that they contain certain ideas which were current among the Gnostics and were not current, although perhaps occasionally to be found, in other forms of Christianity." (p.169). This debate is wide ranging, and as with the language dispute, cannot be entered into here. It will be adverted to only when it has a direct bearing on the interpretation of the Ode in question.

(3) Harris, for example, lists a number of historical characters for whom the dragon might be a cypher, but he is not convinced that this is the correct direction in which to interpret. J. R. Harris, The Odes and Psalms of Solomon (Cambridge: University Press, 1909), pp.118-119.1


(5) It should be noted that Newbold, although preferring to understand Ode 22 as a reference to the descent of the Redeemer from the realms of light to the world of matter, is prepared to acknowledge that there is a definite reference to the Descensus ad Inferos in the 42nd Ode.

(6) The reading of Harris' manuscript for this line, wrmָly, could be construed either as a verb plus direct object or as a verb plus preposition. Harris himself preferred the former, translating the line, "He also who cast me down" (op. cit, p.118.).

(7) Pistis Sophia, Nag Hammadi Studies, IX, ed. C. Schmidt, trans. V. Macdermot (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), ad loc. Macdermot notes that in the second line of v2, the manuscript reads "taught them".


(9) Batiffol is evasive in his comments on the meaning of these terms. The speaker he identifies as Solomon, a figure for Christ, and states that the verses may depict his Descent into Hell or may allude to the Incarnation, with the "low places" referring to the earth. On the whole, he seems to prefer the latter interpretation, stating that the highly enigmatic second verse should be understood of the Spirit which is given to Christ (Psalm 104:30). He notes that such a localization of the Spirit
in the space which separates heaven from earth is found in the writings of Hippolytus, Augustine and Philo. [P. Batiffol, "Les Odes de Salomon," R.B., VIII (1911), pp.161-4.]

(10) The Syriac terms, and not the Coptic, have been cited since the Fistis Sophia quotes neither Ode 34 nor Ode 30.


(22) Newbold notes that the Syriac ru' is used in the Peshitta of John 20:25 to translate the Greek verb ballein in its weaker sense of "put", and that this is the meaning at Ode 22:2.


(24) The 17th Ode will be more fully discussed in a later chapter.


It has been argued that echoes of the divine conflict with the sea can be heard even in some gospel passages such as Christ's stilling of the storm and walking on the lake.

Whilst it is true that Revelation identifies the dragon with the Devil and Satan, and that these two characters and many more undoubtedly figure in the later Descensus tradition, the Odes appear to preserve a more primitive version of the Descent and understanding of the dragon figure. The Odist envisages a straightforward and decisive battle between two parties only, the speaker and Death.


The only line for which all the manuscripts have third person plural verbs is v10a.


The Pistis Sophia reads "freed" in place of "chose" in the first line of v8, but its version of the second line does include the idea of separation.

Bauer does indeed translate the Syriac verb gb' in this way (op. cit., p.603).

His Greek retroversion suggests that he takes the Syriac klmdm in the third line as an adverb (pantöe), rather than a noun.

Nöldeke states, "When two or more nouns, connected by means of waw or a like conjunction, combine to form one member of a proposition, then, as regards concord, various cases become possible ...... when there are differences in gender and number, it is sometimes the position, sometimes the assumed importance of one or more of the members, that determines the case." [T. Nöldeke, Compendious Syriac Grammar, trans. J. A. Crichton (London: Williams and Norgate, 1904), p.256, S322.]


This is against Labourt's translation, on which his comments are based.


The thought of the Ode at this point is very similar to the vision of the new heaven and earth in Revelation 21:1. The parallel with
this text from the Apocalypse is significant, for in addition to describing the passing away of the first earth, the biblical verse adds the words, "and the sea was no more".

(43) Harnack, who considers there to be no interpolation in this Ode whatever, remarks that this is pure coincidence.

(44) Op. cit., p.370. Their translation of this verse follows the reading of Harris' manuscript. Charlesworth notes that in place of mn gll in the second line, Burkitt's Syriac has mn k*p gll. He emends k*p here to k*p y "columns", stating that the restoration demonstrates the Odist's developed usage of paronomasia (op. cit., pp.117-8).

(45) The Descensus interpretation of Ode 31 will be more thoroughly examined at a later point.


(47) Ibid. p.231.


(49) The pattern is amazingly well preserved in IV Ezra 13:5ff. Here, the Man (= Messiah) rises from the sea and hews out a vast mountain for himself and there gathers the elect (13:12).

(50) This translation is cited on p.229 by A. P. Hayman in "Was God a Magician? Sefer Yeṣira and Jewish Magic," J.J.S., XL (1989), pp.225-37. Hayman comments that in line with a standard rabbinic tendency, the time when the chaos was suppressed is displaced in this passage from creation to Sinai.
Chapter 4: Ode 24
The subject of the present enquiry is the 24th Ode, and in particular its association of the familiar theme of Christ’s Descent into Hell with his baptism.

v1. The dove fluttered over the head of our Lord Messiah, Because he was her head.

v2. She sang over him, And her voice was heard.

v3. The inhabitants were afraid, And the dwellers trembled.

v4. The bird spread her wings, And every creeping thing died in its hollow.

v5. The abysses were opened and covered, They were seeking the Lord like women in childbirth.

v6. But he was not given to them for sustenance, Because he did not belong to them.

v7. Then the abysses were immersed in the Lord’s immersion. They perished in that (evil) intention which they had had from the beginning;

v8. For they were perverted from the beginning, But the result of their perversion was life.

v9. And everyone of them that was lacking perished, Because they could not defend their continued existence.

v10. The Lord destroyed the plots Of all those who did not possess the truth.

v11. For they lacked wisdom, Those who were arrogant;

v12. And were rejected, Because they did not possess the truth.

v13. But because the Lord revealed his Way And spread widely his grace,

v14. Those who understood it Know his holiness. Hallelujah.
The primary concern of the foregoing chapters has been to demonstrate that some of the more obscure thoughts found in certain Odes are to be interpreted in terms of the Descensus ad Inferos. Discussion of the texts has been wide-ranging, and has included retracing the possible source of their imagery and a consideration of the way the Descent theme is developed by the Odist to convey important Christian ideas.

It had been suggested by some readers of the Odes that they make little of the death and resurrection of Christ, events so central to early Christianity, yet the preceding examination has revealed that this is clearly not the case. For the Odist, the abstract language of the theologian on the subject of the Passion is given the substance of the very real physical battle with Death. Indeed it may be argued that, using the language of the Descensus as a frame, the Odes present a full and systematic treatment of all the theological, Christological and soteriological implications of Christ's death and resurrection.

It follows from this that the temporal setting of the Descent in the Odes has hitherto been supposed to be after the crucifixion. Such an occasion is demanded by the wider context in Odes 42 and 31, since the Descensus material is preceded by allusions to the Passion. Furthermore, it is supported by the weight of broader Christian tradition, which regards the Descent as having taken place during the three days between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. However, this well established chronological pattern seems to be disturbed in the 24th Ode, in which the Odist associates Christ's Descent not with his death, but with his baptism.

Naturally, other interpretations of this hymn have been put forward. Scholars such as Harnack and Grimme, who consider the Odes to be a Jewish composition which has undergone later Christian
interpolation, are opposed to seeing Christ's Descent in the background. At the same time, those who believe the collection to be Christian in provenance have been perplexed by the timing of events which Ode 24 appears to present, and are reluctant to admit of a possible connection between baptism and Descent. The approach taken in this chapter will be to begin by examining four of these non-Descent interpretations which have been offered, and to identify their weaknesses. The latter part of the chapter will then move on to promote the Descensus interpretation, and to consider whether there is any evidence to indicate that other early Christian writers associated the Descent with Christ's baptism. The Odist's usage of this theme will again be looked into, and the specific question as to what may have been intended by this resiting of the Descensus away from the Passion and into a baptismal context will be addressed.

The Judgement at the End Time

Grimme\textsuperscript{1}\textsuperscript{1}, in line with his overall theory that the Odes were a Jewish composition subject to later revision by a Christian editor, argued that Ode 24 be understood as a prophetic account of the events of the End Time. The dove (possibly a figure for the Holy Spirit) appears, causing terror among all creatures, and the opponents of truth are finally destroyed by the Lord. He follows Harnack\textsuperscript{2} in thinking that the opening stanzas have been extensively reworked by the Christian editor, and suggests that they once simply read:

\textit{The dove fluttered over the earth,}

\textit{And her voice was heard.}
He appears to take the fourth verse as a reference to the destruction of the animal kingdom. Underlying the Syriac term prht' is the Hebrew collective noun 4wp, these birds being unrelated to the dove of v1(3).

Grimme's belief that the Syriac of the Odes is secondary, and represents a translation from a Hebrew text, also allows him to remove much of the obscurity from vv5-7 by suggesting that the alleged translator has either misread or misunderstood the Hebrew that stood before him. He renders these verses as follows:

Und die Abgründe tun sich auf, und die (darin) Verborgenen schreien zum Herrn,
Gleich Kindern, denen keine Nahrung gegeben wird aus Mangel an Brot.
In Abgründe waren sie niedergedrückt durch das Siegel des Herrn,
Und es waren durch diesen Beschluss zu Grunde gegangen, die vordem gelebt hatten.

In the fifth verse of the text he proposes that the particle d has been omitted from the verb ḫksyw, and that the verb hww be read with this as an auxiliary rather than with the verb in the second line, which he further emends from b'yyn to q'yyn. Thus the subject of the lines which follow is not the abysses themselves, but those who are hidden in them, the opponents of truth. Grimme considers the reference to the bearing women nonsensical, and maintains that this has arisen from a misreading of the original Hebrew which bore ylwdym and not ywltd. He states that the idea of abandoned children crying for food is far more intelligible. Similarly, he contends that v6b is incomprehensible as it stands, and that the Syriac dylhwn stems from a misreading of the noun lh(m) (bread) which stood in the Hebrew text by the preposition and suffix lh(m) (theirs). Based on his view that the subject of these lines is those who are hidden in the abysses, he further suggests that the preposition b has been dropped from before the noun thwm in v7.
Grimme's interpretation, whilst it can be sustained for the whole of the Ode, presents more difficulties than it resolves. Its validity depends entirely on agreement with his theory that the extant Syriac text represents a translation from, and interpolation into, an original Hebrew version. All of the emendations which he proposes and the reconstructed Hebrew he gives must be accepted before his interpretation can be sustained. There is no guarantee, however, that any of this is correct.

Furthermore, given that there is substantial accord between the two Syriac manuscripts of the Ode, and no Hebrew version has come to light, an attempt should be made to interpret the text as it stands. It must be assumed that even if the hand of the translator or editor has been at work, the form of the text they left behind made some sense. Particularly problematical in this respect are the changes Grimme suggests have been made to the hymn's opening stanzas. If the Ode originally prophesied the events that were to take place at the End Time, as he clearly thinks it does, why then would a Christian editor introduce what appears to be an allusion to Christ's baptism? The reworking here by the so called interpolator is substantial, and its significance must be sought. It seems that Grimme himself singularly fails to address this issue, and his interpretation must therefore be set aside at least until a fuller attempt has been made to understand the extant version of the Ode.

The Flood

In an article published in 1911 entitled "Two Flood Hymns of the Early Church", Harris departed from the position he had taken in the editio princeps that Ode 24 dealt with the Descensus, and suggested instead
that the Flood provided the background against which the hymn should be interpreted. Taking the third verse of the Ode as his starting point, and reading the plural form "birds" in v4, he argued that the scenario described corresponds closely with the events of the Flood as detailed in Genesis:

The inhabitants were afraid,
And the sojourners were moved:
The birds dropped their wings,
And all creeping things died in their holes;
And the abysses were opened which had been hidden.

He regards the Syriac phrase *wthwm* *p‡hw w†ksyw* (v5a) as an allusion to the statement in Genesis 7:11 that the fountains of the great abyss were broken up and the windows of heaven were opened, and construes the fourth verse as a reference to the destruction of the animal kingdom parallel to Genesis 7:21. The latter part of the Ode, Harris maintains, alludes to the corrupt state of mankind prior to the Flood. Its language is taken from passages such as Genesis 6:5-6 and 8:21.

The Flood theme enables Harris to explain much of the Ode, but still leaves the opening verses and the reference to the hungry abysses unaccounted for. It is at this point that his interpretation falters. Adducing parallels from Ephraim's *Nisibene Hymns* on the subject of the Descent, Harris acknowledges that the hungry abysses of the Ode demand a Descensus context, but considers that this has been intruded into the Noachic situation. He suggests that the only connecting link is the word "abyss", and concludes that vv5b-7a of the Ode are a Christian interpolation into an otherwise Jewish Ode.

Having assumed that the hymn has been subject to interpolation, this allows Harris to infer, like Grimm and Harnack, that the first two verses have also been reworked by a Christian editor. The dove
of the opening stanzas, he argues, was the bird sent by Noah from the ark, distinguished from the rest of the fowls (prḥt, v4a) that perish in the Flood. Its task in the original recension of the Ode must have been to announce judgement, hence the general fear on the part of the inhabitants of the earth (v3). The body of the hymn, with the exception of the interpolated Descensus material, is to be seen as the text of the judgement which the dove pronounces, and is inspired by the Genesis texts noted above. The reference to the Messiah in v1, unless he be identified with Noah (a suggestion which Harris appears to find improbable), is to be removed entirely, and the opening reconstructed to read:

The dove fluttered down on the olive-tree,

And she sang upon it,
And her voice was heard:

Several objections may be levelled against this interpretation of Ode 24, chief amongst them being that like that of Grimme, it relies on a complete acceptance of the scholar's interpolation theory and the reconstruction which he offers of the opening stanzas and vv7b-10. The distinction Harris draws between interpolated and original material appears artificial, and it seems possible that vv7b-10 refer to the corrupt state of the abysses rather than that of mankind, as he has suggested. Even if editorial influence be detected, he is unable to trace a motive for the intrusion of the Descensus material in the Flood narrative, the observation that the word "abyss" provides the connecting link being inadequate.

In addition to these general difficulties, there is also a specific problem with Harris' interpretation of what he regards as the original Jewish Ode. The fourth verse he understands as a reference to the
destruction of the animal kingdom which alludes to Genesis 7:21. In his view, the Odist mentions two of the groups of creatures listed there, the birds and the creeping things. Yet there is a manuscript variant in v4a, and it is by no means certain that the plural form "birds" should be read. Harris' own manuscript reads prh\(^t\) šbqt gpyh, but even allowing for the fact that the singular and plural forms of the noun prh\(^t\) are indistinguishable in an unpointed text, the verb and the possessive suffix which follow it (šbqt gpyh) are both singular. Burkitt's manuscript makes the plural reading "birds" impossible, since it presents the third feminine singular verbal form prh\(^t\) in place of prh\(^t\)\(^*\)\(^7\). If the singular form "bird" is read, the most natural way to take the line would be to identify this bird with the dove of the first verse. Furthermore, Harris-Mingana, while still preferring the plural form "birds", have suggested that the phrase šbqt gpyh is an idiomatic expression, in which the verb šbq means "to give freedom to an object in order to accomplish the function assigned to it with all its energy"\(^15\). They argue that it is used with this sense at Ode 33:3, where the reference is to Grace calling out (literally, "let loose her voice"), and translate Ode 24:4a:

_The birds took to flight_

This removes the notion of destruction from the line and implies merely movement or activity.

Thus the parallel with Genesis 7:21 which Harris cites for the fourth verse of the Ode is called into question, for the latter reproduces only one of the groups spoken of in the biblical text, the creeping things. Since he takes this verse as the opening of the original hymn, and builds his overall interpretation on his understanding of it, it must be asked whether that interpretation can
be sustained\textsuperscript{\textdegree}'. Harris himself evidently felt that it could not, and reverted to a \textit{Descensus} interpretation for this Ode in his later work with Mingana.

**The Triumph of Christianity over Paganism and Judaism**

This interpretation, based on another highly individual reading of the Syriac text, was expressed by Bruston\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{\textdegree}°}. He seeks an alternative biblical identity for the dove of the opening verses of the Ode, rejecting the Noachic and baptismal options, but stating that it is the image of the simple soul, sweet and pure, inspired by Christ's exhortation to the Twelve at Matthew 10:16. In Christ, it has immediately recognized its master (\textit{\textit{rẏs\textsuperscript{\textdegree} hw\textsuperscript{\textdegree} lh}}) and flown towards him, beginning to sing of his greatness.

Discussing the possible provenance of the collection, which he considers to be a Christian composition, Bruston regards this Ode as illustrative of its Syrian origin. He translates vv3-6 as follows:

\begin{quote}
Et les indigènes ont craint,  
et les étrangers établis (parmi eux) ont été émus.  
L'oiseau a laissé (pendre) ses ailes;  
et le reptile, un mal mortel le retenait dans son trou;  
et des flots ont été couverts et vidés à fond.  
Et ils invoquaient le Seigneur comme des femmes en travail,  
et il ne leur fut pas donné de nourriture;  
c'est pourquoi leur destruction a eu lieu;
\end{quote}

These lines describe a country where two populations of different origin were mixed, in which pagan divinities with sacred birds (\textit{pr̩ht\textdegree}), reptiles (\textit{rb̩ś}) and pools (\textit{thwm\textdegree}) were worshipped. He construes \textit{v4a} with the same \textit{malam partem} sense as Harris, and considers the meaning of vv4-5a to be that the sacred birds and reptiles have been neglected, and the ponds which contained the sacred fish have been emptied and
dried out. All this has happened because of the people's conversion to Christianity, which has superseded paganism.

Bruston avoids the difficulty experienced by Harris of having to account for the allusion to the hungry abysses (vv5b-6) by implying that these lines refer not to the abysses (though this is the most natural sense) but to the reptiles (v4b). He notes that the Odist may have been thinking of Psalm 104:27. His reconstruction of v4b can only be accounted for by his understanding of the sixth verse which, he states, demonstrates that the reptiles had not been dead previously as the extant Syriac of v4b actually suggests they were. He does not though offer any thoughts as to the identity of the "mal mortel" (v4b), nor explain the figure of the "femmes en travail" to describe the way the reptiles sought the Lord (v5b).

The mention of the two mixed populations in v3, according to Bruston, discounts Greece as the possible home of the Odes, though may apply to Syria or Egypt. The latter, however, is excluded by the absence of quadrupeds from the list of sacred animals. Moreover, there is positive support for a Syrian provenance from evidence that doves, lakes and fish were held to be sacred to Atargatis, the Syrian goddess; the serpents, he argues, were considered sacred to the god of medicine.

It is not only of the destruction of paganism that the dove sings, for the latter part of the Ode also describes the end of Judaism. Bruston renders v9a in the following way:

Et a péri du milieu d'eux la charte qui était imparfaite,

Charlesworth has suggested that in place of the word dkl in the line he has read dpl, and further emended this to dp meaning "tablet", which he has then taken to refer to the Mosaic Law. Bruston
himself cites in support the use of the comparable Greek noun cheirographon at Colossians 2:14 to designate the Law. The references to "those who do not possess the truth" (vv10 and 12) but are "proud" (v11) are clearly the Jews, and he compares the thought in Romans 2. The closing stanzas of the Ode which speak of the extension of the Lord's grace serve to underline the triumph of Christian universalism over Jewish particularism.

Bruston's interpretation of the hymn has little in common with that of Harris, save that it too is problematical. It seems that his desire to promote the Syrian provenance of the collection leads him to see a distinction between the two terms (`mwr and twtə) in v3, so that one refers to an indigenous population and the other a group of strangers who have settled. Such a distinction is artificial, and it is arguable that mention of two synonymous parties is made simply to emphasize the universality of the fear engendered by the dove's song. His understanding of v4a (which involves the notion of destruction of the sacred birds) is similar to Harris' in that it fails to detect the idiomatic usage of the verb šbq, and the same objections apply.

The main difficulty, however, is that it is exceedingly difficult to account for much of the translation Bruston gives, which departs considerably from the Syriac text preserved in the manuscripts, and upon which a great deal of his interpretation depends. There are few suggested emendations, and scant text critical notes. Bruston himself remarks that it is pointless trying to modify the text or be detained in an explanation of how the translation has been arrived at, yet it seems that in cases of such radical departure some sort of justification for the reading is demanded. Of particular obscurity are his versions of vv4b, 5a, 6 and 9a. Since these are absolutely crucial
to his interpretation, some account of their origin is required before they can be embraced. Other readers of the Odes were unable to share Bruston's confidence in his reconstruction of the text, and his interpretation has been abandoned.

The Regenerating Work of the Word

As part of the flurry of scholarly activity that occurred in the decade following Harris' discovery of the Odes, Newbold asserted that the collection had been composed by Bardaisan\(^ {133} \). His claim was made on the basis of what he saw as three important facts about the nature of the Odes. Firstly, that they are the work of a gifted poet. Secondly, that they unmistakably reveal the influence of gnosticism, curiously blending the gnostic with the orthodox. Finally, they were written by someone who knew the life of the spirit by immediate personal experience. Bardaisan, he maintained, was the most obvious candidate to fulfill all three of the above requirements for authorship.

Newbold argues that the 12th hymn outlines the regenerating work of the Word (Messiah), and that Ode 24 depicts a precise stage in that work, the stage initiated by the descent of the dove. For Bardaisan, the role of the Word was to establish order and harmony among the five elements, fire, air, water, light and darkness. These had become, for a reason unspecified, commingled. The creation of the world and the final perfection of the universe were thought to be the beginning and end of this vast process, of which the regeneration of man was only part. The birth of Christ represented one stage in it, the descent of the dove may be seen as another.

In Ode 24, Bardaisan describes the effect of that descent on nature, first on the animals (vv3-4) and later on the abysses (vv5-6).
These represent the great gulfs of air, vapour and fire, remnants of primeval chaos, which separate heaven from earth. He translates the fifth and sixth verses of the hymn:

The abysses were opened,  
and were spurned:  
They were crying to the Lord like women in labor,  
and no food was given them,  
because there was none for them.

They describe the attempt by the abysses to devour the dove as it descends through them. Hitherto, Newbold states, they had been intent on devouring one another, underlying this being the ancient conception of the elements as opposites which when brought into contact cause mutual destruction. The dove thrusts them aside, and their cry comes as a result of the state of agonized turmoil and confusion into which the dove's divine presence has thrown them.

Suddenly, with the seventh verse of the hymn, the thought leaps forward to describe the consummation of the Word’s work, the warring elements are finally brought to rest by the thought or will of God. This is the meaning of v8, Newbold states, that the present world must pass away to allow for the establishment of a new heaven and a new earth. From v10 onwards, the focus shifts from the cosmological to the anthropological aspect of the work of the Word.

There are several difficulties with Newbold’s interpretation of this Ode. Firstly, in general, it seems essential that his theory of gnostic influence on the collection as a whole be accepted before it can be sustained. Yet there is significant doubt among the scholars as to whether the Odes betray elements of gnostic thought. More specifically, his interpretation relies heavily on the identification of the thwm with the warring primeval elements. There is, however, no real evidence from the wider context to suggest that this
identification is correct. He also imports a considerable amount into the text in order to derive the view that these abysses had been intent on devouring (= destroying) each other prior to the descent of the dove. This criticism applies even if his translation of vv5a and 6b, for which he offers no explanation, be accepted.

In common with other readings of this Ode which have already been examined, vv4-6 have proven to be the rock on which Newbold founders. Additionally, there are two further weaknesses which his understanding shares with those already discussed. The first is its incorrect construction of v4, which has been commented on above; the second, its inability to explain adequately the meaning of the opening lines. Newbold is certain that the whole of the hymn is to be understood in terms of the effects of the dove's descent and presence, which makes his reading of v4 all the more difficult to comprehend. He remarks that the first verse reflects the Valentinian gnostic idea that the divine Christ did not come to earth until the moment of the baptism, but that the dove here does not represent Christ, for the Messiah is her head. He accounts for this as "an indication of the curious blending of orthodox and Gnostic ideas so characteristic of these Odes." Since his overall interpretation is so reliant on his understanding of the function the dove fulfills and its identification with the Word, it seems that this comment is a dismissal of one of the greater difficulties presented.

He appears not to cite any evidence from Bardaisan's work to suggest that the poet saw the descent of the dove as a stage in the work of the Word. Nor does he account for what he sees as the shift from the cosmological to the anthropological concerns of the hymn's
closing stanzas. For all the above reasons, his interpretation is to be rejected.

Summary

This completes the examination of four of the non-Descensus interpretations of Ode 24 which have been put forward. Three main areas of difficulty in understanding the hymn have been exposed. The first is that, with the exception of Bruston, the commentators have been unable to make sense of the opening verses, or show their relationship to the rest of the Ode, without recourse to the theory of interpolation and emendation of the text. All, and the French scholar is to be included here, have ignored the most obvious possibility that there is a deliberate and integral allusion to the gospel accounts of Christ's baptism. The second criticism, which is related to that above, is that the first line of the fourth verse has been widely misconstrued to refer to the destruction of a part of the animal kingdom. This has led the writers to overlook the most natural sense of the verse, which would be to see the bird here as synonymous with the dove of the opening lines. Such failure is particularly marked in the cases of Bruston and Harris, since their overall understanding of the Ode takes this verse as the point of departure. The final objection which may commonly be raised is that the writers have failed to explain satisfactorily the reference to the abysses, and by extension, to their hunger and being like women in childbirth. Grimme is forced to resort to alleged mistranslation, Harris to parenthesis. Newbold, meanwhile, proposes an improbable identity for the abysses, whereas Bruston engages in an unsupported rewriting of the text.
The conclusion to be drawn must therefore be that any alternative interpretation suggested for the Ode must take account of these problems and avoid them. It appears that the Descensus interpretation meets the threefold requirement of being able to make sense of the opening lines, to construe correctly v4a and to account for the mention of the abysses, including what is predicated of them. It is now appropriate to consider this in greater detail.

The Descent into Hell

The dove fluttered over the head of our Lord Messiah\(^{11}\),
Because he was her head.

She sang over him,
And her voice was heard.

The inhabitants were afraid,
And the dwellers trembled.

The view that the extant opening stanzas of the hymn allude to an event described in the biblical accounts of Christ's baptism, the descent of the dove, is shared by most of the commentators. This includes on the one hand the scholars who consider the opening to have been reworked by a Christian editor, and on the other those who believe it to be unrelated to the rest of the Ode. It will be shown in the interpretation which follows that these verses form an integral part of the hymn, and that they provide the backdrop against which the remaining lines are set.

The gospels themselves differ somewhat in their reports of Christ's baptism. Matthew (3:13ff.) and Mark (1:9ff.) suggest that the dove's descent took place at the point of Christ's emergence from the waters; Luke (3:21ff.), that it happened after the baptism when Jesus was praying. The Fourth Gospel (1:29ff.) typically recasts the whole
episode, and the precise timing of the descent of the Spirit is unspecified. All of the evangelists, however, remark that the descent of the Spirit was accompanied by some sort of announcement. In the synoptics, this takes the form of a voice from heaven stating that Jesus is the beloved son with whom the speaker is well pleased; in John, it is the voice of the one who sent the Baptist, stating that Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

The Ode differs again in its treatment of this material, but it seems that the allusion to the same event remains clear. Assuming that the dove is a figure for the Holy Spirit, as it is in the gospels, the Odist evidently subordinates the Spirit to the Messiah. Bernard\(^1\), realizing that the orthodoxy of the collection is thus compromised, remarks that "our head" would be preferable. Harris\(^1\), who is similarly perturbed, suggests that this Ode was known to and borrowed by Ephraim, but that the latter is at pains to correct the Odist's theology. In the ninth Epiphany Hymn, he takes up the play on the word head, and explains carefully that the Son is the head of heaven and earth also. Murray notes that in contrast to the subordination here, the Spirit is sometimes depicted in the Odes as the mother of Christ (Ode 36:3), or at least as the feminine power who somehow mediates the Son to the world through Mary (Ode 19).\(^2\)

For the evangelists, the announcement that accompanies the dove's descent must be made by God; its intended audience, those who are present at Christ's baptism. But for the Odist, the chanteuse is the dove herself, and though her song goes unreported, it seems that the content and audience are entirely other than those in the gospels. Of what then does the dove sing, and who are the ones who were so disturbed on hearing her message?
The answer to these questions can only lie in the verses which follow:

The bird spread her wings,
And every creeping thing died in its hollow.

The abysses were opened and covered,
They were seeking the Lord like women in childbirth.

But he was not given to them for sustenance, Because he did not belong to them.

The variant readings for the first of these lines (v4a) have already been discussed, but their significance to the overall understanding of the hymn is great, and some of the more important points need to be reiterated. The first is that the noun prḥt’ in Harris’ manuscript may be pointed as a singular or plural, but the verb which follows it is singular in form, as is the possessive suffix to the plural noun ʿgḥ.

Burkitt’s manuscript reads the third feminine singular verbal form prḥt in place of Harris’ noun prḥt, and in this case a subject must be supplied. Whichever reading is preferred, the reference must be to a bird (singular). Secondly, the expression šbqt ʿgpyḥ is to be construed idiomatically, not as a reference to the dropping of wings in death or exhaustion, but to their being freed to accomplish a specific task. The nearest English equivalent for this expression would be “spread her wings” or perhaps the paraphrase “took to flight”. It therefore follows that the most obvious subject of v4a must be the dove of the opening stanzas.

Moreover, it appears that this line marks a shift in the tempo of the Ode, for the next, v4b, plunges straight away into the thought of destruction, reporting the death of the creeping things. Clearly the idea is that the events of which the dove had sung in her lament, while fluttering over the Lord’s head, begin to take place as she becomes
more active. Thus her hymn must be seen as a warning of the destruction to come, and the dwellers who were so terrified on hearing it should be equated with the creeping things mentioned in v4b. This moves the reader a step closer to identifying just who these creatures are, and perhaps their description as dwellers and inhabitants requires further consideration.

Given that the context is baptismal and the setting the River Jordan, the Odist may have been thinking not of those present on the land, but of the inhabitants of the waters. The canonical accounts of the baptism have been shown to diverge in their timings of the dove’s descent, and it seems likely that Ode 24 resites this at the point of Christ’s immersion in the river. There is evidence elsewhere in the collection to support the theory that the Odist considered the waters to be inhabited. His belief in the existence of the seven headed dragon as a denizen of the cosmic ocean has already been discussed in the chapter on Ode 22. Here, it seems, this view is expanded, as it was by others in the ancient world, so that all seas and rivers of the earth, including the Jordan, are held to be in communication with this ocean, and are likewise inhabited.

The marked influence of Canaanite ideas on the Odist’s usage of the dragon figure has already been noted. In view of the dragon’s title "Prince" in these Ugaritic texts, perhaps the inhabitants of the Jordan mentioned in Ode 24 are to be seen as members of his royal retinue. Should this identification of the dwellers (who are the creeping things) with Yam’s entourage be correct, a further point is raised. This is that Yam is clearly equated in the 22nd Ode with Mot himself, and it was argued that the Odist’s concept of Sheol accordingly extends to cover subaquatic as well as subterranean
locations. Thus the Odist uses the medium of the water at Christ's baptism to return to his favourite theme, the Descent into Hell. The connection may appear tenuous at first sight, but the imagery used in the remaining verses will bear this theory out.

Returning to the content of the fourth verse, it is important to note that the Odist does not imply that the dove herself is responsible for the deaths of the inhabitants, merely that they occur when she spreads her wings. Indeed, it appears from what follows that it is Christ who is the bringer of destruction. Possibly the notion underlying v4a is that the dove's taking to flight in some way empowers or assists the Lord in his task of destruction. Alternatively, it may be that this is intended as a visible sign to those above the waters of the turmoil that is taking place within them.20

The plural noun thwm3, which is the subject of v5, is found only once more in the entire collection. This single other occurrence is at Ode 31:1, in what is clearly a Descensus context. The term essentially connotes depth, and can apply equally to a great chasm in the ground or to deep waters. Its Hebrew equivalent, thwm, is used at Genesis 1:2 to describe the waters which exist in a state of darkness, alongside the chaotic form of the earth, before God's enlightenment and ordering in creation. Bieder21 is clearly correct in his observation that here in the 24th Ode, Sheol is depicted as a plurality of abysses.

Both manuscripts for v5a read wthwm3 ḫptw ḫksyw. The root of the second verb is ḫs3, the basic meaning of its ethpa'al theme being "to be covered" or "hidden". The commentators have evidently struggled to make sense of the thought lying behind this verse and this is reflected in the number of translations and emendations, too

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many to list, which have been put forward. The text, however, is intelligible as it stands, and there are two possible ways to interpret the line. The first would be to understand it in the light of v5b, with its mention of the women in childbirth, and see it as a vivid allusion to the birthing process, the opening and covering (= closing) of the cervix. The second would be to suggest that the line be read in the context of the thought of v6, and that the opening and covering be taken to refer to the desperate, but futile, snapping action by the jaws of the abysses.

Both of these images, the women in childbirth and the hungry mouths, are of great interest. For the interpretations of the Ode examined above, they proved to be the stumbling block on which the scholars foundered. This is not so with the Descensus understanding. In the case of the latter, the Odist's picture of Mot's insatiable appetite has been exposed to the full, and requires little further comment. Three points should simply be noted. The first is the observation made by Bauer that at Ode 24:6, in contrast with Ode 42:11, there is no thought of disgorging. Christ has never been given to the abysses to be consumed by them. This relates to Bieder's comment, the second point, that oddly Christ is passive here and only becomes active in the 10th verse. It must be implied that he was not given to the abysses by God. The final point is that the second line of v6 need not be assumed to be corrupt, simply that it reflects the same play on the notion of possession which was noted in Ode 42 (vv14a and 20b). What is implicit at this point in Ode 24, and explicit elsewhere in the collection, is that Christ does not belong to the abysses and therefore cannot be consumed by them because his nature is wholly other than theirs.
The introduction of the birthing metaphor into the Descent narrative represents a new departure for the Odist, and a possible source must be sought. Plooij remarks that the belief that Sheol cried out at the coming of Christ is common enough, but the qualification that the abysses cried "like women in childbirth" is far rarer. He cites illustrations of this idea from Acts 2:24 (which speaks of the pangs of death that have been cast off by God in raising Christ from the dead) and Colossians 1:18 (in which Christ is described as the first born from the dead). The idea in the epistle may be compared with the threat against the wicked man at Job 18:13 that:

Firstborn Death will devour his limbs

Underlying this is the Canaanite notion that Mot is the firstborn son of El. Plooij further argues that the most striking parallel to the thought of the Ode is to be found at IV Ezra 4:41ff., where Hades is explicitly deemed to be a mother womb, and likened to a woman striving to be rid of her birth pangs as soon as possible. Alternatively, Carmignac, who maintains that the Odist had been a member of the Qumran community and converted to Christianity, proposes that he is exploiting a theme found in the Hodayoth:

Sheol and the place of perdition open ....... they make their voice heard from the abyss ....... the gates of death are opened ......... the doors of the pit are closed behind the (woman) pregnant of perversity. (3:16-18)

Bernard cites the following passage from Chrysostom, in which the birthing and gorging metaphors of Death are combined just as they are here in Ode 22:5-6, and the prison image of Sheol is also present:

Then was that prison burst, and the gates of brass were broken, and the dead were loosed, and the keepers of the Hell-gate all quaked for fear. And yet, had He been one of the many, Death on the
contrary should have become more mighty; but it
was not so. For He was not one of the many.
Therefore was Death dissolved. And as they who
take food, which they are unable to retain, on
account of that vomit up also what was before
lodged in them; so also it happened unto Death.
That Body which he could not work upon, he
received; and therefore had to cast forth those
also which he had within him. Yea, he travailed,
whilst he held Him, and was straitened, until he
vomited Him up. Therefore saith the Apostle,
'having loosed the pains of death'. For never
woman in travail with child was so full of
anguish, as he was torn and racked in sunder,
while he held the Lord's Body.

Within the Odes themselves, there is an interesting contrast to be
made between the idea of the abysses' sufferings in labour, and the
virgin's painless delivery bringing forth her son in Ode 19. The
underlying dualistic tone is once more to be detected. The virgin is
able to bear her son like a strong man, and dispense with the services
of a midwife, because she functions as an agent of the Lord. But the
abysses are struck down with pain, and desperately seek his assistance,
because they are his opponents. The same verb, $b^\circ$, is used in both
hymns to express this contrast.

The antiquity of the abysses' hostility is described more fully in
vv7b-8:

They perished in that (evil) intention which they
had had from the beginning;

For they were perverted from the beginning,
But the result of their perversion was life.\(^{[26]}\)

Prior to this, the Odist depicts their ultimate destruction using an
elaborate play on the verb $tb'$ and its related noun $\tau w b^\circ$. There are
two potential translations of v7a which reflect the double meaning of
this root, "to sink" or "to seal". Harris\(^{[27]}\) prefers the latter sense,
translating the line:
And they sealed up the abysses with the seal of the Lord

His choice is shared by Bernard and Bacon\(^{28}\), who suggests that the language of the Ode depends on a passage from the Apocalypse of Baruch, which also deals with the abolition of Sheol

Reprove therefore the angel of death, and let thy glory appear, and let the might of thy beauty be known, and let Sheol be sealed so that from this time forward it may not receive the dead, and let the treasuries of souls restore those which are enclosed in them. (21:23)

The difficulty of establishing the subject of the line (i.e., the identity of the "they") for Harris' translation was realized by some commentators. Harnack therefore used an impersonal verb ("man versiegelte ...."); Newbold, a passive ("the abysses were sealed ...."). In contrast, Harris-Mingana preferred the meaning "to sink", with the extended sense "to submerge" or "overwhelm", for the verb \( \text{t}b \). They suggest v7a be rendered:

But the chasms were submersed in the submersion of the Lord

and are followed by Charlesworth, Bauer and Bruston.

Either sense of the verb \( \text{t}b \) and its related noun would be appropriate to the baptismal context, but it seems that the idea of overwhelming raises fewer problems than that of sealing and perhaps the translation "immersed" and "immersion" best brings out the sacramental connotation. Once again, the familiar notion of the Descent as a reversal is apparent. Just as the gorger is poisoned and can swallow no more, so the waters are themselves overwhelmed in Christ's baptism and can no longer drown.

There is too some disagreement between the scholars as to the translation of the second line of v7. The argument hinges on how the
relative $d$ prefixed to $\gamma t\gamma h\nu\nu$ is to be construed. Harris-Mingana, followed by Bacon and Charlesworth, take it to refer to the noun $m\partial b\partial t$, which must be a cypher for the deadly machinations of the abysses:

And they perished in the thought which they had existed in from the beginning.

But the majority of commentators assume it relates to the subject of the line contained within the verb $\lambda d\nu\nu$. Flemming, for example, translates:

und es gingen zugrunde durch diesen Gedanken sie, die vorher existiert hatten,

In this case, it is unclear whether $m\partial b\partial t$ is to be interpreted with the negative sense noted above, or positively, as a reference to the divine life giving plan. In the wider collection this noun is employed with both connotations, but its unambiguously pejorative usage later in Ode 24 at v10a suggests it should be taken negatively here. The sense is little affected whichever reading of the line is preferred since, for the Odist, the nature of the abysses is inseparable from the notion of their deadly intention. They are the ancient opponents of the Lord and their purpose has always been to thwart his plan. The significance of Christ's victory in the first line of v7 is underscored in the second by means of a deliberate allusion to the antiquity of the previous plan.

The relationship in the Odist's mind between the Höllensturmung and the Chaoskampf has already been remarked on in the discussion about the dragon who features in Ode 22. It seems that this association is once more apparent in the 24th hymn from the use of the terms $m\nu \iota\nu\delta\mu\mu\nu$, $\rho\nu\varsigma\gamma\tau\tau\tau$ and $\theta\nu\mu\mu\nu$! Moreover, the fluttering of the dove over the Messiah's head in v1 not only alludes to Christ's baptism, but also recalls the activity of the Spirit of God who swoops or hovers.
(rḥp) like a mother bird over the face of the waters at Genesis 1:2. Evidently the Descensus in the Odes replicates, with Christ as the protagonist, the battle waged by God to establish order against the chaotic primordial waters in creation.

The extensive paronomasia which characterized the preceding verse continues in v8 with a complex play on the root ḥbl. It is clear from Ode 33 that the Odist uses this verb and its related nouns in a Descensus context as a title for Death and what he causes i.e., physical corruption. However, this is an extended meaning derived from the verb’s literal sense, which is of the twisting and writhing by women in childbirth. It is precisely this image which was used to describe the way the abysses sought the Lord in the fifth verse. The translator experiences considerable difficulty in finding an English equivalent that reflects both the extended and literal meanings of ḥbl, but in view of the reference to the eternal struggle between chaos and order which has been detected, the verb should be read as a pe’al and the terms "perverted" and "perversion" are most apt.

In v8b the matter is further complicated since it is uncertain whether the possessive suffix attached to the noun ḥwbl refers to the deadly activity by the abysses towards others or to their own death. Thus the line could be seen as an elliptical expression meaning that despite the lethal deeds of the abysses, the divine plan prevails through the advent of Christ, and there is still life. Alternatively, it may involve the idea that because the abysses had previously caused death, now they themselves are destroyed, the result is the life of others. This second line of Ode 24:8 is perhaps the single most powerful example from the entire collection of the Odist’s consummate skill as a poet. Charlesworth refuses to accept that such tightly
interwoven linguistic harmony should be attributed to the hand of a translator, and cites this verse in support of the argument for the priority of the Syriac.

In the ninth and following verses the nature of the abysses is further described in terms of their shortcomings:

And every one of them that was lacking perished,  
Because they could not defend their continued existence.

The Lord destroyed the plots  
Of all those who did not possess the truth.

For they lacked wisdom,  
Those who were arrogant;  
And were rejected,  
Because they did not possess the truth.

It seems that the reference must still be to the abysses, for no new subject has been introduced, and the theme of their destruction, in addition to that of their plan, persists. Yet the accusations which are made almost suggest that the thought has been enlarged to encompass all the opponents of the Lord, deadly and otherwise. The statement that they were lacking, with the implicit notion that this is the reason for their destruction (v9a), is more fully expanded in the lines that follow using language which is markedly biblical in tone. The criticism is threefold; firstly they do not possess the truth, secondly they lack wisdom and thirdly they are lifted up in their hearts i.e., arrogant.

Charlesworth and Culpepper compare the thought of v10b, which is repeated in the 12th verse, with that of John 8:44:

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him .....
The wider context in the gospel is of Christ defending his authority on the basis of his divine paternity and mission. This is in turn contrasted with earthly paternity and murderous intent of his opponents. The theme of truth runs throughout the chapter (vv13, 14, 16, 17, 26 and 32) as does the emphasis on knowledge. This stress on the importance of knowledge is also found frequently in the Odes and it is sometimes represented using the synonymous term "wisdom", the absence of which is the second charge made against the abysses in vila. There is much evidence to suggest that the Odist makes extensive use of ideas and language from the Wisdom literature, possibly in an attempt to support the collection’s ascription to Solomon, and it seems that he shares its conception of the key terms knowledge, wisdom and understanding, which are used to describe the requirements of a theologically and ethically correct relationship with God. Those who possess them are on the side of the Lord, those who lack them are his opponents.

It appears too, that the third allegation may also have been influenced by the Wisdom tradition. The idea that humility is the appropriate response to the Lord, and its converse, that arrogance often leads to self destruction, are common enough in the Old Testament, but the conjunction of humility and knowledge is expressly made at Proverbs 1:7:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Thus the negative qualities of the subterranean abysses are described in language which the biblical writers used to depict the unbelieving opposing natures of men. The contention that the scope of the hymn is enlarged at this point beyond Sheol to include the earthly opponents of
the Lord is supported by evidence of this same tendency in other Descensus Odes from the collection. It has already been argued that the closing verses of Odes 33 and 42 suggest an extension of the speaker's audience to embrace not only the dead but the living believers.

Curiously, in the 24th hymn, apart from the mention of "life" in v8b, the focus remains resolutely on the destruction of the opposition. There is no reference to the dead or to Christ's preaching to them. Yet there is some thought of speech, or at any rate the lack of it, in v9b. Certain commentators see this line as a reference to the Lord's refusal to grant the abysses permission so that they might remain. Others prefer to regard it as an allusion to the abysses own inability to make a defence for themselves. Either interpretation is possible, but the latter seems more directly in keeping with the repeated emphasis on the defective nature of the abysses. This introduction of a legal motif further recalls the Virgin's statement, also in a Descensus context, at Ode 33:11b:

I am your judge.

In that Ode, the Virgin gives a promise that she will make her audience wise (ḥkmkwn) in the ways of truth (šrr), and an assurance that those who put her on will not be falsely accused or rejected (nttlwn); her hearers are the obedient dead or believers. Here, the subjects are the rebellious waters or unbelievers, and their fate in the courtroom has been exactly the reverse. They were unable to defend themselves and were rejected (ṣṭly) because they lacked wisdom (ḥkmt) and did not possess the truth (šrr).
The dominant thought of the Ode so far has been of the nature and activity of the abysses. This changes dramatically in vv13-14, which bring the hymn to its close on a triumphal note:

But because the Lord revealed his Way
And spread widely his grace,

Those who understood it
Know his holiness.

The first of these lines begins with exactly the same words as the last (v12b) of the previous section, mgj d. It is clear that a contrast is being drawn between the deficiencies of the abysses and the activity of the Lord, so the insertion of the adversative "but" at the beginning of the line is demanded.

It was noted that the thought of the Ode up to this point has concentrated on the abysses to such an extent that except for the elliptical reference to life in v8b, the idea of the resurrection of the dead is virtually excluded. Given though that this idea is so integral to the Odist's broader understanding of the Descent, and is expressed with great force in all the other hymns which deal with this subject, its exclusion remains to be accounted for if the Descensus interpretation of Ode 24 may be sustained. Elsewhere in the collection the poet uses a wide variety of imagery to depict his belief that the dead have been raised as a result of Christ's Descent, this includes the ideas of a release from bonds and disgorging by the insatiable Mot. Another specific figure, employed in the 22nd Ode, is that of the Way (wrh). This stands for the divinely appointed path by which the dead are to leave Mot's clutches, and so live again. The Syriac term wrh is precisely that found at Ode 24:13a, in which the Way is said to have been revealed by the Lord. Thus it appears that the thought of
resurrection of the dead is not absent from the Ode. The escape route from Sheol is disclosed implicitly for use by the dead.

The revelation of the Way is accompanied by a further action on the part of the Lord, the dissemination of his grace. The fact that the noun יבג is used exclusively in the Odes with a positive sense, as an attribute of the Lord, even a designation of Christ (Ode 33:1), is additional evidence that all thought of the abysses has been abandoned. The implied recipients of this grace are those on whom great favour, rather than destruction, is being conferred. Furthermore, just as the Odist extends the scope of destruction beyond the abysses to encompass all unbelievers in vv9-12, so, by the use of this general term of blessing in v13, he includes not only the dead but also living believers.

The language of Wisdom resurfaces in the final verse of the hymn with a play on the verb יד. There is some ambiguity with the third feminine singular pronominal suffix attached to the verb in the first line, in that it may refer to either of the feminine nouns, הר or יבג, in the preceding verse. Charlesworth and Labourt state categorically that the reference is to the former, and this appears more likely given the connection between revelation and understanding.

The closing stanzas of the hymn clearly mirror, using the same language and ideas, but in positive form, the sentiment of vv9-12. In contrast with the abysses who are cast as the authors of their own downfall, the Lord chooses to reveal his Way to the dead. For the Odist, Christ is always the initiator of the life giving process in the Descensus drama, and this is reflected here in the 13th verse. Yet another common element in the depiction of this event is the requirement of a response on the part of the dead before they can live
again. In the 14th verse this is couched in terms of understanding, which in turn is to be compared with the rejection of the abysses on the grounds that they lack wisdom.

There is no explicit mention of resurrection, but it seems that the prospect of hope is expressed in terms of knowing the Lord's holiness (ḥṣwṭ, v14b). The present participle ṣḍyn indicates that this is an abiding reality. The Spirit is often described as holy in the Odes, and the believers are frequently designated "the holy ones", using the synonymous term qḍvš. But holiness (qḍvšwšt) as an attribute of the Lord occurs only once more in the collection with the exhortation to love the Lord's holiness and put it on at Ode 13:3. It is possible that in both the 13th and 24th Ode these nouns are used as a circumlocution for the Lord himself. The fact that the noun ḥṣwṭ is connected in Ode 24 with knowledge, which is regularly employed by the poet to describe the foundation on which the believer's relationship with the Lord is built, suggests that the underlying thought here requires further elucidation.

Unlike the abysses, for whom knowledge of the Lord is impossible because of their own arrogance, the dead can now enjoy a perfect relationship with him. Since what is predicated of the dead is exactly the opposite to what is said of the abysses, it may be implied that their fate is reversed too. As the abysses saw destruction, the dead see life. Although the figure of the Way is used in these verses with the very specific soteriological sense noted in the discussion of Ode 22:11, the influence of its use by Christ as a self appellation must be detected. In John 14:1-7 Christ responds to Thomas's question as to how the disciples can know the way where he is going by asserting that he is the Way, and their means of access to the Father. Such
identification enables the evangelist to pass immediately from the notion of knowing the way to knowing Christ himself and, by association, the Father also. This is precisely the pattern of Ode 24:14, in which the transition is made from understanding the Way to knowing the Lord's holiness.

Conclusion

Having shown that the dominant thought of Ode 24 is of Christ's Descent into Hell at the time of his baptism, it only remains to make a few concluding remarks and address the two specific questions which were raised in the introduction but have not yet been answered. There, it was asked whether there is any evidence to suggest that other early Christian writers connected the Descent with Christ's baptism, and also what the significance of the resiting of this event away from the Passion may have been for the Odist.

The assertion that the hymn's main theme is the Descensus ad Inferos is made on the grounds that its language and imagery are those which in the foregoing examinations of other Odes from the collection have already been identified as being used by the poet in his treatment of this subject. Several familiar elements, which may be deemed to form the Grundstock on which his overall understanding of the Descent is built, can be detected. These include the depiction of Sheol as a watery place with an insatiable appetite, the figure of the divinely appointed Way as a means of escape for the dead and the deployment of the legal motif.

Striking as these linguistic and conceptual echoes may be, they do not exhaust the parallels between the 24th Ode and other Descensus hymns, for the development of thought is remarkably similar too. It

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has been noted that the Odist's thinking on this subject is characterized by a marked dualism. On the one hand is the Lord, whose intention is to give and sustain life; with him stand all those who know him and respond positively to his invitation. On the other, is Death, whose plan has always been to destroy and deprive of life; his cohorts are those who are ignorant of the Lord and are rejected. Furthermore, the well known ideas of the Descent as a reversal of previous fortunes and as a definitive establishment of a new pattern of existence are also evident in Ode 24. The abysses are themselves submerged and can drown out life no more, just as the gorger is himself poisoned and can no longer consume the living. Their activity is brought to unexpected final completion with the advent of Christ, its consummation, life which endures forever. The might of the Lord prevails, and a line is drawn under Death's reign of terror. Finally, this Ode displays two further tendencies witnessed elsewhere of the Descensus hymns. The first is in its association of the Descent, when Sheol is depicted as a watery place, with the creation battle. The second being the Odist's enlargement of his sphere of reference to embrace not only the dead but also living believers, and conversely not only the abysses but also the Lord's earthly opponents.

Besides these similarities, there are also differences with the Odist's treatment of the Descensus theme in Ode 24 which should be noted. The picture of Sheol as a watery place is obviously not unknown, but its depiction as a plurality of abysses certainly is. It is a common feature of the Descensus hymns that the conflict exists between Christ and a single opponent only. Perhaps the number is emphasized precisely in order to facilitate the extension of thought so as to include the unbelievers. In addition, the image of the abysses
seeking the Lord like women in childbirth (v5) is new, but the word play on the root ḫbl in the eighth verse and the occasional parallels to be found in other texts, particularly Colossians and Job, suggest that it is far from accidental. The absence of Christ's preaching to the dead here has also been commented on, but it seems that this is due to the poet's desire to concentrate instead on the abysses' inability to speak and so defend themselves.

However, the most radical departure by far is the resiting of the Descent into a baptismal context and it is to this issue that attention must now be given. Clearly the Odist is not alone in linking these events, for there is evidence of this connection in other early writings. Harris\(^{24}\) initiated research into this area by suggesting that the association of Christ's baptism with his triumph over Hades is to be found in two passages from the Descensus ad Inferos in the Gospel of Nicodemus\(^{31,35}\).

In the first, Seth reminisces how he prayed, when Adam was dying, to be led to the tree of mercy, that he might take its oil and anoint Adam in order to heal him. While doing this, an angel appeared saying that the oil could not be given him then, but promising:

\[
\text{veniet enim amatissimus dei filius de caelis in mundum, et baptizabitur a Johanne in Jordane flumine, et tunc recipiet pater tuus Adam de hoc oleo misericordiae et omnes credentes in eum.}
\]

Later, as part of a discussion between Christ and John the Baptist about the Descent, the following words are found:

\[
\text{Ego Johannes vocem patris de caelo super eum intonatem audivi et proclamatem, Hic est filius meus dilectus, in quo mihi bene complacuit. Ego ab eo responsum accepti quia ipse descensusus esset ad inferos.}
\]
It may be that this second text reflects little more than the notion that the Baptist was Christ's forerunner in Hades, just as he had been on earth. The belief that he announced Christ's coming to the dead is commonplace in the Fathers; it is sometimes associated simply with John's death, and need not be related directly to the baptism at all<sup>38</sup>. Nevertheless, the fact that here the explicit repetition of the baptismal formula is immediately succeeded by a reference to the Descent is remarkable. Labouret concedes in his comments on Ode 24 that, while being unaccustomed to this relationship between Christ's baptism and his Descent, these texts from the Gospel of Nicodemus signalled by Harris appear conclusive.

MacCulloch<sup>39</sup> also reports that Gregory Thaumaturgos represents Christ as saying at his baptism that it became him to descend to the depths of Hades on behalf of those detained there, to destroy the power of death, and to kindle the torch of his body for those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death. Whereas Harris-Mingana believe that the Odist's association of Descent and baptism is shared on at least one occasion by Ephraim. They maintain that he both knew and correctly understood the meaning of Ode 24:7a (namely that when Christ was baptized something depressing happened in the lower world) for in the 35th of the Nisibene Hymns he puts into the devil's mouth the words:

> When Christ was submerged in baptism, he broke away and swamped me.

Given that Bernard is convinced the Odes are a baptismal anthology, and that he is certain that the Descent motif features regularly within them, it is not surprising that he is able to find numerous other early Christian works which connect these two themes.
In an article on I Peter 3:19ff., he begins by noting that the starting point for this connection is the cosmological conceptions of the ancient world. The earth, he argues, was held to be a disc, surrounded by, and resting upon the waters or abyss. These waters were there at the beginning of things in unruly form, but the Spirit had brooded over them in creation, and they had been gathered together so that the dry land appeared. However, their chaotic or destructive nature had not been entirely obliterated, for they had erupted in the Flood, and were also thought to be the abode of dangerous monsters. He adds that the ancients further considered all earthly oceans and rivers to be in communication with this abyss, the region below land and sea alike, and to be similarly inhabited.

A summary of this argument can also be found in Bernard's work on the Odes, in which he specifically addresses the issue of the relationship between the baptism of Christ and his Descent into Hades. There, he goes on to state that among other early Christian writers, the epiphany of the Spirit upon the primeval waters was identified as having its counterpart in Christ's baptism, at which she brooded upon the waters of the Jordan. He quotes the following words from the baptismal Ordo of Severus of Antioch:

\[
\text{Spiritus sanctus in similitudinem columbae volans}
\text{descendit, mansitque super caput filii et super}
\text{aquas incubavit.}
\]

Moreover, he contends that many Eastern baptismal rites introduce the idea, just as Ode 24:3 does, that the waters and their inhabitants were terrified at the coming of Christ for baptism. He suggests that they, along with Hippolytus and Origen, cite three passages from the Psalms as prophetic of this:
When the waters saw thee, O God, 
when the waters saw thee, they were afraid, 
yea, the Deep trembled. (77:16)

or:

The sea looked and fled, 
Jordan turned back. (114:3)

or:

The voice of the Lord is upon the waters; 
the God of glory thunders, 
the Lord, upon many waters. (29:3)

Bernard succeeds in establishing a link in early Christian thinking between Christ's baptism and creation, and with the passage through the Red Sea, for this is what the context speaks of in the first two of the Psalms listed above. The association of these two events in turn with the Descent is sufficiently well known and frequent that it does not require greater elaboration. But in his comments on the 22nd Ode, which unmistakably treats of the Descent, Bernard is further able to demonstrate a direct association of this with Christ's baptism by two other writers. The link is provided by the figure of the dragon or serpent in the waters. Thus he states that Cyril of Jerusalem explains to the catechumens in his Catechetical Lectures that the dragon in the waters of Job 40:23 is the devil whom Christ overcame in his baptism. In addition he refers to an Epiphany Hymn ascribed to Severus, which reads:

[Christ] wished by His baptism to open before us 
an ascent leading up to heaven, and to lay in advance a sure foundation for the gift of adoption, and to bring the Holy Spirit upon flesh and to crush the head of the evil one, the suprasensual serpent, upon the waters.

At the least it has been shown that the Odes are unexceptional in using the same kind of language to describe the effects of Christ's baptism as that used to detail those of his Descent. The going down
into the abyss, the terror of the waters and their inhabitants and the
crushing of the serpent are all features which are common to both.
Bernard's observation, that the place of departure for such speculations
is the conception of the Underworld as an abyss with which
communication is by water, is to be emphasized, as are their Canaanite
antecedents. From this, it is easy to see that water became a ready
medium by which the thought of many writers, including the Odist, could
flow from creation to the Flood, the passage through the Red Sea,
Christ's baptism and the Descent. Thus there is no contradiction
implied by Harris-Mingana's contention that, while the main theme of
Ode 24 is the Descensus, set at Christ's baptism, it contains elements
which have been borrowed from Exodus 15.44

Finally, it remains only to ask what the significance of this
re situing of the Descensus into a baptismal context may have been for
the Odist. It is possible that he saw Christ's baptism as anticipatory
of his death, and as such his Descent into Hell was foretold in the
setting of his immersion in the Jordan. But Ode 24 deals with the
Descensus material in a manner which is suggestive of accomplishment
rather than prophecy, such that this explanation is rendered inadequate.
A more likely reason for the re situing is that the poet believes that
the events of Christ's Descent have been replicated, albeit on a lower
plane, in his own life at the time of his baptism. In all of the
Descent hymns which have been examined so far, the subject, speaker or
point of reference has been Christ. However, it will be shown that in
other Odes the Descensus language is also found on the lips of the
Odist himself. It seems that the re timing of the Descent to coincide
with Christ's baptism in the 24th Ode eases this transition from Christ
to the believer through the commonality of the sacrament.
Notes to Chapter 4

(2) Harnack appears to construe the hymn in the same way that Grimme does, as an announcement of judgement, but remarks that the text is so corrupt he is prevented from giving a fuller interpretation. [A. Harnack, "Ein jüdisch-christliches Psalmbuch aus dem ersten Jahrhundert," *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, eds. A. Harnack and C. Schmidt, Band XXXV, Heft 4 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1910), pp.56-7.]

(3) Harnack definitely understands this verse very differently to Grimme, since he comments specifically on it. He assumes that the noun *prēb* refers to the dove of the opening verses, and that she appears in v4 as the spirit of life, who, on idly loosening her wing, brings death.

(4) J. R. Harris, "Two Flood Hymns of the Early Church," *The Expositor*, ser. 8, II (1911), pp.405-17. The other of these so called flood hymns was Ode 38.

(5) Harris was convinced at this point that the extant Syriac of the Odes was a translation from Greek. He reconstructs vv7b-10 in the following way:

> They were corrupt in imagination, those that lived in the ancient days;
> Corrupt were they from the beginning;
> Their corruption was the end of the life of all things;
> Every one of them that was imperfect perished.
> It was not possible to give them permission to remain:
> The Lord destroyed the imaginations of all them that had not the truth with them.

(6) *Carmina Nisibena* XXXIX 18 and XXXV 6.

(7) This admittedly would not have been known to Harris at the time he was writing.


(9) It has already been noted that Grimme (but not Harnack) construes v4 in this way. The same objection therefore applies, though this verse is not so pivotal for his overall interpretation as it is for that of Harris.


(12) This is the reading contained in Harris' manuscript; Burkitt's has kl.


(14) Ibid., p.201.

(15) This is the version preserved by Burkitt's manuscript; Harris' omits the words ryš dwrn.


(18) R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge: University Press, 1975), pp.312ff. It is possible that the 36th Ode is not spoken ex ore Christi, but by the Odist standing as a figure for the believer. This matter will be considered in the next chapter.

(19) This translation is of the text preserved by Burkitt's manuscript. That of Harris omits the I prefixed to the noun mr'kwit', which gives the sense, "and no food was given to them".

(20) Having once again mentioned the Canaanite matrix, it may now be asked whether in addition to the dove (v1) and bird (v4) representing the Holy Spirit in this Ode, there are not also hints of the goddess Anat's winged form in the Ugaritic texts. It has already been noted in the chapter on Ode 33 that Anat is said to co-operate closely with Ba'al in his purpose and her violent character and destructive nature are repeatedly emphasized.


Labourt, with Grimme and Harris ("Two Flood Hymns"), contends that the subject of these verses is not the abysses themselves. He prefers to regard the lines as a reference to the fall of the evil angels. Unlike them, however, it is clear that he still considers the theme of the Ode to be Christ's Descent into Hell. [J. Labourt, "Les Odes de Salomon," R.B., VIII (1911), pp.8-9.]


Newbold (op. cit., p.197) is convinced of the latter. In order to achieve this certainty, he construes both the particle *ḥyt* with its plural suffix and the plural verb *ḥw w* as singulars, so that the reference is to the antiquity of the plan itself.

Flemming's translation, which is used in Harnack's work, reads "Wahrheit" rather than the expected "Weisheit" at v11a (op. cit., p.57). Since both Syriac manuscripts clearly have the noun *ḥrmṯ* and not *ḥrr*, and there is no note given to suggest the reason for this reading, it must be assumed to be erroneous.


Grimme’s assumption that this is a dittographical error is unnecessary.


J. R. Harris, *editio princeps*, p.123.

Thus far quotation from this work has been avoided in discussion of the *Descensus* material in the Odes because of the difficulties surrounding its provenance and date of composition. It will be quoted here because it is cited by Harris.

Harris' italics.

Harris' italics.

This point is overlooked by Bernard in his citation of a statement by Origen concerning the Baptist:

Et mortuus est ante eum, ut ad inferna descendens illius praedicaret adventum.


(41) J. H. Bernard, The Odes of Solomon, Texts and Studies, VIII, no. 3 (Cambridge: University Press, 1912), pp.32-9. It should be noted that many of the parallels Bernard cites in these pages from other writers refer not to the baptism of Christ, but to that of the believers. This issue will be more fully discussed in the following chapter, but is not directly relevant here.

(42) Bernard's italics.


(44) In contrast, Plooij maintains that the hymn's language has been influenced by the description of the Flood, but he goes on to note a passage from Aphrahat which details the crossing of the Red Sea. In its midst there comes an unexpected reference to the gates which lift up their heads, an expression which occurs regularly in the Descensus tradition:

The foundation of old was bared, and the water from the beginning became suddenly arid. The gate lifted up its head, and the eternal gate was lifted up.

He argues that the phrase, "the foundation of old was bared" is parallel to Ode 24:5a, "the abysses were opened which had been closed". Although alternative readings for this line of the Ode have been proposed, Plooij's general view that the journey across the Red Sea was associated by Aphrahat with the Descent is not undermined. The connection is still more explicit at Demonstration XII 6, which has already been cited in the chapter on Ode 22.
Chapter 5: Odes 17, 21 and 25
In the previous chapter, when the Odist's restitting of Christ's Descent away from the Passion to coincide with his baptism in the Jordan was discussed, it was hinted that this retiming is related to the wider question of how the *Descensus* theme is developed in the collection as a whole. Specifically, the suggestion made was that there is evidence from other hymns to indicate that the poet intentionally associates Christ's Descent with Christian baptism so that its events are seen as being replicated in the believer's own life, albeit on a lower plane, at the time of his baptism. It seems that the harmonizing of the Descent with Christ's own baptism which occurs in Ode 24 paves the way for such a sacramental development of this theme, which now falls to be examined in greater depth.

The main concern of this chapter will therefore be to show that there are several hymns in which strains of the *Descensus* are heard, but where its effects are described by the Odist as having immediate and personal significance. Arguably the most striking example within the collection of this personal application of the *Descensus* drama and its import is to be found in the 17th Ode:

v1. Then I was crowned by my God,  
   He is my living crown.

v2. And I was justified by my Lord,  
   For my salvation is incorruptible.

v3. I have been freed from vanities,  
   And am not condemned.  
   My chains have been cut off by his hand.

v4. I have received the face and likeness of a new person,  
   And walked in it and been saved.

v5. The thought of truth led me,  
   And I followed it unswervingly.

v6. All who saw me were amazed,  
   Because I seemed like a stranger to them.
v7. But the one who knew and nurtured me,  
Is the Most High in all his perfection.

v8. He glorified me by his kindness,  
And raised my understanding to the height of truth.

v9. From there he gave me the Way of his steps,  
And I opened the doors which were closed.

v10. I shattered the bars of iron,  
For my own iron had grown hot and melted before me.

v11. Not a thing appeared closed to me,  
Because I was the opening of everything.

v12. I went towards all my prisoners to free them,  
Leaving behind neither captive nor captor.

v13. I gave my knowledge generously,  
And my intercession lovingly.

v14. I sowed my fruits in their hearts,  
And transformed them in me.

v15. They received my blessing and lived,  
And they were gathered to me and were saved;

v16. Because they became my members,  
And I was their head.

v17. Glory to you, our head, O Lord Messiah.  
Hallelujah.

Critical Notes
v1b This line could also be rendered with an impersonal sense, "And my crown is living".

v2b Or, "He is my incorruptible salvation".

v3c Literally, "her hands". Harris-Mingana remark that the feminine form of the suffix may have arisen because the writer thought himself emancipated by "the thought of truth" (v5), the nouns mhšbt and šrr both being feminine. Alternatively, Grimme suggests a lacuna in the text either before or after b'l'lydyh. The translation which has been given supposes that the reference is to the Lord/God in vv1-2.

v4b With the majority of commentators, it has been assumed that bb refers to the "new person" of the previous line. However, Harris-Mingana, Charlesworth and Bauer prefer to translate "in Him", understanding a further allusion to the Lord.

v5b The expression brb refers back to the thought of truth in the previous line.

v7 This verse is fraught with difficulties which there have been many attempts to resolve, mainly involving a rearrangement of the text. The translation of the first line presented above follows
Harris-Mingana's suggestion that wrbny be read for wrbny and Noldeke's assertion that it is grammatically possible for a single object suffix to serve two closely related verbs. Charlesworth adopts Harris-Mingana's alternative proposal of wwrbny ("and he exalted me") on the grounds that it provides a close parallel to Burkitt's manuscript version (N) of v8a. Frankenberg is convinced that the first three words of the verse are a gloss, and his Greek retroversion takes no account of them. Manuscript N begins with bklh in the second line.

v8 Manuscript N attests wšbyh "and He is glorified".

v9a Grimm proposes reading hvblny ("he led me") instead of yhb ly. Gunkel emends dhlkth to dhlkty ("my steps"). Both of these alterations are unjustified.

Manuscript N begins with bklh in the second line.

v9 Manuscript N attests wsbyh "and He is glorified".

v9a Grimme proposes reading hvblny ("he led me") instead of yhb ly. Gunkel emends dhlkth to dhlkty ("my steps"). Both of these alterations are unjustified.

v10 Manuscript N reads ṣq1 where Harris' manuscript (H) has the plural noun mwkl in the first line. Charlesworth reports that the former is the pa'el participle passive of the verb q1 meaning "distorted" or "perverted". Also in v10a, Grimm maintains that dprz1 is a dittographical error on the part of the copyist. In the second line, Frankenberg seeks to emend dyly into a form of the verb dly, but Grimm thinks that it is a mistake for the ethic dative ly. Labourt contends that there is a lacuna between dyn and dly with an expression such as "a mes yeux" or "devant mon visage" having been left out. Harnack suggests that "das Eisen" be read, omitting dly altogether.

v11 At v11a, H has a marginal reading of ṣyry for ṣydy; N lacks the possessive suffix and reads ṣydy. The translation of the second line follows N in reading ṣd1sr; H preserves ṣd1sr.

v12 Charlesworth proposes that the word b'wty at the beginning of the second line be rendered "my resurrection". Harris-Mingana offer "comfort" or "consolation" in their notes, though this is not reflected in their somewhat obscure translation of the verse.

v13 Harris-Mingana recommend that the verbs in both lines of the verse be changed from the first to the third person, the subject being b'wty of the previous verse. Gunkel renders the preposition and suffix by in the second line "durch meine Kraft".

v14 Naturally, not all the commentators who have studied this hymn agree that it contains an allusion to the Descensus. Some have suggested that it simply refers to a liberation in the most general terms. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that the thought in vv9b-12 is wholly in keeping with the Odist's notion of Sheol as a prison in which the dead are held bound by Death. This imagery has been found to exist quite happily alongside that of Death as an all consuming monster or seven headed dragon in Odes 42 and 22, but in Ode 17 it is given its fullest expression. It may also be argued that the vivid and
emphatic nature of the language in these lines would tend to indicate that something more than a vague notion of redemption is intended. What appears to be envisaged is a veritable storming of the heavily defended gaol, a complete liberation of all the captives and also the destruction of the prison guards. This stress on the totality of the victory is certainly well established in the Odist's picture of the Descent; not only are the existing prisoners of Death released, but he and his cohorts are comprehensively overcome to prevent them from taking any further captives.

These general observations go some way towards establishing the case for a Descensus interpretation of Ode 17, but there are also certain specific points which plead firmly in its favour and further enhance the understanding of the Odist's thinking on this subject. The first arises in v10a, where many scholars have noted the similarity between the words wgdmt mwkl' dprzl' and Psalm 107:16, which the R. S. V. renders:

For he shatters the doors of bronze,
and cuts in two the bars of iron(15).

Evidently related to this, and containing all the same verbs and nouns in the Hebrew, Septuagint and Peshitta versions, is the passage at Isaiah 45:2, in which the Lord says to Cyrus:

I will go before you
and level the mountains,
I will break in pieces the doors of bronze
and cut asunder the bars of iron.

Thus far, references to the Gospel of Nicodemus have been largely avoided because of the difficulties surrounding the provenance of this work and its date of composition. However, it has been suggested that the Descensus material embodies very primitive tradition, and herein an allusion to Psalm 107:16 is unmistakable. In the Greek and Latin A
recensions 14, which are closely aligned, insatiable Hades is seen in fearful conversation with Satan about the advent of Christ, mentioning the recent raising of Lazarus as grounds for his perturbation. During their debate, a great voice calling out the words of Psalm 24:7 is heard:

Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in.

Hades reacts by sending Satan out to withstand Christ, and bidding his demons to batten down the hatches. But the patriarchs urge Hades to open the gates, and David tells how he prophesied about Christ's coming, citing Psalm 24:7 and (in the Latin A recension) Psalm 107:16. The voice cries out again, and Hades asks:

Who is the King of glory?

to which the angels reply:

The Lord, strong and mighty,
the Lord, mighty in battle!

It is then reported in the language of Psalm 107 that the brazen gates were broken down and the iron bars were shattered. Christ tramples on Hades and binds Satan, and taking Adam by the hand leads him and the other Old Testament saints up to Paradise.

The passage from Psalm 24 which plays such a prominent part in the Gospel of Nicodemus is also found in the Gospel of Bartholomew in a Descensus context 15. It occurs unexpectedly in Aphrahat's account of the crossing of the Red Sea in Demonstration I, though it seems from the comparison between Moses and Christ in Demonstration XII 6 that this too may be construed as a reference to the Descent 15. Similarly, there is an implicit quotation of Psalm 107:16 in Demonstrations XIV and XXI which allude to the Descensus, and the
breaking of Death's gates and the imprisonment of the dead are certainly found in *Demonstration* XXII alongside the imagery of Christ as the poisoner of Death.

It seems, then, that Psalms 107:16 and 24:7ff. were quite widely used in connection with the Descent, but Bernard takes this line a stage further. He states that Isaiah 45:2, which is clearly related to Psalm 107:16, also occurs in the gnosis of Christ's baptism, and above all is quoted by Barnabas as one of a number of Old Testament testimonia on Christian baptism. Bernard considers that the Descensus element in Ode 17 is secondary to the baptismal interest, but as Murray observes, these two interpretations need not exclude each other, "for by baptism we enter sacramentally into Christ's conquest of death".

In fact, Murray discusses Ode 17:9-10 in his search for the source of the Diatessaron reading of Matthew 16:18, which renders the Greek verb *katischuein* by *hsn* and the noun *pulai* by *mwkl*. His comments on this matter have already been mentioned in a previous chapter but a repetition of the main points is justified. Firstly, Murray maintains that the literal meaning of the Syriac verb *hsn* connotes the exercise of strength against an enemy. It is not restricted to an attacking sense, but can just as easily mean "to withstand". Secondly, he asks whether there is any significance to the translation of *pulai* by *mwkl*, itself a loan word in Syriac from the Greek noun *mochlos*, when the native Syriac term is thought a more exact rendering. He concludes that the natural function of bars is defensive and that allied with the defensive sense of the verb noted above, the *Diatessaron* version of Matthew 16:18 may be thought to contain an allusion to the *Hollensturmung*. 

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It was argued that the passing allusion to this biblical text found in Ode 22:12 is applied to Christ, who is identified as the Rock on which the kingdom is built. However, in the gospel itself, the reference is to Peter and the Church, which leads Murray to suggest that in Tatian's version of Matthew 16:18, the picture is not of the Church doggedly resisting attack, but as an active battling force which shares in Christ's victory over Hades. He is quite convinced that the themes of baptism (the rite of initiation into the Ecclesia) and Descent are intentionally combined in Ode 17, and that this combination is reflected by the Diatessaron reading of the gospel text.

So far, the biblical parallels which have been adduced for Ode 17:10a would tend to support the theory that in this hymn the Odist uses the prison motif alone in his depiction of the Descent. Yet there is a further biblical passage, overlooked by the commentators, where the "bars of iron" feature, and which may indicate that the thought of the dragon is not too far away.

In Job 40-41, the figures of Behemoth and Leviathan are conjured up by the Lord in his reply to Job's question. Their physical attributes are described in great detail, and at 40:18 the Lord states of Behemoth:

His bones are tubes of bronze,
his limbs like bars of iron.

Day rejects the naturalized interpretation of Behemoth and Leviathan, which regards them as the hippopotamus and crocodile. He maintains that the presence of mythological elements in the text, coupled with the implication that only God can overcome them, suggest that they should be seen as the chaos monsters subdued by Yahweh at the time of creation. Leviathan, he identifies with the Canaanite
dragon Lotan, one of the names by which Yam is known, whereas underlying the biblical Behemoth Day sees El’s calf Atik, the ox-like creature of the waters.

The Odist’s usage of Canaanite imagery in the Descensus hymns has already been thoroughly exposed, as has the relationship between the Hollensturmung and Chaoskampf. At the very least it may be argued that the same ideas of strength and invulnerability are used of Behemoth and Leviathan by the biblical writer as are found in the Odes and other Descensus literature of the inviolability of Sheol and Death. Of particular interest is the description at Job 41:13-17 of Leviathan’s impenetrable hide, which contains more than a hint of Mot’s snapping jaws:

Who can strip off his outer garment?
Who can penetrate his double coat of mail?
Who can open the doors of his face?
Round about his teeth is terror.
His back is made of rows of shields,
shut up closely as with a seal.
One is so near to another
that no air can come between them.
They are joined one to another;
they clasp each other and cannot be separated.

This connection between Mot and Leviathan/Yam, and the equivalence of the Descent with the creation battle, will be discussed again later in the chapter.

The second line of Ode 17:10 seems to have provoked considerable difficulties for the commentators, hinging mainly on the meaning of the terms przl and dyly. Against any of the proposed emendations, it appears that the extant text is intelligible if it is simply assumed that the speaker himself was bound before he brings about the liberation of others, which is described in the preceding line and following verses. An interesting point is raised here about the Odist’s
Christology, since the idea must be that Christ himself, who is clearly the speaker\textsuperscript{22}, was bound in Sheol just as the rest of the dead are before he effects their release. Gunkel and Bauer, following the theory that the Odes have been composed under the influence of gnosticism, are convinced that this is a reference to the notion of the redemption of the Redeemer, traces of which may be detected elsewhere in the collection at Odes 8:21c, 28:11 and 42:18\textsuperscript{23}. However, since it has been suggested that the Odist has been inspired by the abiding tradition of imagery from the battle between Ba'\textsuperscript{a}l and Mot in the Ugaritic texts, which continued to impact on Judaism and Christianity long after Ba'\textsuperscript{a}l and Mot had passed from the scene, these words may go no further than recalling the need there for El's intervention in securing Ba'\textsuperscript{a}l's triumph.

It is also possible that the poet develops the idea expressed in Colossians 1:18 of Christ as "the first born from the dead". He remains effective in Hades and can complete his ministry because he is released by God from his bonds first of all\textsuperscript{24}. The latter point is implied by Charlesworth in his note on v11a, in which he states that the word \textit{kd} denotes present action, distinguishing it from that in v10b by which it is preceded. Whether any significance is to be sought in the fact that Christ's fetters seethe and melt away, whereas those of the dead are smashed, cannot be said. Bernard notes that the idea of melting iron is applied to the dissolving of the iron gates of Hades when Christ descended by Pseudo-Epiphanius in a \textit{Homily for Easter Eve}.

The speaker's statement in v11b, that he is the opening of everything, has often been compared with Christ's claim in the New Testament that he is the Door (John 10:7, 9)\textsuperscript{25}. In the Fourth Gospel there appears to be some shift in the meaning of the term \textit{thora}
between these two occurrences. The first indicates that the thought of protection for the sheep is uppermost; Christ is the door behind which they are safely sheltered from the threat of attack by wolves, and this is developed by the evangelist into the assertion that he is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep (John 10:11). In the second instance, the idea of entry for the sheep through the door to pasture is prominent. This latter usage appears parallel to the notion expressed at John 14:6 that Christ is the means of access to the Father, and it is taken up by Ignatius. The following passage from his Letter to the Philadelphians is cited by Batiffol and Harris-Mingana in connection with Ode 17:

He is the door of the Father, by which enter Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and the prophets and the apostles and the Church.

Notably, earlier in the letter Ignatius tells his readers:

Christ Jesus shall loose from you every bond

It may be concluded that the thought of access to God and egress from Sheol, the clutches of Death, are closely related in the Odist's mind and this is expressed in the 17th Ode with Christ's assertion that he is the Door. It seems that ρηθ is used in v11b with the same heilsgeschichtlich sense that ἡρα is employed elsewhere in the Descensus hymns.

Underlying the speaker's mention of "my prisoners" in v12a may be the notion of ownership of the dead being transferred from Death to Christ at the time of the Descent which is found in Ode 42:14 and 20. Grimme compares the thought of the possession of the captives here in Ode 17 with that at Ode 10:4, and indeed both Batiffol and Harnack have also remarked on the similarity between these two hymns. It has already been suggested in a previous chapter that Ode 10 may be
interpreted in a *Descensus* light. In the second line of v12 there is a reference not only to the release of the captive dead, but also to the destruction of the prison guards. Thus the completeness of the victory as depicted here harmonizes with what is said elsewhere in the collection of the *Descensus*. Unlike Odes 33, where Christ draws to him those who are obedient, and 42, where the dead first call out their recognition that he is the Son of God, what is indicated here is a universal and unconditional release.

In the verses which follow it seems that some sort of shift takes place in the thought. The Odist moves away from the specific idea of a liberation of prisoners to more general terms of blessing and salvation. This tendency to a widening of the audience to encompass not only the dead but also the living of the Odist's community is also well established within the *Descensus* Odes. It is clear that the thought of the dead and the Descent has not been abandoned, for they are made alive following receipt of Christ's blessing and the gathering motif is a common feature of the Odist's *Descensus* theme (Odes 42:14 and 22:2), but everything that is predicated in these verses could equally well be said of the living. Their actual content will be discussed more fully at a later point.

So far, attention has been focussed on the closing lines of the Ode. In the foregoing examination of vv9b-12 it has been found that the Odist depicts the Descent using the prison metaphor and in language borrowed from a biblical text which was used by writers in the early Church both of the Descent and Christian baptism. It has also been noted that the thought of being freed by Christ from bonds is applied by Ignatius to living believers, and that the speaker's audience in the Ode is widened from v13 onwards so that it may be
thought to include not only the dead but the Christians of the Odist's own day. These observations go some way towards showing that Christ's Descent victory is seen as having a current application, but they are hardly conclusive proof of the baptismal connection. It is now appropriate to consider the opening verses of the hymn to see whether they shed any light on this matter.

The speaker in the first person is the subject for much of the hymn, and comparison of the content of v16 with the doxology indicates that he is to be identified with Christ. In the closing stanzas which have just been examined the speaker is very much active, and triumphantly declares his own achievements. But in the opening verses he appears passive, rejoicing in what the Lord has done for him. This is particularly marked in vv1-4a where he celebrates his own liberation. Before comparing this theme of personal liberation with that of the release of captives in vv9bff., it is important to make some comment on the image of the crown which is found in the first verse.

There is some scholarly disagreement as to how the second line of the verse should be translated. The version given at the beginning of the chapter, in which God himself is thought to be the crown that is set on the speaker's head, is preferred by Gunkel, Harnack, Grimm and Labort. It is supported by comparison with the usage of the term klyl' in certain other hymns. In Ode 5:11-12, for example, the speaker says:

Because the Lord is my salvation,
I will not fear.

He is like a crown upon my head,
And I shall not be shaken.
Similarly, in the first Ode, where the image of the crown plays the leading role, it is stated:

The Lord is on my head like a crown,
And I shall never be without him.

Plaited for me is the crown of truth,
And it causes thy branches to blossom in me.

For it is not like a parched crown that blossoms not;
But thou livest upon my head,
And have blossomed upon me.

Thy fruits are full and complete;
They are full of thy salvation.\(^27\)

In contrast, other commentators have suggested that Ode 17:1b should be rendered with an impersonal sense, and such a construction of the line may be suggested by the other occurrences of the term \(\text{klyl}'\) in the collection, where there is no direct identification of the crown with the Lord. At Ode 20:7-8 the speaker, a priest of the Lord, urges his audience:

But put on the unstinting grace of the Lord;
Come into his paradise,
And make for yourself a crown from his tree.

Put (it) on your head and be joyful,
And recline on his rest.

Also, in Ode 9:8-11, which contain an interesting reference to "the wars", he declares:

An everlasting crown is truth;
Blessed are they who set it on their head.

(It is) a precious stone,
For the wars were on account of the crown.

But righteousness has taken it,
And given it to you.

Put on the crown in the true covenant of the Lord,
And all who have conquered will be inscribed in his book.
This brief look at further instances of the crown image within the hymns has been of limited help in resolving the difficulties in the translation of Ode 17:1b, since it has been shown that both proposed versions are supported elsewhere. Nevertheless, it has been instructive, for it is clear that in these other hymns the speaker is not Christ but the Odist himself, and the crown is thought to be worn by the believers. Bruston\(^{239}\) insists that the specific language used to describe the crown in all these passages, that it is true, imperishable and precious, cannot simply be explained as alluding to Isaiah 28:5 and Proverbs 1:9 and 4:9\(^{239}\). Rather it manifestly echoes such New Testament texts as I Peter 5:4, James 1:12, II Timothy 2:5, 4:8, Revelation 2:10 and 3:11.

These biblical passages are referred to by Harris-Mingana in their discussion of the crown in Ode 1, where the coronation imagery is most fully developed\(^{30}\). They conclude that in the New Testament the crown is invariably depicted as the victor's reward after trial and the doctrine is consistently prospective. The usage in the ninth Ode is somewhat parallel, but the crown is evidently thought to be attainable in the present life, and in Ode 17 the poet actually regards the coronation as retrospective. This leads them to suggest that there may be other directions in which to explain the symbolic language of the Odist, besides the military conception which prevails in the New Testament.

Their own view is that the crown in Ode 1 symbolizes the garland worn by the newly married, which is mentioned in Song of Songs 3:11. This identification harmonizes with their wider theory that the Odist has been much influenced by the Wisdom literature, and it is certainly true that there is a great deal of amatory language within the
collection. They remark that the latter is apparent in the third hymn, in which Christ is the Beloved and the believer the lover. It may be added that the nuptial imagery is explicit in Odes 38 and 42\(^{213}\).

Harris-Mingana are also convinced that the first Ode is imitated in the hymn sung at the royal wedding feast in the Acts of Judas Thomas, in which the espousals of the Church are set over against the nuptials that were proceeding in the palace. This leads them to conclude that in the early Syriac Church, Ode 1 was thought to be an *epithalamium*. It seems that they believe the image of the crown in the Odes has elements from both the New Testament picture of the victor’s wreath and the nuptial garland which features in the oriental marriage ceremony, though in their specific comment on Ode 17 it is uncertain which they think is to the fore.

Another possible identity for the crown in the Odes, mentioned though ultimately rejected by Harris-Mingana, is discussed by Bernard\(^{32}\). He suggests that it is to be seen as the baptismal garland or circlet with which the neophytes were crowned. This coronation formed part of the rite in the Syriac, Armenian, Coptic and Abyssinian Churches and is spoken of by Cyril of Jerusalem in his *Procatechesis* 1:

Already there is an odour of blessedness upon you, 0 ye who are being enlightened; already ye are gathering the spiritual blossoms for the weaving of heavenly crowns; already the fragrance of the Holy Spirit has breathed upon you; already ye have gathered round the vestibule of the King’s palace; may ye be led in also by the King! For there have now appeared blossoms on the trees; may the fruit also be perfect!\(^{23}\)

Similarly, in the 13th of Ephraim’s *Epiphany Hymns*, placed in the mouths of those just admitted to baptism, it is stated:

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The bridal chamber that fails not, my brethren, ye have received; and the glory of Adam's house today ye have put on.
The judgement that came of the fruit was Adam's condemnation; but for you victory has arisen this day.
Your vesture is shining, and goodly your crowns; which the Firstborn has bound for you by the priests' hand this day.

Crowns that fade not away are set on your heads; hymns of praise hourly let your mouths sing.

The Evil One made war and subdued Adam's house; through your baptism, my brethren, lo! he is subdued this day.

The significance of this second passage becomes all the more apparent when it is realized that Ephraim combines not only the nuptial, baptismal and victor's image of the crown, but also speaks of the weaving of the crown by the Firstborn and the subduing of the Evil One. It has already been argued that Ode 17:10b may be understood in the light of Colossians 1:18 in which Christ is described as first born from the dead. Furthermore, in connection with Ode 33, it was suggested that the Evil One is to be identified with the Corruptor whom Christ destroys at the time of his Descent.

Murray maintains that this combination of nuptial and baptismal imagery which occurs in Ephraim's writings is quite common in Syriac tradition. Discussing the theme of the Church as Bride and Mother, he points out that the prophetic symbolism of God's marriage with Israel through the covenant was taken up and often associated with baptism by Syriac writers, since baptism was seen as marking the formal espousal of each soul to Christ. One of the terms used of the Bride was kitê, a reference to the coronation which formed part of the wedding ceremony. Thus it was from this custom that the practice of crowning the baptized, who were seen as married to Christ, undoubtedly
developed. Murray further suggests that in the Syriac version of the wedding hymn in the Acts of Judas Thomas, at certain points the feminine figure becomes subordinate and the imagery is primarily that of the temple or baptistery. He adds that the association of marriage with baptism is also made by Ephraim in relation to Christ's own baptism. In the Diatessaron Commentary, Ephraim mentions those who plighted their troth by a well as types of the Lord who espoused his Church at his baptism in the Jordan. These espousals at baptism, the anticipatory symbol of Christ's death, were fulfilled on Calvary when the Church was born from his side, the Second Eve from the Second Adam.

Evidently, a strong enough case exists for seeing in the so-called "garland Odes" a reference to the baptismal chaplet with which the neophytes were crowned. Murray's comments on the crown in Syriac tradition show that Harris-Mingana's nuptial interpretation and Bernard's baptismal one need not be regarded as mutually exclusive, but can be reconciled. It is now appropriate to return to the remaining early verses in Ode 17, and in particular to look at the theme of release found in vv3-4a.

Gunkel argues that the speaker throughout Ode 17 is Christ himself. He observes that in v10b there is an undeniable reference to the melting away of Christ's own bonds, and that it is the same release which is celebrated in vv3-4a. In his view, the justification, salvation and chains which are spoken of in the earlier verses allude to the crucifixion, when Christ appeared to be condemned, and his subsequent redemption by God. The whole hymn therefore echoes gnostic patterns with its description of the work of the Redeemer who is himself redeemed first of all. Gunkel does not deny that the opening
verses of the Ode may be thought to apply to the believer, since it is a general rule of New Testament speculation that whatever is predicated of Christ was often applicable to the Christians, but he insists that the hymn should not be divided into two parts with two different speakers.

A powerful objection to Gunkel’s theory is that although Christ’s own release is mentioned in v10b, the real focus of interest in this part of the Ode lies with his activity as the universal liberator\(^{33}\). Furthermore, the identification of the crown in the first verse with the baptismal chaplet\(^{34}\) naturally excludes the notion that the speaker there is anyone other than the believer. It is therefore legitimate to ask whether the liberation which is described in vv3-4a should not be applied to the believer, and if there is any evidence either from external sources or within the collection itself to suggest that baptism was viewed as a form of release in the same way that Christ had freed the dead from Sheol.

Plooij\(^{35}\) points out that in the prayer in the Demonstration on the Grape, Aphrahat explicitly uses the language of release from Sheol to refer to those who had been spiritually dead but have been made alive by Christ, and that ὁι ζῶντες is virtually a technical term for Christians already in the New Testament (II Corinthians 4:11, 5:15, Revelation 3:1). Similarly, Frankenberg is convinced that the whole of Ode 17 is to be understood in an internalized and spiritualizing way. He states that originally man’s nature was pure and spiritual, he was as God. With the Fall came his sensual nature which estranges him from God, hence the need for salvation or apokatastasis. In Frankenberg’s view, the bonds from which the speaker has been freed at the beginning of the 17th Ode are the γεῖνοι ἐν αὐτῷ which tie him to
his earthly nature. Following this preliminary release, and as part of the *Vergöttungsprozess*, the believer is renewed and the demons in and about him are amazed. God raises his *nous* to perfection and it goes down into the abyss of his soul to release the spiritual powers held in the rigid powers of sin and Death, just as Christ descended into Hades to free the dead. The *nous* is the head which assimilates the members into that *metastoichelosis eis ten pneumatiken phusin* spoken of by Gregory of Nyssa in his *Homily on Canticles*.

Plooji and Frankenberg both remark that the language of release used in the Descent was applied to the believer, though neither appears to connect this specifically with baptism. But it has already been suggested that Isaiah 45:2, of which echoes are heard in the 10th verse of the Ode, was used by Barnabas as one of a number of Old Testament testimonia on baptism. Moreover, as Bernard\(^{133}\) points out, Cyril describes baptism as *aichmalotois lutron* in *Procatechesis 16*, and this expression is frequently repeated by the Fathers.

So far, the *Descensus* motif has been detected in vv9b-12 of the Ode and an allusion to the coronation which formed part of the baptismal ritual has been shown to exist in the opening verse. At vv3-4a, the precise relationship between the Descent and baptism is expressed. Just as Christ broke the iron bars and freed the dead from Sheol, so the believer himself is freed from vanities and his chains cut off at the time of his baptism. The exact meaning of the expression "freed from vanities" must now be determined.

Bernard does not comment directly on vv3-4a in his notes to Ode 17, but it may be inferred that he regards them as a reference to the liberation from the bondage of sin which took place at baptism\(^{133}\). In this case, the Odist's thinking on baptism and its relationship to
Christ's Descent appears remarkably close to the way Paul relates the rite to Christ's death and resurrection, especially with the notion of freedom from sin, in Romans 6. The speaker's assertion in v3b that he is not condemned seems to support such an interpretation and Charlesworth too is convinced that this is the correct direction in which to understand the Ode. In fact, he questions whether there is any reference at all to the Descent in the hymn, even in vv9bff., and states that these lines may simply speak of those who are bound by sin on earth. Likewise, Batiffol compares the thought at Ode 18:7c, which he considers refers to those imprisoned in iniquity.

Bernard goes on to argue that the idea of release from the captivity of sin is cognate with the belief that through the sacrament the believer is restored to Paradise, the latter being common in the Fathers. He explains that the idea was that once the guilt of sin had been annulled in the rite, man could be restored to that state from which Adam fell. Thus Bernard also interprets the paradisal imagery of the 11th Ode and the reference to Paradise (which immediately precedes a mention of the crown) at Ode 20:7 in this light.

Although this motif is not used by the Odist in his treatment of the Descent, it is certainly true that later Descensus tradition stressed that those who were liberated by Christ from Hades were led into Paradise. It seems that Bernard succeeds in establishing a close relationship in the Odist's thinking between Christian baptism and Christ's Descent, but it must be asked whether he has captured the whole picture with his assumption that the idea of sin underlies the word sryqt in v3a. In order to answer this question, a brief review of what has been said of the dragon figure in the Odes is required.
When the imagery of the 22nd Ode was discussed, it was noted that at Revelation 20:2 the dragon is said to be the Devil and Satan, popularly supposed to be the inspiration behind human sin. These figures in the biblical text appear distinct from Death and Hades, as is the case in the Gospel of Nicodemus where Satan and all consuming Hades are first seen deep in conversation with each other and are later overcome separately by Christ. Similarly, in the comments on the poet’s treatment of Christ’s baptism in the 24th hymn, it was observed that Cyril of Jerusalem explains in his Catechetical Lectures that the dragon in the waters of Job 40:23 is the Devil whom Christ overcame at his baptism and the same thought is also expressed in an Epiphany Hymn ascribed to Severus. It appears that there are grounds for seeing in the dragon a separate figure from the Death monster, but this may not be the case as far as the Odist is concerned.

It has been argued that the ultimate source of his Descensus imagery lies with the Canaanite description of Ba'alu’s battles with Yam and Mot. Although Mot and Yam appear as two distinct entities in the Ugaritic texts, it was suggested that they be seen as wet and dry versions of the same principle. Structurally, they serve the same mythological purpose of co-operation in their anti-cosmic activity and hostility to life and order. It has also been remarked that this parity between Sea and Death accounts for the fact that at times in the Odes the battle with Death appears strongly reminiscent of the Chaoskampf. A single biblical example will suffice as an illustration of this point:

Or who shut in the Sea with doors,  
when it burst forth from the womb;  
when I made clouds its garment,  
and thick darkness its swaddling band,  
and prescribed bounds for it,  
and set bars and doors,
and said, "Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed"?

Here in Job 38:8-11, the Sea is described as having been barred and gated by God in creation in precisely the same language used of Sheol. In vv16-17 their equivalence is brought out even more clearly:

Have you entered into the springs of the Sea, or walked in the recesses of the Deep?
Have the gates of Death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of Deep Darkness?

It seems that the Odist conflates the battle with Satan and that with Death into a single conflict. The reason for this is provided, as the Canaanite texts show, by Yam's and Mot's shared hostility to God's plan for his people of order and life. Having looked closely at the Odist's depiction of the Descent, there can be little doubt that he regards Christ's defeat of Death as the more significant victory, though elements of the conquest of Satan are not entirely absent. With these observations in mind, it is now possible to return to the question over the meaning of the word sryqt in Ode 17:3a, and to ask whether the whole expression does not also include the thought of a defeat of Death at the time of the believer's baptism.

Immediately preceding the reference to the freeing from vanities there is mention of justification and incorruptible (dd' ḫbl) salvation. Again, in connection with Ode 33, it was argued that this root ḫbl is used by the Odist in a physical rather than a moral sense, so there is already some justification for seeing in v3a an allusion to the baptized's share in Christ's overthrow of Death.

The root srg itself is quite common in the Odes. At 5:9, for example, the speaker's scheming persecutors are found to be sryqyn and their plan comes to nought. Likewise, in the 18th Ode sryqwt is grouped with falsehood, error, ignorance and significantly Death as the
antitheses of the knowledge, will and perfection of the Most High. There is also a direct contrast in Ode 11:8-9 between the abandonment of sryqt and turning to the Most High.

In addition to these general examples, there are three further instances where this root occurs specifically in a Descensus or Passion context. At Ode 31:13, where Christ is the speaker, the verb is used in the negative form in connection with the thought of the promise to the patriarchs of salvation. There are clear echoes of the Descensus in the first two verses of this hymn, and of Christ's trial and the division by lots of his clothing in the closing verses. The latter thought, detailed in the gospel account of the Passion (John 19:24) where it is recognized as a fulfillment of Psalm 22:18, also features in Ode 28:18. Here, the soldiers' activity is said by Christ to be sryqt and the general atmosphere of this hymn is of the defeat inflicted through the resurrection on those who machinated vainly against him in the crucifixion. The final example occurs in Ode 33:1 where the verb srg is used in a positive sense to describe the emptying of Sheol.

In all of the above cases, whenever srg and its derivatives are used of the opponents of the Lord or believer, the usage is pejorative. Invariably this opposition is described in terms of hostility to the Lord's plan, thought or intention, to which the poet explicitly refers at Ode 9:4:

For in the will of the Lord is your life,
His purpose is eternal life,
And your perfection is incorruptible.

Evidently there are firm grounds for seeing in vv3-4a an allusion to the believer's sharing in Christ's Descensus defeat of Death on the occasion of his baptism. The bonds from which he has been freed are not only those of sin's captivity but also those of Death. In this
respect, the Odist's depiction of Christian baptism is as a *mimesis* of Christ's Descent. During the Descent, Christ definitively overcomes Death, and this victory forms the basis of and is affirmed by the believer in his own baptismal experience. Christ's victory is the universal pattern, Christian baptism its reflection and personal application.

There has been much debate over the meaning of vv4b-9a, and for those scholars who contend that there is a change of speaker in the hymn, this has mainly focussed on where that shift occurs. Harris-Mingana, followed by Charlesworth, suggest that it takes place between vv5 and 6, arguing that the thought in v6 is close to that at Odes 28:9 and 41:8 where Christ is also believed by them to be the speaker. Bieder, on the other hand suggests that even vv9b-10 should be thought of as the believer’s words, whereas Batiffol, convinced that the Christology of the Odes is docetic, maintains that Christ is the speaker from v4b.

To a large extent, this preoccupation with the precise delimitation of the speakers misses an important point. The tone of these verses is celebratory and triumphal, and because it has been established that the Odist thinks the baptized share in Christ's *Descensus* victory, their sentiment would be appropriate either to Christ or the believer. The notions of perfection, understanding, elevation, the Way, kindness and truth are all found applied to both Christ and the believer throughout the collection. As Bieder and Bernard have both observed, the very fact that there is such an interchange of speakers serves as an important clue to the Odist's understanding of his baptismal relationship with the Lord. Bieder is persuaded that the key to interpreting the *Descensus* material in the
collection is to be found in holding together the mythical elements with the psychological interpretation proposed by Frankenberg, and that a framework is provided for this by baptism, through which the believer becomes mystically united with Christ. He suggests that there is no decisive point at which the speaker changes. Rather an ever greater mystical union with Christ occurs, in which the believer gradually fades away behind the Lord.

Having gained a deeper understanding of the Ode, it is appropriate to return to these final verses. Frequently it has been remarked in the studies of other Descensus hymns, that at their close the speaker's audience appears widened and the scope of the Descent victory extended. The 17th Ode is no exception to this pattern, and the reason for it has become clear now that the relationship between Christ's Descent and Christian baptism has been established and illuminated. The Odist sees Christ's victory in Sheol as being a definitive overturning of all previous forms of existence. In them, man was subject to Death and evil and so estranged from God, whose purpose is life and goodness. Helped by the Father, Christ overcomes Death in Sheol and sets up his own rule over those whom he has freed. The victory he accomplishes is comprehensive in every respect; it becomes the universal pattern which is mirrored, commemorated and celebrated at the time of every believer's baptism. Thus for the Odist, the general terms of salvation and blessing which are found at the close of the Descensus hymns reflect the view that he and his fellow believers enjoy through their baptism the same benefits as those liberated by Christ from Sheol. All have been freed from Death by his Descent victory, and this is affirmed and individually applied at every single baptism.
Bernard points out that there is a further allusion to the rite in v14a with the reference to the sowing of fruits in hearts. He states that prayers for the neophytes, which go back to John the Baptist's exhortation in Matthew 3:8, that they may be fruitful in good works, are frequent in the baptismal Ordines. There is also a direct connection between the bearing of fruit and emergence from the baptismal waters in the Epistle of Barnabas, where Psalm 1:1ff. and Ezekiel 47:1, 7 and 12 are quoted as foreshadowing baptism. Within the Odes themselves, the bearing of fruit by the believer is mentioned on numerous occasions. At Ode 3:2 it is equated with living a holy life, whereas at 38:18 the fruits are said to be everlasting. In Ode 14:6-7, fruit bearing is explicitly related by the Odist to his own work of composition and praise. Similarly, at the beginning of the 11th hymn, this idea is expressed in association with the notion of circumcision of the heart, which Bernard thinks is an indisputable reference to baptism.

Harris-Mingana observe that there is some difficulty with the meaning of the second line of v14. They maintain that with the verb ḫlp, the preposition b is always used to denote the exchange of one thing for another, however, this is ill-suited to the context. Their solution (which involves changing the verbs in both lines of v14 from the first to the third person and making the noun b’rety in v13 the subject) has already been noted, though it is not adopted in their translation. Perhaps they exaggerate the difficulties here, for it seems that the thought of v14b simply anticipates that of v16, which refers to the dead or believers becoming members of Christ's mystical body. There may also be just a hint of the related idea at vv4 and 6,
which Bernard at least construes as a reference to baptism as a new birth.

In v15, the gift of life is connected with those of blessing, salvation and the gathering motif, the last being a common feature of the Descensus Odes, which Connolly also detects in the Acts of Judas Thomas:

Jesus, right hand of the Father, who has hurled down the Evil One to the lowest limit, and collected his possessions into one blessed place of meeting.\(^{553}\)

It has been suggested that these words in the Ode be applied to both the dead whom Christ frees in Sheol and the community of the baptized in the Odist's own day. As Bieder remarks, in this respect his ecclesiology is entirely different from that in the New Testament, for in the background stands the idea of a comprehensive, cosmic Ecclesia embracing both the living and the dead.

The hymn's final verse and doxology echo the notion found in the New Testament of the believers as members of Christ's mystical body, and take up the themes of transformation and gathering found in the preceding verses. Murray discusses the imagery of the body of Christ in Syriac literature, stating that it is related to the thought of Christ's natural physical solidarity with mankind through his Incarnation and his indwelling through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist\(^ {553}\). In the former, the Word becomes flesh and enables men to become what he is, sons of God, by adoption. This view is clearly expressed by the Odist in another passage which deals with the believer's mystical union with the Lord:

I have been united (to him), because the lover has found the Beloved,
Since I love him who is the Son, I shall become a son.
Indeed he who is joined to him who is immortal, Truly shall be immortal.

Here in Ode 3:7-8 there are also distant strains of the believer's shared defeat of Death and of the amatory language which it has been argued is connected with the idea of baptism as the formal espousal of each soul to Christ. Furthermore, the same concept of sonship is expressed in the 31st hymn, again in a Descensus context:

He lifted his voice to the Most High, And offered to him those who had become sons through him. (v4)

It seems clear that what exists in the Odes is a complex series of ideas, which are related, though not necessarily expressed in any logical sequence. Through the Descent, Christ frees the dead and gathers them to him; they become members of his own body which is living. In turn, the triumph of the Descent is celebrated in and underpins each individual baptism by which the believers are married to Christ and are gathered to become members of his Church and adopted sons of the Father. Murray notes that Ephraim contrasts the members of Christ with those of Adam in a meditation on the Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane:

For everyone over whose body appeared the sign of the first Adam, his body was food for Death; and everyone who bore the sign of the Second Adam on himself, was lord of Death and his destroyer. If there is not a reference to the Descent in this passage, then Ephraim certainly uses the same imagery of Death as the Odist, and speaks of his destruction. It is also possible that the mention of "the sign" introduces a baptismal connotation.

This concludes the investigation into the meaning of the 17th Ode. The objectives set out at the beginning of the chapter have been achieved, for it has been shown that the poet intentionally associates
Christ's Descent with Christian baptism in such a way that its events, and more importantly, effects are seen as being replicated in the believer's own life. Much ground has been covered and it must be recognized that once this connection between baptism and Descent is acknowledged, a great deal more of the collection's imagery becomes intelligible. In addition to the hymns already known to treat of the Descensus, Odes 1, 3, 9, 10, 11, 31, 38 and 39 have also been shown to contain imagery which is either baptismal, or belongs to the Descent, or both.

The chief metaphor used by the Odist in the 17th hymn to express the idea that Christian baptism is the mimesis of Christ's Descent is the breaking of bonds and release. It is therefore legitimate to suggest that the language of rescue from bonds which recurs in Odes 21 and 25 may be used there with the same significance.

As is the case with Ode 17, many scholars have simply commented on the general thanksgiving nature of these two hymns, and construed the salvation and liberation which are spoken of only in the most broad terms. Indeed, Harris in the editio princeps seems so convinced of their general nature that he remarks of both Odes that it is impossible to determine whether their author was a Christian or a Jew. Similarly, those scholars who consider the Odes to have been a Jewish composition subject to later Christian interpolation have tended to find little evidence of editorial activity in either hymn.

Evidently the grounds for seeing in these Odes an allusion to the Descent and believer's enjoyment of its benefits through his own baptism are less firm than, for example, the unequivocal imagery of the 24th and 42nd hymns. Nevertheless, it does appear that their language is at least patient of such an interpretation, and certainly the obscure
reference to the "garments of skin" at Ode 25:8 becomes comprehensible in this light.

That these two Odes share the same inspiration is clearly demonstrated by the fact that in addition to the theme of release from bonds with which both begin, there are no fewer than five other interrelated points of correspondence between their language and thought. These may be identified as the notion of the Lord as the believer's Helper (Ode 21:2, 5 and 25:2, 6), the imagery of light and darkness (21:3, 6 and 25:7), the idea of physical restoration (21:4 and 25:9), the thought of elevation (21:2, 6 and 25:9) and the clothing metaphor (21:3 and 25:8).

Before moving on to examine these five areas for traces of Descensus or baptismal imagery, it should be noted that there are also some minor points at which the thought of the two hymns diverges. However, these are either so general that they do not detract in any way from the combined Descensus/baptism interpretation which is being proposed, or serve only to reinforce it. In the former category comes the emphasis on praise and exultation which is found in the closing verses of the 21st hymn, but not in the 25th. Even here, Harris-Mingana argue that the Odist's literary model is Psalm 45, which in their view is an epithalamium for King Solomon. Thus the thought of baptism as an espousal to Christ may well lie in the background. In the latter group is the mention of outstretched arms at Ode 21:1, which is not only to be compared with the opening of Ode 42 (itself a reminiscence of the very short Ode 27 with the explicit mention of the crucifixion), but as Plooij has pointed out was a distinctly ceremonial act, widely spread in the East as part of the baptismal
rite. To this may be added the allusion to the speaker's enemies which only occurs in Ode 25, but is found in other Descensus contexts.\textsuperscript{31}

Returning now to the main points of correspondence between the two Odes, it seems that the imagery of light and darkness should be taken together with the clothing metaphor. At Ode 21:3 the speaker states:

\begin{quote}
I took off darkness,  
And put on light.
\end{quote}

Later, in the sixth verse, he remarks:

\begin{quote}
I was lifted up in the light,  
And passed before him.
\end{quote}

Similarly, at Ode 25:7-8 he says:

\begin{quote}
You set me a lamp at my right and my left,  
Lest there be anything in me that is not light.  
I was clad in the cloak of your Spirit,  
And lifted off my garments of skin.\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}

Since it has already been suggested that these two hymns share the same inspiration, it may be inferred that light and Spirit are in some sense reckoned by the author to be equivalent, as are darkness and the garments of skin.

The language of "putting on" is well attested in early Christian literature, especially in the New Testament epistles, where it is often used of putting on Christ or the armour of God. Of particular interest is the exhortation found at Romans 13:12:

\begin{quote}
Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light ....
\end{quote}

The usage of light and dark imagery in religious thought is so fundamental and widespread that it scarcely requires any further comment. Invariably it is employed to contrast what is positive and beneficial to believers with the negative, and its applications are
countless and universal. Nor is it necessary to suppose, as some have done, that the Odist's deployment must echo gnostic patterns, since the contrast occurs in gnostic and non-gnostic literature alike.

However, apart from the general positive and negative connotations of light and darkness it would be possible, in view of the hymns' opening verse references to release from bonds, to see a quite specific allusion to the notion of Sheol as a dark and gloomy prison. A single illustration from Aphrahat's writings will suffice to show how important a role light and darkness played in the Syriac Descensus tradition:

When the dead saw the light in the darkness, they lifted up their heads from the bondage of Death and looked up and saw the brightness of King Messiah. Then the powers of his darkness sat in mourning because Death himself was brought down from his position of authority ..... While Death was crying out vehemently because he saw that his darkness had begun to dissolve and because some of the righteous who were asleep had stood up to go out with Him, then He announced that when He comes at the end of time He will bring out all the prisoners from Death's subjection and they will go out to Him to see the light. (Demonstration XXII 4)

The likelihood that the light and darkness imagery in Odes 21 and 25 should be interpreted of release from imprisonment in Sheol is reinforced by Harris-Mingana's contention that the 21st hymn has been inspired in part by Psalm 30. They observe that the mention of the removal of darkness and putting on of light is a paraphrase of the Psalm's 11th verse and note that like the Ode, the biblical text also contains the ideas of the Lord as the believer's Helper (Psalm 30:2 and 10), physical restoration (v2) and praise (vv4 and 12). Still more telling, though apparently unnoticed by Harris-Mingana, is the Psalmist's allusion in vv3 and 8-9 to his rescue from Sheol:
O Lord, thou hast brought up my soul from Sheol, restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit.

To thee, O Lord, I cried; and to the Lord I made supplication: "What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the Pit? Will the dust praise thee? Will it tell of thy faithfulness?"

The tendency by the biblical authors to claim that they have been delivered from Sheol when they are clearly very much alive is discussed by Tromp in his book *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament*. He concludes that the imagery of Sheol is used to describe any form of human misery including impotence, illness, calamity or restraint, but above all alienation from God and the human community. In Tromp's view, the texts are to be understood as expressions of a real but partial experience of Death and the many descriptions of Sheol should be taken qualitatively, as symbols of a fatal situation, rather than locally.

Thus the Odist in applying Christ's *Descensus* victory to his personal situation simply builds on a pattern which is prefigured in the biblical Psalter. In the Odes themselves, the application is both figurative and real. It is figurative in the sense that before the coming of Christ into his life, the believer was alienated from God, like one of the dead, he was spiritually dead. But it is also a very real application, for through Christ's defeat of Death the believer truly possesses immortal life.

So far, a case has been made for the *Descensus* interpretation of the light/darkness imagery, and it has been shown that the language of rescue from Sheol is used in the Old Testament with specific personal application. Nevertheless, if the theory that the Odist relates the
Descent to baptism in these hymns is to be sustained, a more explicit baptismal connection remains to be found and traces of baptismal imagery must be sought.

Though dismissed from the reckoning by Harris-Mingana as being attributable to Ephraim's deliberate re-baptizing of the hymns, a close parallel to the thought of Ode 21:3, with an unmistakable baptismal allusion, exists in the *Hymns for Epiphany* VII 22:

> Cast off the darkness that is upon you. The secret darkness ye have cast off; from the water ye have clothed yourself with light.

In fact, Bernard suggests that the primary reference in this verse of the Ode is to the white robes worn by the neophytes and spoken of by Cyril of Jerusalem, Basil, Ephraim and especially Moses bar Kepha:

> The white robes with which they clothe him are to show that he has been in the darkness of ignorance and has become white and shining in the knowledge of God and in the light which he has received from baptism.\(^{<e,s>}\)

He also detects a reference to the baptismal practice of placing lighted tapers in the hands of the newly baptized, which Cyril of Jerusalem calls *lampades numphagēgias*, at Ode 25:7. Again, in the *Epiphany Hymns* VII 9, Ephraim urges:

> Ye baptized, receive your lamps, like the lamps of the house of Gideon; conquer the darkness by your lamps.\(^{<e,s>}\)

However, this interpretation of the lamps in the 25th Ode is rejected by Harris-Mingana\(^{<e,s>}\), who think that the inspiration behind this hymn is Psalm 132 (there is mention of a lamp in the 17th verse), and recall that at Proverbs 6:23 the Law is spoken of as a light. They believe that the reference to the two lamps here is intended to designate the Law and the Gospel, and the duality is similar to that found in the mention of the milk from the two breasts of the Father in Ode 19.
So far, little comment has been made on the meaning of the curious expression _ibwš_y dmškṣ at Ode 25:8b. The removal of these "garments of skin" forms the antithesis to the covering with the Spirit found in the previous line, and it has already been suggested from the comparison with Ode 21:3 that they be seen as equivalent to the darkness which the speaker puts off there. There have been several attempts by the scholars to enlarge upon the meaning of this phrase within the specific context of Ode 25. A clue to its sense may be found elsewhere in the collection at Ode 8:9, where the speaker states:

Your flesh may not understand what I am saying to you,
Nor your garment what I am showing you.

The proposal made by Harris-Mingana{87} that _ibwš_kwn in the second line be emended to _ibwtkwn ("your hearts") is in their own opinion daring, and for Charlesworth, without foundation. He therefore contends that the form of the verse is synonymous parallelism, with "garment" in v9b standing as an equivalent to "flesh" in v9a{88}.

The precise form "garments of skin" seems to have originated with the clothing made by the Lord for Adam and Eve, mentioned at Genesis 3:21. Harris{89} notes that in his Questions upon Genesis, Philo interpreted these coats allegorically, as a reference to the human body, which he regarded as a receptacle for the Mind and the Life that God had already created. He remarks that in this respect, Philo endorses the belief current in some rabbinic circles and based on a variant reading of Genesis 3:21, that before his fall Adam had a nature clothed in light like God himself, but that afterwards the light was replaced by an ordinary integument. In Harris' opinion, the poet plays upon the allegorical interpretation of Genesis 3 in the 25th Ode, using its language to describe the conversion and regeneration of the soul.
Besides the parallel at Ode 21:3, he finds further justification for this view in the 11th hymn, where the context is pregnant with the imagery of Paradise regained, and the speaker states at vv10-11:

I left behind the folly lying on the earth,  
And stripped it off and hurled it from me.  
The Lord renewed me with his garment,  
And possessed me by his light.

Harris rejects gnosticism as the source underlying the Odist's usage of this expression, though he does refer to a passage in Irenaeus' writings which speaks of Valentinus saying how the Demiurge first fashioned anthropolis choikos from some invisible and fluid substance and then clothed him in the coat of skin which is to aistheton sarkion. However, in his later work with Mingana, he appears to favour the theory of gnostic influence on the Odes at this point, referring to the tenets of the Manichaeans as exposed by Ephraim. In these, the sons of Darkness were said to have skins and the father, Darkness, to have become intoxicated and perverted the pure souls. God's work consisted in taking off the garments of skin-darkness and replacing them with soul-light.

The argument in the editio princeps, that this phrase refers to Adam's state following his fall, is taken a stage further by Bernard and in a manner which coherently relates it to the imagery of light and darkness and to the theme of release from bondage which have already been discussed. The extent to which the rabbis saw the Fall as resulting in any fundamental change in man's constitution is open to debate, but there can be little doubt that early Christianity did regard it in this way, as is clearly demonstrated by the famous Pauline passage at Romans 5:12-21. In Paul's eyes, the Fall led to man becoming subject to mortality, thus several of the Fathers took the
"garments of skin" at Genesis 3:21 to represent mystically the nekro"sis or liability to death which the human body incurred at that time.\(^{1730}\)

It seems, then, that the poet’s assertion at Ode 25:8b, that he has removed his garments of skin, repeats the thought with which the hymn began. The statement that the believer has been rescued from the chains of Death’s bondage is simply reformulated using the clothing metaphor found so frequently in the New Testament. Seen in this light, the parallel with I Corinthians 15:53 (which is followed in v55 by resounding echoes of the battle with Death) is all too clear:

For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality.

Within the Odes themselves, the precise sentiment is expressed again at 15:8-9 using the favourite term ḥbl, and the Descensus context is unmistakable:

I put on incorruption through his name,
And took off corruption by his grace.

Death has been destroyed before me,
And Sheol has been abolished by my word.

Moreover, as Bernard points out, there is further evidence in Christian literature to suggest that the occasion on which this divestiture of the corruptible nature took place was the believer’s baptism. He cites the following passage from Jerome’s Letter to Fabiola:

Praeceptis Dei lavandi sumus, et cum parati ad indumentum Christi; tunicas pelliceas deposuerimus, tunc induemur veste linea, nihil in se mortis habente, sed tota candida, ut de baptismo consurgentes, cingamus lumbos in veritate.\(^{233}\)

The same idea occurs in the writings of Cyril of Jerusalem, Ephraim (with reference to Christ and his own baptism) and Moses bar Kepha,
and the connection between baptism and "putting on Christ" is explicit at Galatians 3:27.

Charlesworth notes that unlike Ode 21:3, where the term Ἰβῆ is paired with its normal antonym Ἰδῆ, in the 25th hymn, the word used to denote the removal of the garments of skin is the apherēl theme of the verb ῥῆμ. Since this can also mean "to exalt" or "raise", Charlesworth maintains that the action which is described is at once seen as both removal and exaltation. His observation appears to be supported by the fact that ῥῆμ is used with the latter sense in the following verse:

Because your right hand exalted me,
And caused sickness to pass from me.

Thus in Ode 25, the thought of elevation is related to the clothing metaphor and to the idea of physical restoration. However, it is not absent from the 21st hymn, occurring both in connection with the notion of the Lord as the believer's Helper and a mention of his proximity to God:

Because he cast off my bonds from me,
And my Helper lifted me up according to his compassion and his salvation.
I was lifted up in the light,
And passed before him.

It seems that this theme of elevation forms a further point of contact, in addition to the bond motif, between these two hymns and the 17th. In fact, it features throughout the Odes in contexts where the celebration of the believer's new found relationship with the Lord is uppermost. The thought is invariably that he is lifted up in order to enjoy the company of the Lord, who is the Most High. In general, the Odist appears to make little use of kenotic Christology in describing his union with Christ, that is to say that the idea of Christ lowering or emptying himself to be one with mankind is seldom found in these
hymns. Rather, he knows Christ in his triumphant form, Christus Victor, the conqueror of Death, and considers the relationship with him and the Father to be possible through his own elevation to the Lord's presence. This point is brought out most forcefully in the 36th Ode, which is throughout a celebration of the believer's elevated status.

The notion of the Lord as the believer's Helper, which is also found at Odes 7:3 and 8:6, has already been touched on. In the 21st and 25th hymns it is related to the thought of salvation, and immediately follows the idea of release from bonds with which both begin. Thus at Ode 21:2, the speaker states:

Because he cast off my bonds from me,
And my Helper lifted me up according to his compassion and salvation.

adding in the fifth verse:

And increasingly helpful to me was the thought of the Lord,
And his incorruptible fellowship.

Similarly, at Ode 25:1-2, he remarks:

I was rescued from my bonds,
And fled to you, O my God.

Because you are the right hand of salvation,
And my Helper.

adding in the sixth verse:

I gained strength from you,
And help.

It will be recalled that in the wider Descensus tradition, Christ physically helps the dead from Hades, taking them by the hand and leading them out. Within the Odes themselves there are allusions to this help in a Descensus context in "the Way" that Christ sets up for the dead (Ode 22:7) and the footprints he leaves behind for them to follow (Ode 39:10-11). Yet more striking is Christ's statement at Ode 22:6, during the course of the battle with the seven headed dragon:
You were there and you helped me,
Everywhere your name surrounded me.

It seems that just as Christ is helped by the Father to achieve his definitive victory over Death, so in Ode 21 and 25 he in turn assists the believers in their own personal mirroring of the conflict through the baptismal experience. The fact that in the Genesis narrative, God’s purpose in creating Eve is said to be as a helper for Adam may indicate that the idea of baptism as an espousal to Christ lies close at hand.

At Ode 21:4, the poet speaks of his physical restoration:

I myself had limbs,
In which there was no sickness
Or affliction or suffering.

And the idea is reiterated at Ode 25:9:

Because your right hand exalted me,
And caused sickness to pass from me.

Bernard takes these lines quite literally, construing them as a reference to the belief common among the Fathers, especially in Syria, that baptism had a beneficial effect on the health of the body as well as the soul. He detects further hints of this view within the collection at Odes 6:14ff. and 18:3. However, it is also possible that the verses recall, albeit obliquely, the wider tradition in Syriac literature relating to Christ’s description as the Physician or Healer, especially in connection with the Descent.

Murray, in discussing the titles shared by Christ and the Apostles or bishops in the Syriac Church, notes that the New Testament provides its own justification for the emergence of "Physician" as a regular title of Christ from the many healing miracles which are detailed in the gospels. In addition to describing his work of
physical healing, the term naturally came to symbolize him as the healer of souls and restorer of human nature.

For Ephraim, the title appears to have been a particular favourite. He makes significant use of it in his depiction of Christ as the conqueror of Death, interpreting the gift of myrrh from the Magi as an indication that Christ was "the Physician who was to heal the broken state of Adam"\(^{15}\). Still more importantly, in his meditation on Christ’s baptism, Ephraim states:

> He (Christ) died, and it (Death) could not keep him in the prison of the tomb. He did not fall sick, because he was the Physician; he did not stray, being the Shepherd: he did not go wrong, being the Teacher; he did not stumble, being the Light.\(^{16}\)

In the Carmina Nisibena XXXIV, where the fullest development of this figure is found, Christ is not only the Physician, but also the medicine who heals believers through his own body and blood, through the Medicine of Life. But as Plooij comments in his comparative study of the Descensus in the Odes and Aphrahat’s writings, "Das pharmakon tēs zōēs wird für Sheol ein pharmakon tou thanatou, ein verderbliches Gift, das Sheol in ihrem Magen nicht behalten kann"\(^{17}\).

Regrettably, a more detailed examination of the manner in which the five points of correspondence between Odes 21 and 25 are developed has not been possible. However, in the discussion which has gone before it has been shown that all five areas contain imagery which is both compatible with the Descensus theme and points to specific baptismal practices or beliefs associated with the rite. It seems then that there is ample justification for interpreting these hymns in the same light as the 17th Ode, as a reference to the idea that through his baptism the believer shares Christ’s defeat of Death accomplished at
the time of his Descent. His own baptismal experience is seen as effecting a release from bondage, the emergence from darkness to light, a restoration to full health and the granting of eternal life, all of which were achieved by Christ for the dead in his Descent.

Now that the precise relationship in the Odes between Christian baptism and Christ's Descent has been established, it only remains to mention Odes 15:9 and 29:4, in which the pairing of Sheol and Death appears to intrude without notice into the context. Clearly it will be seen that these hymns, apparently spoken by the believer, contain the ideas of salvation, life, knowledge, elevation, light, corruption, praise and the defeat of the speaker's enemies which are by now so familiar in the Odist's treatment of the Descensus theme. Whilst it could be argued that any specific baptismal allusion is lacking from these Odes, it seems safe to conclude from the evidence that has been presented that they be taken as further examples of the poet's understanding of Christian baptism as a mirroring of Christ's Descent.
Notes to Chapter 5


(11) Batiffol, for example, who thinks that the Odes are a Christian composition, suggests that in the opening stanzas Solomon stands as a figure for the redeemed soul. In the later verses God's redemptive work in Christ is described. [P. Batiffol, "Les Odes de Salomon," *R.B.*, VIII (1911), pp.21-59, especially 53-5, and 161-97.] Curiously, Labourt, whose translation is cited by Batiffol, does allude to a *Descensus* interpretation in his textual notes to v12, where he quotes the phrase "O mors ero mors tua".

Grimme, on the other hand, proposes that the Odes were originally a Jewish work into which interpolations have been made by a later Christian editor. In his view, the beginning of Ode 17 details the believer's own justification and renewal, after which he breaks down the outmoded statutes of men and heralds the advent of the Lord. He detects editorial activity in this hymn from the 14th verse. Harnack, who also thinks that the collection is Jewish in origin, sees the interpolator's hand from v11, but unlike Grimme believes that the hymn in its extant Christian form may refer to the Descent.
A discussion of the roots of this imagery, which go back to Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld, can be found in other chapters.

Harris-Mingana in their expository comment on this Ode suggest that the author has been inspired by the whole of Psalm 107. In addition to this verse, they also find parallels to the Odist's language in v4 at the Psalm's 14th verse, in v5 its fourth and seventh, in v12 its 10th and in vv14-15 its 37th and 38th.


MacCulloch notes (op. cit., pp.333-4) that it is also used by early writers, the first being Justin Martyr, in their description of the Ascension. The words "Who is the King of glory?" were put in the mouths of those attending the gates of heaven, and the answer was given by the attendant angels.

The latter passage was cited in the chapter on the 22nd Ode in connection with the discussion of the meaning of the term 'wrh' in the Odist's treatment of the Descent. It was argued that Aphrahat, like the Odist, regards the dragon of the Sea as the alter ego of the Death monster.

Murray observes that Psalm 107:16 was used by Hippolytus and Tertullian of the Descent, and by the time of Eusebius its usage had become classical in a Descensus context. [R. Murray, Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition (Cambridge: University Press, 1975), pp.228-38 and 324-9.]

J. H. Bernard, The Odes of Solomon, Texts and Studies, VIII, no. 3 (Cambridge: University Press, 1912), pp.34 and 56-7. His direct comments on Ode 17 are to be found on pp.81-4.


In Ode 17:10a the term used is mwkl, though tr is also found in the wider context.


The fact that these words are spoken ex ore Christi is indicated by comparison of the content of v16 with the doxology.

It should be noted that in contrast to Gunkel and Bauer, Sanders detects elements of the Adonis or Tammuz cult within the Odes. He proposes that the 17th hymn be construed as a reference to the elevation of the Odist to the position of Redeemer. [J. T. Sanders, The New Testament Christological Hymns: Their Historical Religious Background (Cambridge: University Press, 1971).]

This explanation was rejected as a solution to the problems presented by Ode 42 (i.e., the possible docetic nuances and inconsistency in the thought between vv10b, 17 and 18) as being
unsupported by the text itself, yet it does seem applicable here in Ode 17.

In Colossians, immediately before the expression which has been cited, the author states that Christ is "the Head of the Body, the Church", a notion which is clearly echoed in the 17th Ode's final verse and doxology. The description of Christ as "the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" in I Corinthians 15:20ff. may also be compared, but it should be noted that here the resurrection of the rest of the dead is evidently expected to take place at the Second Coming, along with the destruction of Death, the final enemy. For the Odist, both of these things are conceived of as having been achieved during the Descent. Interestingly, fruit imagery does occur later in Ode 17 at v14a, though it seems that its application is somewhat different from that in I Corinthians.

(25) Bauer's translation, which construes ἄνωθεν as a verb and not a noun, avoids this comparison. Similarly, Frankenberg's Greek retroversion offers the term lusis as an alternative to anoixis.


(27) This Ode, the second and beginning of the third are missing in Harris' Syriac manuscript; that of Burkitt only attests from Ode 17:7b. Fortunately, the first Ode is one of the five which are cited in the Pistas Sophia. The translation from the Coptic which has been given is that of Charlesworth. [J. H. Charlesworth, The Odes of Solomon (Missoula, Montana: Scholars' Press, 1977), p.17.1

(28) C. H. Bruston, "Les plus anciens cantiques chrétiens: les Odes de Salomon," RevT., XLIV (1911), pp.478-9. Bruston's argument is directed against Harnack's theory that the Odes are a Jewish composition which have undergone interpolation by a later Christian editor.

(29) The parallels with the Wisdom literature are brought out most fully by Batiffol, who states that frequently in the Odes the speaker is the believer transformed into Solomon (op. cit., pp.34ff.).


(31) The usage of the figures of the Bride and Bridegroom is consistent in these two Odes. In the 42nd it seems that the nuptial imagery is used positively, and the reference is to Christ and his believers. However, in Ode 38 there is also an allusion to the marital couple who corrupt and are corrupted. They are said to imitate the Beloved and his Bride.

Drijvers is convinced that the latter hymn, along with Ode 33, is to be seen as a polemic against Mani and the Manichaean Church. He therefore proposes a date of composition for the collection towards the end of the third century. [H. J. W. Drijvers, "Facts and Problems in Early Syriac-Speaking Christianity," East of Antioch: Studies in Early Syriac Christianity (London: Variorum Reprints, 1984), pp.166-9.]
Such a late date has been almost universally rejected by the scholars, and would seem to be excluded by the fact that the collection was known to and used by both the author of the Pistis Sophia and Lactantius. Moreover, it has been shown that the most likely interpretation of Ode 33 is as a Descensus hymn, with the title "Corruptor" used as a cypher for Death. Since there is such an emphasis on corruption in the 38th hymn, it seems legitimate to suggest that it too should be seen as treating of the Descent.

(33) This passage is quoted by Bernard on p.18.
(34) This passage is quoted by Bernard on pp.20-1.
(36) There are two important facts to note in connection with this hymn in the Acts. The first is that in its Greek version, to which the Syriac is thought to be secondary, the "daughter of light" who is the subject is not the Church but Sophia. The second is that even in the Syriac recension, the feminine figure is not explicitly styled the Bride, though she does have bridesmaids and groomsmen and awaits the heavenly Bridegroom.
(37) Evangelium Concordans III 17.
(38) Ibid., XXI 11.
(39) In part, acceptance or rejection of Gunkel's interpretation of the 17th Ode will depend on the extent to which his wider theory, that the collection has been composed under the influence of gnosticism, is also shared. This broader matter cannot be debated in any greater depth.
(40) Gunkel himself defines the crown as Christ's garland of life given by God.
(44) Similar courtroom language is used in a Descensus context at Ode 33:11b-12a.
(45) Elsewhere, however, in discussing the soteriology of the Odes, with particular reference to the 17th hymn, Batiffol states, "Remarquez bien qu'il ne s'agit pas de péché à effacer, mais de convertir des âmes à la vérité, et de leur communiquer une vie qu'elles n'avaient pas." (op. cit., p.183).
Batifol also comments directly on the similarity between the thought of Ode 17:1-4a and the 11th hymn.

The underlying Hebrew term here is thwm. It has been suggested that the Odist uses the Syriac equivalent, thwm*, in Ode 24 to depict Sheol as a plurality of abysses.

The language of submersion, abysses and darkness has been shown to be part of the poet's Descensus vocabulary.

The speaker's statement in v10, that he was thought to have been "swallowed up" (by Death), may be compared with the assertion in the 17th verse that he did not perish.


The precise expression in Ode 17:9a is *wrh* dhlkth, which Grimme and many others have translated by "Satzungen" or its equivalent. Given the Descensus context, it is more likely that *wrh* is employed here with the same heilsgeschichtlich sense that it has been found to have in Odes 22 and 24, to denote the path of salvation from Sheol.

The noun hlkth may be compared with *qbt* in Ode 39:10-11, where again there are grounds for seeing an allusion to the Descent. The reference to the qys* dmtqn in v10b certainly echoes the report found in the Descensus tradition that Christ took his cross with him into Hades and erected it there as a bridge. Moreover, the water imagery which dominates this hymn has also prompted the suggestion that the Odist is alluding to the gospel account of Jesus' walking on the lake, which in turn may be a New Testament echo of the Chaoskampf. No further comment is required on the influence of the latter on the Odist's depiction of the Descent. The expression *qbt* dnwhri which occurs at Odes 7:14 and 10:6 may also be compared.


Based on its use of the term corruption by comparison with that in Ode 33, it has already been argued that the 38th hymn may be seen to belong with the Descensus Odes. The false bride and groom are not Mani and his congregation, as Drijvers maintains, or heretical teachers generally, as Harris-Mingana suggest (op. cit., pp.394-5). Rather, they are alternative titles for Death and Sheol, or possibly even Death and Satan. The latter is said to deceive the world in Revelation 12:9, and with this may be compared Ode 38:10b.

In this case, there appears to be the same combination here of Descent with baptism which exists in the 17th hymn. Harris-Mingana (op. cit., pp.149ff.), led by Bernard [The Odes of Solomon, Texts and Studies, VIII, no. 3 (Cambridge: University Press, 1912), pp.123ff.], acknowledge that the former's opening verses allude to the concept of baptism as the vehicle in which the believer is carried to the Church, a haven of salvation, and it has been
remarked that in Syriac tradition, nuptial practices were adopted in the baptismal rite. Such an interpretation, which regrettably cannot be tested more fully, again renders another difficult Ode intelligible and it is unnecessary to believe, as Bernard does, that the poet has lost the train of thought part way through the hymn.


(56) Op. cit., pp.69-94. Murray concludes that little is made in Syriac tradition of the ecclesiological implications of this theme, or of the notion of corporate personality. Thus there is scant attention paid to the Holy Spirit's role as principle of unity in the Church, and even Ephraim does not really advance his thinking on this subject beyond what is already present in Paul's writings. Murray ascribes the lack of ecclesiological interest to the tendency towards personal and ascetical concerns, which the Odist shares, that characterizes earliest Syriac literature.

(57) Evangelium Concordans XX 8.


(61) The thought at Ode 42:3ff., where Christ appears to be the speaker, may be compared. In the discussion which follows, it will be assumed that the speaker in Odes 21 and 25 is the Odist himself as a believer, but not all the commentators agree on this matter. Connolly, for example, considers that Ode 21 is put in the mouth of the risen Christ, though he is convinced that the hymn refers to the Descent (op. cit., p.302). It has been argued that the difficulty in distinguishing between speakers in the Odes reflects the poet's notion of mystical union with Christ, and serves only to reinforce the argument that what is predicated within them of Christ in his Descent is applied to the believer at baptism.

(62) This translation follows Burkitt's manuscript version. At v8a, the Coptic reads "your mercy" in place of "your Spirit".


(65) Ibid., pp.106-8.


(70) Harris also briefly discusses the Hymn of the Pearl in the Acts of Thomas. Here, the prince who narrates the story takes off his bright robes and, in his exile in Egypt, puts on the clothing of the natives. On finding the pearl, he strips off the clothing (which is described as filthy and unclean) as he responds to the vision of his royal robe recalling him. Murray, however, notes that although this application of the imagery is dualistic and hostile to the body, the image itself is not necessarily gnostic but due more to encratism (op. cit., pp.311-2). Charlesworth too cautions against concluding that the Odist's usage of the phrase "garments of skin" betrays gnostic tendencies. He cites IQS iv 7-8 in which the reward of the "sons of light" is "a crown of glory and a raiment of majesty in eternal light". [J. H. Charlesworth, The Odes of Solomon (Missoula, Montana: Scholars' Press, 1977), pp.102-3, note 10.1] It seems safest to conclude that this expression, whilst being susceptible to gnostic deployment, was not exclusive to it.

(71) Harris-Mingana refer here to Odes 33 and 38, though it has been argued that these hymns be taken to refer to the Descent, with Death styled "the Corruptor".

(72) Hayman, for example, argues against this, insisting that rabbinic interest in the Fall was only stimulated by and formulated specifically against Christian doctrines. He notes that in the rabbis' interpretation of the Genesis text, death is man's natural lot decreed by God and the origins of evil are to be traced back to the time of his creation, when God implanted in him what is called the yetzer, his power of self-assertion, capable of being perverted into moral evil. [A. P. Hayman, "The Fall, Freewill and Human Responsibility in Rabbinic Judaism," S.J.T., XXXVII (1984), pp.13-22.]

(73) Given that the Odist's imagery of Death has been said to be Canaanite in origin, it may be asked how the story of the Fall fits into this scheme. Apparently, the combination of both theories concerning the origin of death and evil was made possible through the figure of the serpent in the Genesis narrative, which readily became identified with the Canaanite Mot.


Harris-Mingana (op. cit., p.322) observe that at Wisdom 6:19 immortality is said to bring one near to God and Cyril of Jerusalem expressly regards this closeness as being achieved at baptism. The thought appears to be that while held in the bonds of Death, the believer was estranged from God (compare Psalm 6:5), but following his baptism, in which these bonds are removed, he and his Lord are reconciled. Attention is drawn to the comments earlier in this chapter on the meaning of Ode 17:11b where Christ asserts that he is the door.

Ode 7, the main theme of which is the Incarnation, must be seen as the exception.

Not all the commentators are agreed that the Odist is the speaker in this hymn. However, the suggestion that it is spoken ex ore Christi raises a question over the orthodoxy of the third and sixth verses, in which the Spirit would then be made the Mother of Christ and Christ himself be relegated to the position of a divine neighbour.

Harris' manuscript omits the negative particle.


Evangelium Concordans II 26.

Ibid., IV 14. The connection between Christ's baptism and the Descent has already been discussed in the chapter on the 24th Ode.

Chapter 6: I Peter 3:19
Hitherto, the chief concern of the preceding chapters has been to promote and analyse the Descensus interpretation of certain hymns from the collection known as the Odes of Solomon. The main findings from this examination have been that the Descent motif is more pervasive in the Odes than has generally been supposed, and that the Odist develops this theme in a quite particular direction. It has often been argued that the hymns make little of the death and resurrection of Christ, events so central to the Christian kerygma, and that they are singularly lacking in any kind of sacramental interest. Both of these charges have been disproved. The abstract theological concepts of death and resurrection are given by the Odist the concrete form of a battle with and victory over Death and his cohorts, and this defeat is conceived of as replicated in the believer’s own life on the occasion of his baptism. The vanquishing of Death and the resultant assurance of eternal life, in which the believer fully shares through his own baptism, form the basis of the Christian confidence and exultation which are the hallmark of the Odes. In this respect, the collection has been shown to be completely in line, mutatis mutandis, with such mainstream New Testament thinking on these issues as that found in Romans 6.

Having established the link in the Odist’s mind between Christ’s Descent and Christian baptism, it is appropriate to consider whether there is any evidence of such a connection being made by the biblical writers. The broader sentiments of the chapter from Romans just mentioned are approaching harmony with the Odes, though it must be conceded that Paul does not speak of the Descent of Christ as such, but in general of his death and resurrection. Much closer, however, is the passage from I Peter which the R. S. V. translates in the following way:
For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit; in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him. (I Peter 3:18-22)

These verses have often been described by commentators as the most difficult in the whole epistle, and a variety of widely diverging conclusions has been reached as to their meaning. But one of the main strands of interpretation has seen contained within them an allusion to Christ's Descent into Hell, moreover, the reference to baptism is indisputable. Naturally, it is not the only New Testament passage in which strains of the Descensus motif have been heard, but it is precisely the relationship between this theme and Christian baptism which makes it so significant within the framework of this thesis as a whole. For this reason, the primary objective of the present and following chapter will be to establish whether or not v19 refers to the Descent, and, if it does, to examine the connection the author makes with baptism.

It should be noted at the outset that the difficulties which beset the interpreter are not confined to those of thought and language. Both Dalton and Reicke, who have made exhaustive studies of this passage concur that above all it is dogmatic prejudice which has dominated the debate and coloured its outcome. Faced with these problems, and engaged on a quest for hymnic fragments within the New Testament, some scholars have suggested that the passage contains
material from an earlier Christian creed or psalm, which the author of the epistle has either misunderstood or digressed from into an instruction on baptism”. But the principal concern here is not with biblical hymnology, thus on the whole it seems safest to acknowledge simply that older Christological formulae may be present in vv18 and 22, and thereafter to allow the text to speak for itself.

One possible safeguard against the intrusion of the theological considerations warned of by Dalton and Reicke and an essential requirement of any attempt at interpretation is to examine the context in which the passage under discussion lies. In the verses which immediately precede I Peter 3:18-22, the author tells his readers that even if they suffer unjustly they will be blessed (3:14). They are urged to defend themselves when called to account for their faith, but to do so in a spirit of gentleness and humility so that their dignified bearing will put their opponents to shame (vv15-16). Even if this does not happen, it is still intrinsically better, should it be God’s will, to suffer for doing right than for doing wrong (v17).

To a great extent these verses typify the message of the epistle as a whole, the purpose of which appears to be to encourage the Christians in Asia Minor facing persecution. The importance of maintaining the good conduct which befits the Christian life, despite adversity, is stressed. The readers must submit to the civil authorities (2:13-17), just as slaves must submit to their masters (2:18ff.) and wives to their husbands (3:1-6). They are to be holy in their conduct as the one who called them is holy (1:16). They should follow Christ’s example of patient suffering even when it is unjust (2:18-25) and be secure in the knowledge that it is the lot of Christians worldwide (5:9). They are to remember that the Lord sees
and hears the activities and requests of the righteous (3:12), that he judges justly (2:23) and is ready to call the profligate to account (4:4-5). The outcome of their faith will be the salvation of their souls (1:9), the reward for their endurance that God himself will restore, establish and strengthen them (5:10). Above all, they can feel confident that their faith is true through Christ's resurrection (1:3, 21).

Having presented a brief conspectus of the general themes of the epistle, the main questions raised by the passage at 3:18-22 can now be addressed directly. Given that the chief purpose of this chapter is to search for traces of the Descensus motif<sup>23</sup>, these may be exhibited as follows:

1. Is the variant reading epathen (supported by B, K and P) for apethanen in v18 to be preferred?
2. What is the meaning of the phrase ζωοποιηθεὶς de pneumatι in v18?
3. Are either of the suggested variants for the words en ho kai (v19) to be upheld?
4. What is the antecedent to this phrase?
5. Where is the prison in v19 located?
6. Who are the spirits in v19?
7. What is the content of the proclamation in v19?
8. When did the events of v19 take place?
9. Is I Peter 3:19 related to I Peter 4:6?

Clearly many of these questions are inter-dependent and can be taken together. The utterly disparate interpretations which have arisen from the text suggest that they must now be examined as systematically as possible.

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[1] Is the variant reading *epathen* (supported by B, K and P) for *apethanen* in v18 to be preferred?

[2] What is the meaning of the phrase *zōopoieteis de pneumati* in v18?

The weight of textual evidence strongly favours the reading *apethanen* (Christ also died), which is followed by the R. S. V. and N. E. B. translations. But some scholars have insisted that *epathen* (Christ also suffered), which is upheld in the A. V. translation, is the original reading. The grounds for their preference are that the verb *paschein* is demanded by the context, which deals with Christian suffering but in no way mentions the possibility of believers dying for their faith. By reading *epathen* in v18, the train of thought from the previous verse remains unbroken. The transition from the sufferings of the Christians to the sacrificial death of Christ, and its purpose, is perfectly facilitated by means of this verb which was frequently used in the New Testament with the extended meaning "to die". These scholars are able to account for the change to *apethanen* by suggesting that later scribes must have realized the remainder of v18 referred to the death of Christ, but were somehow unaware of the extended meaning of *paschein*, and so made the language more explicit. They may also have been influenced by the Pauline parallel at Romans 6:10, *ho gar apethanen tē hamartia apethanen ephapax*.

Others have defended the majority reading *apethanen* arguing that the change to *epathen* may have occurred precisely because the scribes felt compelled to harmonize this verb with those found in 3:13-17 and 4:1, or because of a recollection of the phrase *hoti kai Christos epathen* at 2:21. Kelly has suggested that given the writer's general predilection for the verb *paschein*, *apethanen* is the more difficult reading, and as such has strong claims to originality. He
adds that this word may even have been used against the author's own preference because it stood in the liturgical texts he was citing.

As Reicke,14 Bieder and Selwyn have all noted, the actual sense of the verse is little affected whichever verb is chosen. The remaining words make it clear that the death of Christ is in mind, and the New Testament usage of paschein as a synonym for apothneskein, when Christ is the subject, underlines the point. However, the wealth and breadth of textual support pleads firmly in favour of apethanen, and it seems that it should be preferred. The objection raised by Dalton and Beare that this reading violates the unity of the passage is not insuperable. It must simply be assumed that the author passes directly from Christian suffering to the ultimate form of Christ's, his death, in order to proceed with his argument, which clearly is concerned with much more than merely establishing Christ as an ethical model to be followed.15

The final phrase of the verse, zōopoietheis de pneumati is connected with that which immediately precedes it, thanatōtheis men sarki, as is indicated by the men ...... de construction. Such a construction is used to distinguish a word or phrase from that which follows. It may then be translated "on the one hand ...... on the other", or even more simply by the word "but". The tightly-knit nature of the whole expression suggests that the datives sarki and pneumati, with no preposition, should both be construed in the same way. Whilst it may be possible to understand pneumati as a causal dative (by the Spirit), this cannot apply to the former part of the antithesis, thus it seems both should be taken as datives of reference, or adverbial datives.
The verb *zōopoiein* must bear the same sense here that it has at John 5:21, 6:63, Romans 4:17, 8:11, I Corinthians 15:22 etc., where it functions as an equivalent of *egeirein* to denote the resurrection. Most modern day commentators have emphatically remarked that the inspiration behind this verse is not the Platonic dichotomy of body and soul, or the distinction between Christ's divinity and his humanity. They maintain that the thinking at I Peter 3:18, as elsewhere in the New Testament where the flesh/spirit contrast is drawn, is determined by its dependence on Hebraic rather than Greek patterns. Two opposing spheres of activity, influence or existence are juxtaposed; on the one hand stands the earthly and temporal (*sarki*), on the other the heavenly and eternal (*pneumati*). The conjunction of *zōopoiein* with *pneumati* clearly does not imply a rejection of the notion of Christ's bodily resurrection, nor can it admit of a distinction between the post-crucifixion but pre-resurrection state of his existence. Perhaps the best summary of the import of this phrase is provided by Alford, who states, "He, the God-man Christ Jesus, body and soul, ceased to live in the flesh, began to live in the spirit; ceased to live a fleshly, mortal life, began to live a spiritual Resurrection life."
[3] Are either of the variants for the words en hō kai (v19) to be upheld?

[4] What is the antecedent to this phrase?

Faced with the notorious difficulties of the text, Bowyer conjectured that the present reading en hō is a scribal error for the name Enōch. Similarly, Harris proposed that the phrase en hō kai be seen as a case of haplography for en hō kai Enōch. There is no manuscript support for either of these suggested emendations, and it seems that the introduction of Enoch as subject in a passage which deals with the work of Christ would be highly intrusive. They are dismissed by the majority of commentators as ingenious but untenable.

Moving on to the meaning of the words en hō, or more accurately, to the problem of identifying their antecedent, two main solutions have been proposed. It is interesting to see that even with its opening words, the divisions which are to characterize the interpretation of the whole verse are already beginning to show. The reason for this will be apparent when the alternatives have been put forward.

(a) Selwyn regards the phrase en hō as a relative referring to the whole of the previous expression (thanatōtheis ....... pneumati) or verse (i.e., Passion and resurrection generally) and translates, "in the course of which" or "in which process". Having defined sarki and pneumati as datives of reference, he maintains that such a dative of reference never serves as an antecedent to a relative pronoun in the New Testament, thus the antecedent to en hō cannot be the single word pneumati. Selwyn notes further examples within this epistle where the antecedent is the whole of the preceding phrase (1 Peter 1:6, 2:12, 3:16, 4:4). Bieder is in substantial accord with Selwyn, adding that a more specific classification of the time should not be sought. All that may
be said is that the events of v19 took place "in temporal proximity" to Christ's death and resurrection. Reicke, however, prefers to regard the appositions thanatōtheis .... pneumati as a parenthetical explanation of the main action in v18a. In his view, the words en hō function as a temporal conjunction equivalent to en hō chronō ("on which occasion" or "on that occasion") referring back to the death of Christ. In support of this argument he lists examples from Greek literature of the use of en hō as a temporal conjunction. Cranfield and Best note both Selwyn's and Reicke's suggestions as viable alternatives.

(b) Kelly contends that there can be no real doubt that en hō refers back to pneumati alone as the antecedent and is not persuaded by the examples Selwyn cites of other instances in I Peter where the antecedent is the whole of the previous phrase. These, he argues, are not true parallels, since in them no single noun stands out as the obvious antecedent whereas pneumati clearly does in 3:19. Dalton is of the same opinion and claims support from the translation found in the N. E. B., "And in the spirit he went and made his proclamation ....". Both consider that the kai belongs with en hō, its force being to indicate that a further activity of Christ in the spirit (the first having been his resurrection from death which brings people to God) is about to be mentioned.

Kelly remarks that Selwyn's argument that there are no New Testament examples of an adverbial dative serving as antecedent to a relative pronoun carries little weight since the ancient commentators, to whom Greek was a native language, unhesitatingly took it that way. The obstacle to this thesis, as Dalton himself recognizes, is that by and large these ancient commentators clearly take pneumati to refer to
Christ's soul/divine nature, an interpretation which both he and Kelly reject\textsuperscript{22}. It should be noted that although Kelly and Dalton suggest that the single word *pneumati* is the antecedent to *en hō*, both explicitly take the whole phrase *zōopoītheis de pneumati* as antecedent when developing their argument\textsuperscript{24}, arguing that in the *men ...... de* construction the accent is on the second member. In fact, they effectively dissociate the second member of the antithesis from its partner, thereby wrongly placing the main emphasis of the verse on the resurrection rather than death of Christ\textsuperscript{25}.

Clearly it will be seen that position (a) admits of a *Descensus* motif in v19, whereas (b), which puts the activity in the post-resurrection sphere, excludes it. At this point, no single line of reasoning appears sufficiently compelling to determine the whole *Descensus* issue.
Where is the prison in v19 located?

Who are the spirits in v19?

These two questions must be taken together since the locality of the prison to some extent is determined by the identity of the spirits. The context provides no clues, for the verb poreutheis simply means "he went", without any indication of direction. It is probably better to begin by asking, who are the spirits? There are three main possibilities:

(a) They are the contemporaries of Noah, alive on earth at the time of the Flood, to whom the pre-existent Christ made proclamation through the person of Noah. This interpretation was favoured by Augustine, chiefly because it avoided what he saw as the theological difficulties presented by construing the text otherwise. It remained dominant for about 1000 years, and is shared by Aquinas and Bede. Evidently Augustine takes pneumatí (v18) to refer to Christ's soul or divine nature, without any reference to the resurrection, and assumes that this single word is the antecedent to en hô. The kai in v19 has the extended meaning, "also, at another time", and the verb poreutheis is rendered by advenio giving the sense "came" rather than "went". The prison is the metaphorical imprisonment of sin and ignorance.

Though his interpretation undoubtedly makes sense of this difficult passage, Augustine himself frequently acknowledges the problems and regards his understanding as provisional rather than definitive. It has been almost universally rejected by modern scholars as overly allegorical, and because it has at its heart the Greek body/soul dichotomy considered alien to biblical thinking.

(b) They are the souls of some or all of the dead of Noah's generation imprisoned in Hades. This interpretation is attested in the writings
of Clement of Alexandria\(^2\), Origen\(^3\) and Hippolytus\(^4\), and is implicit in the Peshitta translation\(^5\). It is likely that these are the earliest examples of comment on this verse of any kind.

Such antiquity has commended it to many modern commentators (with the modification of the sense of pneumati and en \(\Delta\) noted above) including Beare, Bigg\(^6\), Bernard\(^7\) and Cranfield. The main difficulty it presents is that of taking pneumata, which in the New Testament invariably refers to supernatural beings malign or otherwise, to denote human souls. Cranfield meets this objection by citing Hebrews 12:23 as an example of New Testament usage of pneumata with this sense.

(c) They are supernatural beings imprisoned either in Sheol or a place above the earth. This interpretation is adopted by Kelly, Dalton, Reicke, Bieder, Best, Selwyn and Michaels\(^8\) with some variations. It arises mainly from the objection noted above that pneuma standing alone can not be intended to describe the human soul. These commentators argue that Hebrews 12:23 cannot be deemed a true parallel as there the term pneumasi is accompanied by a qualifying genitive, dikaiōn. Since some of the variations of this interpretation are of importance for the overall understanding of the passage, it will be wise to examine them fully.

Kelly states that the key to the whole passage is to be found in the myth of the sin and condemnation of the rebellious angels of Genesis 6:1-4 (where they are called sons of God) and the importance of this myth in late Jewish Apocrypha (especially I Enoch) and New Testament times (cf. Jude 6 and II Peter 2:4). The remainder of v19, which goes on to describe how the spirits refused obedience, makes this interpretation all the more likely as it was the angels' misbehaviour
and condemnation which had become such a source of interest (I Enoch 10-16 and 21, Apocalypse of Baruch 56:12ff., Jubilees 5:6). Notably, their misdemeanour was specifically defined as disobedience (I Enoch 21:6). All human sin was attributable to them and their leader Azazel (I Enoch 10:8) and even after their sentence they continued their evil work by means of their spirits, defiling men and luring them to idolatry (I Enoch 19:1).

The place of punishment of these rebels is called a prison (I Enoch 21:10, 18:14), though its precise location is unclear from the apocryphal books in which there is much disagreement. Jubilees 5:6 suggests that they are bound "in the depths of the earth". I Enoch proposes a variety of places: on the earth (I Enoch 13:9), in the West (I Enoch 22:1-3, 67:4) or an abyss at the end of the heaven "which had no firmament of the heaven above, and no firmly founded earth beneath it" (I Enoch 18:12-14). According to Kelly, this last picture is the one which was developed in II Enoch, and of which echoes are heard in the New Testament. It presupposes a plurality of heavens above the earth in which both the souls of the dead and good and evil spirits reside. He suggests that the strength of this view among early Christian circles makes it probable that the prison is to be thought of as being situated in the upper regions. Furthermore, for him, the context points decisively in that direction.

The reference to the refusal of obedience having occurred in the days of Noah cannot be seen as an objection to this interpretation as the tales of the fall of the angels and the Flood are placed side by side in the Genesis narrative, and had become inextricably linked in the minds of the Apocrypha writers (e.g., I Enoch 106:13-18 and Testament of Naphtali 3:5).
Michaels notes the particular use of the term *pneumata* in the New Testament for the demons encountered by Jesus in his ministry. On the basis of I Enoch 15:8-10, he states that the spirits are better identified with the offspring of the sons of God (i.e., the angels) and their union with the women of the generation of the Flood, than with the sons of God themselves, who are usually referred to as angels or watchers, but not spirits. That union produced giants, and from them came the evil spirits or demons who continue to harass humankind and in the gospels are referred to as unclean spirits.

Michaels recognizes that there is a difficulty in equating the spirits in I Peter with the unclean spirits of the gospel tradition since the latter can scarcely be described as "in prison", rather, they are very much active in the world. Moreover, he states the progeny of the angels, the demons, are never described as being bound in the way the angels are themselves in I Enoch. He overcomes this by proposing that *en phulake* be rendered "in refuge" with the meaning of a haven or protection for those on the inside. He cites Revelation 18:2 in which he considers that *phulakē* has the same import and is connected with *pneumata*. A more specific location of this stronghold is not required, Christ made proclamation to the spirits wherever they were.

Michaels is apparently unaware of the passage in Jubilees 10. This both confirms that the evil spirits are imprisoned just like their progenitors and that they are able to continue to exercise their malign influence among humankind. It supposes that although some of the evil spirits had been imprisoned, a tenth remained free to serve Satan on earth.

Best, Selwyn and Reicke all agree on the influence of I Enoch on I Peter, and that the author has the fallen angels in mind. In fact,
Selwyn suggests that the whole kingdom of demons, with Satan himself at its head, is envisaged. The passing allusions in the New Testament to the fate of the fallen angels can leave no real doubt that their place of punishment or prison is situated in the Underworld (Jude 6, II Peter 2:4, Revelation 20:1-7).

Selwyn argues on the strength of I Enoch 22:10-11 that the wicked dead may also be in the author's mind, though it is unclear why he does so having lined up an impressive array of arguments against this interpretation, and in view of the fact that his later line of reasoning practically excludes it. Reicke too believes that a secondary reference to those who died in the Flood may also be present. As with Selwyn, it is difficult to see the reason for this, since the real force of his later argument is based on an identification with the angels. Reicke develops the thought to suggest that the malign influence of the evil spirits would above all have been considered to be at work and visible amongst the heathen, and in particular, their rulers. Bieder concurs with this extended view of the evil spirits, but dismisses the matter of the location of their prison as irrelevant to the author's purpose.
What is the content of the proclamation in v19?

As with poreutheis, the verb ekērxen itself is not much help for its literal meaning is quite neutral and betrays no sense of the content of the proclamation. Reicke\textsuperscript{36} maintains that it must have its normal New Testament meaning, when connected with euaggelion, of preaching the gospel. This, he defines, as Christ's true glory. Although convinced that the text does not permit further definition of the content of the proclamation, he has no such qualms about supposing its effects on the spirits (in his view, the fallen angels), who were put to shame at finding the glory of the Messiah in such a humble form.

Reicke's remarks on this matter are clearly determined by what he regards as the main function of the passage, which is to show Christ's activity as a moral example to be followed. Just as Christ preached to the imprisoned spirits, so the Christians should courageously proclaim to those in high positions (who derive their inspiration and power from the fallen angels) the secret of the gospel. Reicke is careful to note that the author does not provide any information on the later fate of the spirits to suggest that restoration is envisaged, although he does comment that there are certain biblical passages which produce a strong impression of all creatures being considered finally received by God. He also states that in the Christian mimesis of this proclamation the pagans will be more readily converted for they no longer receive support from their patrons in the spirit world who heard the gospel from Christ himself.

It seems Reicke's argumentation continually oscillates between implicitly positive (the possibility of conversion) and negative (a putting to shame) understandings of the nature of the preaching, with the former eventually dominating. The complexity of his comments,
coupled with a rejection of his opinion that the passage is a reflection on the *imitatio Christi*, suggest a more straightforward interpretation of the meaning of *ekeřuxen* should be sought. Two main theories have been proposed, which largely depend on how the spirits have been identified.

(a) Christ preaches a message of salvation, or at least a call to repentance with a view to salvation. This is the interpretation initiated by Clement of Alexandria and Origen and followed by Beare, Cranfield, Bernard, Bigg and Best, who contend that the verb *ekeřussein* has here its ordinary *New Testament* sense of preaching the gospel with the implicit note of hope. It will soon be recognized that with the exception of Best, these are the commentators who consider the spirits to be human souls. It is this combination of a message of hope to the souls of the departed now in Sheol which presented for some the theological difficulty of the possibility of repentance and salvation after death. Evidently, this was only a perceived rather than an actual difficulty for the members of the Alexandrian school of theology, here represented by Clement and Origen, who held a theology of wider hope. Similarly for much later liberal Protestant scholars, most of whom comment that the people of Noah's generation, generally considered by Jewish and Christian tradition to be the epitome of sinfulness, have been singled out at I Peter 3:19 precisely in order to underline how far that hope reached. In this case, the *kai* at the beginning of the verse is to be construed with *tois en phulakē pneumasin*, its force being "even".

However, it is just this difficulty with which Augustine wrestles in his reply to Evodius (who had asked, with reference to this text, whether Hell had been emptied), and which gave rise to his allegorical
interpretation. Later commentators also felt this to be a problem, assuming that the message was one of hope to the dead in Sheol, and so restricted the number of the dead to whom Christ preached to those who had already been converted before their death. This view, popularized by Cardinal Bellarmine, was dominant in the Roman Catholic Church replacing that of Augustine, and was probably used to support the doctrine of Purgatory. The chief objection to it is there is no evidence in the text that a particular group within the spirits who had refused obedience is intended, certainly not a group who had repented. On the contrary, there is much biblical evidence to suggest that the people of the Flood generation were notorious for their abiding sinfulness.

Best proposes that this same message of salvation was preached to the evil spirits. Again, he argues from normal New Testament usage that this is the meaning even when *kerussein* is used without a qualifying noun (e.g., at Mark 1:38, 3:14, Matthew 11:1, Romans 10:14, I Corinthians 1:21, 9:27). Conversely, he maintains, there is no occasion when it is used absolutely (i.e., without qualification) to mean judgement. It is possible that II Enoch 18 implies the possibility of the angels' repentance and conversion and that in the New Testament at Colossians 1:20 and Ephesians 1:10 a general restoration may be envisaged. Best notes that the acceptance or rejection by the spirits of this offer is not mentioned, probably because the author's main interest is in what Christ did rather than the fate of the angels.

(b) Christ pronounces condemnation on the spirits or announces victory over them. This line is taken by Michaels, Dalton, Kelly and Selwyn who all think that the spirits are supernatural beings, and regard this preaching of condemnation to the spirits as in some way
connected with the subjection of the angels etc. in v22. Kelly acknowledges that this verb *kerussein* normally means "to preach the gospel" in the New Testament, but appeals to the basic meaning "to proclaim" or "to announce" *simpliciter*, and finds instances of this usage in Luke 12:3, Romans 2:21 and Revelation 5:22. The proclamation to the spirits must be construed as Christ's triumphant announcement that their power had finally been broken. The forthcoming subjection of the angels (v22), the epistle's wider purpose of bracing its readers' morale and the parallel being drawn between Christ and Enoch (whose task it had been to pronounce doom to the apostates) all tell against the interpretation that Christ offered salvation to the spirits. Selwyn also notes the neutral meaning of *kerussein* in Revelation 5:2, but argues that Christ's work of redemption achieved in his death still needed to be proclaimed even (*kai*) to the disobedient angels, who could not repent, but could be brought into subjection. The passages he alludes to in the Fourth Gospel (12:13 and 16:11) may indicate that Selwyn thinks the idea of judgement is uppermost in the author's mind. Michaels, following his own understanding of *phulake* as a refuge or haven, refers to a domestication or taming of the spirits whose refuge is no longer inviolate.

Dalton cites the Septuagint version of God's charge to Jonah in Jonah 1:2 to go (*poreuthēt*) and make proclamation (*keruxon*) to Nineveh, the content of which is that Nineveh is to be overthrown (Jonah 3:4). In addition he refers to II Peter 2:5, where Noah is described as a herald of righteousness (*dikaiotēs kerukas*), the term righteousness describing a quality of Noah and not the content of the message which was rather of the impending catastrophe. Dalton comments that there is no evidence which substantiates the theory of a
future restoration for the angels, either in the New Testament (at Ephesians 1:10 and Colossians 1:20) or in II Enoch, which are adduced by Best and mentioned by Reicke to support the theory of angelic restoration. The prevailing thought in the New Testament and Jewish tradition about the fate of the angels insists on their condemnation. For him, the content of ἐκατοκύκλωσεν belongs within the context of Christ's redemptive victory.

The same view of the content of the message was also taken by some commentators, notably orthodox Lutherans at the beginning of the 17th century, who assumed that the spirits were human souls. They were then faced with the same difficulty which had perplexed Augustine, namely the possibility of salvation after death, and an understanding had to be found which did not appear to condone this. Augustine's own interpretation was considered too fanciful, and that of Bellarmine seemed to lend itself to the defence of the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory. There are no modern representatives of this theory.
When did the events of v19 take place?

This question is related to those of the antecedent to ἐν ήδο at the beginning of the verse, the location of the prison, and the connection between this verse and the events described in v22. As the first two issues have already been discussed, the third should be investigated more fully. Kelly, Dalton and Michaels agree that the journey described in v19 πορευθῆς ἐκερουκέν is part of the same journey spoken of in v22 (πορευθῆς εἰς οὐρανόν), which undoubtedly refers to the ascension. The spirits in v19 must be counted amongst the angels, principalities and powers of v22, and the proclamation to them was essentially one of defeat. Thus v19 refers to an activity during the course of the ascension, and therefore positively excludes the thought of a Descensus. Michaels notes that the use of πορευθῆς in v19 is pleonastic, corresponding to the English "go and ...." so that the emphasis is on ἐκερουκέν rather than the journey. This makes it unlikely that a journey separate from that to heaven in v22 is envisaged, much less one in the opposite direction. Dalton's relies heavily on his understanding of ἐν ήδο (a reference to post-resurrection activity depending on ζωοποιεῖθαι de pneumati) and the comparison he makes between the preaching by Christ to the spirits with Enoch's proclamation to the angels in the heavens in II Enoch to defend this view.

Reicke's too refers to his discussions on the meaning of ἐν ήδο and the location of the prison (both of which differ dramatically from those of Kelly, Dalton and Michaels) for the timing of the events in v19, which he states is the interval between Christ's death and resurrection. He disagrees that there is an immediate identification with this journey and the one in v22, objecting that πορευθῆς in v19 would require some appropriate form of qualification if this were to be
the case. Its aorist form indicates momentary action, whereas a present participle would be more appropriate should the meaning be that Christ preached during his ascension. It seems that Reicke is bound by his implicitly positive understanding of the nature of the preaching to the spirits in v19 to dissociate it from the narrative of their subjection in v22. This in fact raises the question as to how the differing fates of the spirits in these two verses can then be reconciled at all, but, as was noted above, Reicke's remarks on the content of the preaching are problematic.

This leads quite naturally to Best's comments on the timing of the action in v19, since he too maintains that the proclamation is essentially a message of hope to the supernatural spirits. He overcomes the difficulty by proposing that a different group of beings, the angelic powers who inhabited the region between earth and heaven, is intended in v22 which does refer to the ascension. This leaves him free to place the events in v19 in the interval between Christ's death and resurrection. He comments that the mention of Christ's victory (v22) would have been unnecessary if they were the same spirits who are already said to be bound (v19). As with Michaels, this reasoning seems to be attributable to an ignorance of the text in Jubilees 10 which recognizes and explains the reason for the continuing influence of the spirits in the lives of men, despite their imprisonment. Although Best notes carefully that the acceptance by the spirits of the offer is not discussed by the author in v19, the criticism levelled at Reicke, that it is difficult to see how the implicitly differing fates of the spirits in vv19 and 22 can be reconciled, may also be applied to his interpretation.
Selwyn too regards the events in v19 as having taken place between the death and resurrection of Christ, again based on his understanding of *en ἥν* and the identification of the prison with Sheol. He considers that v22 refers to the ascension, and that the subjection of the angels which is described there took place during the course of the ascension. In a similar vein to Best, Selwyn appears to detect two realms of spirit powers in these verses, one below and one above. Although an appeal may be made to Hebrews 1 and 2:5-9 to support the notion that the powers in v22 are good and not evil spirits, in the majority of New Testament passages where these terms are found their malign nature is to the fore.

Selwyn further notes that the New Testament books are in disarray over the precise occasion when this subjection took place. Ephesians 1 and Colossians 2 see it as an accomplished fact, Colossians relates it to the cross, I Corinthians 15 regards it as an element in the End of all things. That being the case, it may be unnecessary to postulate two different realms of spirit powers in vv19 and 22 as Selwyn does. A close reading of 1 Peter 3:22 shows that the subjection of the angels is mentioned in the same breath as the resurrection, ascension and heavenly session, but more accurately describes their status in relation to Christ than the event itself. It is equally possible to understand from this verse that the subjection took place as a result of the whole process of resurrection, ascension and session, or that it had already been accomplished before that process began, as it is to understand that it occurred during that process. Either of these alternative interpretations would be consistent with Selwyn’s understanding of v19 as an announcement to the spirits in Sheol. In the case of the former,
the proclamation is of the imminence of their doom or subjection, in that of the latter, it is of the destruction itself.

Those who consider the spirits to be the souls of the departed in Sheol refer to the argument from the later Descensus tradition in placing the events of v19 between Good Friday and Easter Sunday without much further substantiation. They, of course, do not relate these events to those detailed in v22, as the beings there are clearly different.
Summary

This concludes the discussion of the issues raised by v19 itself. The crucial question has been whether I Peter 3:19 speaks of an Ascensus or a Descensus. In view of the variety of opinions which have been witnessed, and the amount of ground which has been covered, a short summary of the findings will be helpful.

(a) The spirits are the fallen angels imprisoned between earth and highest heaven over whom Christ announced victory in the course of his ascension. The main problem with this line, taken by Kelly and Dalton, is that neither scholar has been able to show convincingly that the idea that the angels were bound in the heavens was the dominant view of the location of their prison at the time of the writing of I Peter, and they ignore or rebut inadequately the New Testament evidence from Jude 6, II Peter 2:4 and Revelation 20:1-7 to the contrary. The premise from which their argument proceeds, that the single word pneumati (v18) is the antecedent to en hō (v19), has been shown to be dubious. Dalton's argumentation is particularly weak in that it relies heavily on II Enoch, the dating of which is sufficiently uncertain to call into question whether it should be cited at all. He even admits that strictly the overthrow of the powers of evil took place at the Passion-resurrection, thus the passage here must be thought of as a later promulgation of that victory*53. It seems that this interpretation should be rejected.

(b) There are two possible strands within this category, which may be broadly defined as the demonological view and the anthropological view. In the latter, the spirits are generally thought to be the souls of the dead in Sheol to whom Christ preached salvation during the triduum mortis. This line has to be regarded as a strong possibility if only
because of its antiquity. The arguments from the later Christian Descensus tradition used by modern scholars in support are not of themselves weak, but are of little help to this particular enquiry. There is no doubt that later Christianity made much of this theme, but the question is whether or not they used this verse as a scriptural basis for it. The theological objection to taking the verse in this way raised by Augustine is not insuperable as some consider the New Testament by no means uniform in its teaching on the scope of salvation. By far the greatest problem with this interpretation is that of taking pneuma to refer to the human soul, which according to normal New Testament usage is wholly unjustified. It may also be asked how well it would accord with the wider context of providing encouragement to Christians under threat of persecution.

This second charge may additionally be brought against the demonological Descensus interpretation which regards the preaching in a positive light. Reicke's thorough treatment of the text has been shown to present problems in reconciling the fate of the angels in v19 with that in v22. Furthermore, his contention that the author's main concern is to depict Christ as an ethical model to be followed by the believers in their attempt to convert their heathen neighbours has been disputed.

In contrast, the demonological Descensus interpretation which sees the proclamation as one of doom to the evil spirits avoids all these difficulties. It seems by far the strongest of all the possible interpretations which have been mentioned in three respects, none of which appears governed by the influence of dogmatic considerations. Firstly, it is internally consistent. Secondly, it harmonizes well with what is known of the general concerns of the epistle. Finally, it
understands the text within the frame of reference provided by other New Testament writings.
Is I Peter 3:19 related to I Peter 4:6?

Before moving on to discuss the significance of the remainder of the passage this last question must be addressed because it has often been argued that definitive support for the anthropological salvation Descensus interpretation of 3:19 is to be found at 4:6. It has been left until now in order to avoid the danger of reading the later verse’s vocabulary back into 3:19. The R. S. V. translates the verse in the following way:

For this is why the gospel was preached even to the dead, that though judged in the flesh like men, they might live in the spirit like God.

Three important differences between these two passages should be noted at the outset. Firstly, the content of the preaching in 4:6 is clearer, it must be a positive message (εὐαγγελίσθη instead of εκαρυσσε). Secondly, the recipients of the message are the dead (nekrois instead of τοις ἐν φυλακῇ πνευμασία) and thirdly, the purpose of the preaching appears to be specified (τίνα κρίθοσιν ἑναν κατὰ ἀνθρώπους σάρκι ζόσι de κατὰ θεον πνευματι). Despite the superficially greater clarity, a variety of interpretations have been put forward, mainly hinging on the identity of the dead.

(a) The gospel was preached by Christ to all the physically dead in Sheol. This is the line taken by Bigg, Best, Cranfield, Reicke and Beare who all also regard 3:19 as a reference to the Descent but are divided about the identity of the spirits in that verse. Here, they are in no doubt that the hearers are the dead in Sheol. They argue that nekrois in this verse must have the same meaning that nekrous has in v5, all the physically dead, and must be taken in the obvious sense of the word, that they were dead at the time when the announcement was
made. Bigg, Beare and Cranfield are agreed that this verse refers to the same event as that in 3:19, where the singling out of the dead of Noah’s generation was intended to illustrate the breadth of the scope of salvation. Here, more generally, it is all the dead. Reicke and Best, who identified the spirits in v19 with the rebellious angels, also believe that this preaching is related to that in 3:19 and probably took place on the same occasion.

There is some disagreement among these commentators about the meaning of the difficult expression krithŏsi ..... zōsi ..... pneumatĭ. Dalton*”* observes that the grammar of the passage requires that the action of the verbs in both the men and the de clauses should follow that of the main verb (eueggelisthe), thus Reicke refers krithŏsi and zōsi to the imminent judgement of the Last Day as in v5. The reference to this judgement taking place “in the flesh” is an allusion to the characteristic belief of Judaism and early Christianity that there would be a general resurrection of the body for the purpose of judgement. Reicke himself acknowledges that this presents a problem in retaining the balance between kata anthrŏpous and kata theon. It implies that kata must have quite different meanings in the two clauses “as being men” in the first, and “in God's likeness” in the second. Best notes that Reicke's interpretation also destroys the contrast of flesh and spirit which is likely to bear the same meaning here as in 3:18. As the whole phrase appears to be perfectly balanced and to be making three specific contrasts between judged/live, flesh/spirit and men/God, it will be preferable to find an interpretation which better retains this balance.

Cranfield, Bigg and Beare propose that krithŏsi here is to be understood as a reference to the judgement of death which had already
occurred. That death was the judgement of God on sin is a commonly held belief in both Testaments (Genesis 2:17, 3:19, Wisdom 2:3ff., Romans 5:12, 6:23). All of these commentators appear to take kata anthropōn in the sense of the fate shared by men, i.e., they had died like all men must, but as Selwyn and Dalton note, this would require the singular kata anthropōn rather than the plural which is found here. Best therefore accepts this interpretation modified by Dalton’s and Selwyn’s proposal that kata anthropōs means "according to men's standards" or "in the eyes of men". He further maintains that this interpretation need not be taken to imply a second chance for the dead (elsewhere in the epistle, men's fates are sealed at death, 1:3ff., 3:10, 4:5, 18, 5:8) which would accord ill with the pervading theme of encouragement to those who are being persecuted to continue in their faith. The point is that the author envisages in those passages an audience which has already heard the gospel, the single event of preaching in 4:6 is an offer of the gospel to those who did not have the opportunity to hear it when alive.

This solution ignores Dalton's argument that the action in the men ..... de clauses should follow that of evangelistē, for it effectively invests krithōsē with a pluperfect sense. It also supposes a difference of meaning between this instance of krinein and that in v5 where it refers to the Last Judgement.

All of the above interpretations, including that of Reicke, assume that the point of v6 is to explain that Christ (or God) can judge the dead (v5) because the gospel has been preached to them. It is difficult to see, if this assumption about the point that the author is making is correct, what relevance this verse has to the preceding verses of the chapter which seem generally to be concerned with the
plight of Christian believers maintaining their faith in the face of pagan jibes. Cranfield and Beare both show an awareness of this difficulty.

(b) The gospel was preached by Christ to the departed just of the Old Testament in Sheol on the occasion of his Descent. Reicke finds an example of this interpretation in the so-called Jeremiah *logion* quoted by Justin who reproaches the Jews for having removed several passages from the Old Testament which point to Christ, including one from the book of Jeremiah which speaks of the Lord remembering his dead and descending to them to preach his glad tidings and to save them. Irenaeus who attributes this *logion* variously to Jeremiah, Isaiah and undetermined sources explicitly refers this to the Descent into Hell. Reicke suggests that if this *logion* is pre-Christian, it has influenced the writer of I Peter (in which case 4:6 originally referred to the Descensus) and if not, then it probably arose out of I Peter 4:6 interpreted as treating of the Descensus. Dalton disagrees that I Peter 4:6 is the text lying behind the Jeremiah *logion* and prefers to think of it as a free development of Matthew 27:51-52 which had been interpolated into the text of Jeremiah well before Justin's Dialogue with Trypho. He notes, however, that this understanding of 4:6 seems to have been the view of Cardinal Bellarmine and of some Catholic scholars since, who find here a repetition of their interpretation of 3:19, again motivated by the theological difficulty of seeing a reference to all the dead. There is no indication in the text of a specific group within the dead.

(c) The gospel was preached on earth by the Apostles to the spiritually dead. It may seem surprising, in the light of his understanding of 3:19, that this is the line taken by Clement of
Alexandria and shared by Cyril of Alexandria, Augustine, Bede, Erasmus and Luther. In the modern era it has been expressed by Bieder. The main objection to it must be that it involves a quite radical shift in the meaning of *nekroi* between vv 5 and 6, unless v5 also refers to the spiritually dead which is unlikely to be the case given that it deals with the Parousia and Final Judgement. Moreover, it fails to account for the aorist form of *euëggelísthē* which expresses a given fact. As Reicke remarks, "The preaching of the Gospel still continues, and there are still spiritually dead, so that if the author had wished to say something about non-Christians in general considered as spiritually dead he ought absolutely to have spoken in the present tense."[329]

(d) Christ was preached to Christians alive on earth who at the time of the epistle's composition are dead. This is the interpretation of Selwyn, Kelly and Dalton, all of whom argue that the use of *euëggelísthē* which is supposed in the first two interpretations is extremely rare in the New Testament. They prefer to take this verb with the personal sense, "Christ was preached", which naturally excludes the notion that he was the preacher. They note that the words *eis touto* point forward to the *hina* clause, whereas *gar* looks back to v5. The *hina* clause retains the grammatical form of a purpose clause, but its first part may be translated by a concessive phrase and the second is to be emphasized.

These scholars are agreed that the thought underlying I Peter 4:5 and 6 is similar to that in I Thessalonians 4:13ff., where Paul is attempting to allay fears about the fate of those Christians who had already died prior to the Parousia. Dalton repeatedly insists in the light of the context, which is of the coming retribution for unbeliving pagans, that the *gar* of 4:6 is much more likely to introduce an
explanation of Christ's condemnation of the unbeliever and vindication of the believing Christian than it is to be an explanation of the grounds on which this judgement is executed. Kelly agrees that the point of the gar is to draw out and underline an aspect of the judgement which will comfort and sustain the Asian Christians, namely that because Christ is a righteous judge their converted brothers who have died have not believed in him in vain.

Having defended his interpretation of eueggelishtē, Dalton goes on to say that the proper time for this preaching is this earthly life and that there is no suggestion in the New Testament of a preaching to souls. It is therefore perfectly plausible that the dead in 4:6 are those who heard the gospel but have since died. He supports this from English usage such as "Pope John XXIII was born ..... in a village near Bergamo", where the sense clearly indicates that the subject was not Pope at the time of his birth. The remainder of the verse stresses the idea that for these dead Christians, the preaching of the gospel had not been in vain. Although they had died and thus in the eyes of men (kata anthrōpous) appeared to have been judged by God they are able to reach true life, life in the spirit, life in the eyes of God.

Dalton accepts that the meaning of krinein cannot be the same in vv 5 and 6, and points to Reicke's overall failure to interpret the rest of the verse when trying to show that it is. He also rebuts the view held by Selwyn that krithōsi refers to the trials, persecutions and in particular deaths of the Christians at the hands of their opponents, the verb is aorist in form and so indicates a definite and not continuous experience. The thought of the verse is perfectly paralleled in Wisdom 3:4, which similarly deals with the vindication of the
righteous by God in spite of appearances to the contrary kata anthrôpous (i.e. en opsei anthrôpôn). Thus it may be paraphrased:

For this is why he (Christ) was preached also to those who are now dead, that though judged in the flesh in the eyes of men they might live in the spirit in the eyes of God.

This interpretation respects the chronological order of euëggelisthê ..... krithôsi ..... zôsi and probably better demonstrates than the alternatives that v6 is an integral part of the chapter and not some kind of afterthought or digression.

The chief argument against it is that there is some shift in meaning implied between the dead of v5 and those of v6, and that if the Christian dead are meant in v6, why is the author not more explicit as Paul is in I Thessalonians by writing of "the dead in Christ" or of "those who have fallen asleep"? Kelly and Dalton go some way to overcoming the first part of the objection by pointing out that the phrase "living and dead" was a standard formula used by New Testament writers when addressing the matter of the Last Judgement and simply picked up by the writer of I Peter, though his main emphasis is not the all embracing scope of the judgement, but that the appropriate vindication or punishment will be meted out within it. As to the second point, Dalton concedes that the writer may have expressed himself more clearly had he used koimômenoi or koimîthentes instead of nekroi, however, the context with its pervading concern for the believer under persecution is against taking such a narrow meaning of nekroi in 4:6.

(e) The gospel was preached to Christians on earth who have since died. This is the interpretation preferred by Michaels who construes euëggelisthê impersonally. He takes up the thought from v5 that the
coming judgement will be universal and especially universal in time, the
phrase ζωντας και νεκρούς referring to each person who has ever lived,
from the creation of the world until the Day of Judgement. The dead
are included in the judgement along with the living because they too
have heard the gospel. He accepts that the dead are the Christian
dead, but states that Dalton’s argument only needs to be refined and
broadened. Its main weakness is the unnecessary limitation of the dead
to Christians who died subsequent to Jesus’ death and resurrection.
Because the one community of faith spans all ages, the righteous of
Israel’s past are freely regarded as Christians before the coming of
Christ.

Michaels contends that I Peter does not reflect the anxiety so
marked in I Thessalonians about the fate of the loved ones who had
died. The writer’s main concern is to make the experience of the just
of the Old Testament a prototype and illustration of the experience of
his readers. The idea is that some of the dead had heard the Christian
gospel in their lifetime with much the same results as this had for the
Christians in Asia Minor. The gospel was preached in order that people
might be saved (cf. 1:12, 25), this is specified in 4:6 as life with God
triumphing over human disapproval and condemnation (cf. 2:4). Michaels
adds that to make this case it was not essential for the author to
demonstrate that all the dead had heard the gospel, only that some had.
He is probably thinking of the heroes and heroines of faith (Hebrews
11) of obedience, faith and hospitality (I Clement 9-12) and of
humility (I Clement 16-18). The point is that the conflict in which
the readers of I Peter find themselves is not a new one and its
outcome, vindication for the righteous, is always the same, the pattern
through history should be the grounds for encouragement and confidence.
Clearly this interpretation reads a considerable amount into the text as Michaels himself is forced to concede. He fails to substantiate fully his claim that "Christians" in this epistle do not belong to any one period in history. Moreover, his idea that the righteous dead of the Old Testament are cited to encourage the readers would carry more weight if the writer stated that they had already been vindicated, yet Michaels clearly considers that the phrase σαρκι
..... pneumati refers to future vindication. Although he states that he favours Dalton's interpretation, he is not really able to defend his own theory without clinging to elements from the interpretation dismissed by Dalton that the preaching forms the basis of judgement. In fact, what Michaels presents is a synthesis of interpretations (b) and (d). It raises more problems than it solves and should therefore be rejected.

This concludes the survey of the interpretations of I Peter 4:6. None is entirely satisfactory, but the least problematical are the first, (a) and the fourth, (d). Interpretation (a) certainly supports the anthropological Descensus understanding of I Peter 3:19, though it does not specifically exclude the demonological understanding which has been argued for\(^5^4\). The main difficulty it presents is that of seeing what relevance an explanation of the basis on which Christ can judge the dead has in a context that appears to be concerned with Christian believers maintaining their faith in the face of pagan jibes. In contrast, interpretation (d), which sees no reference to the Descent whatsoever and assumes that the purpose of the verse is to comfort the Asian Christians with the assurance that the faith of their fellow believers who have died was not in vain, accords well with the wider
context. The extent to which this is the case will become clearer in the next chapter when the opening verses of I Peter 4 have been discussed more fully and the function of the whole passage within the epistle has been explored.
Notes to Chapter 6
Bieder identifies the following as potentially treating of the Descent: Mark 3:27, 16:4, Matthew 12:40, 16:18, 27:51b-53, Luke 23:42, Acts 2:24-31, Romans 6:3ff., 10:7, 14:9, Colossians 2:14ff., Philippians 2:10, Ephesians 4:8-10 and Revelation 1:18. CV. Bieder, Die Vorstellung von der Höllefahrt Jesu Christi (Zürich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1949.) His comments on I Peter 3:18-22 are to be found on pp.96-129. Regrettably, a fuller discussion of these passages is not possible here, however, the text from Ephesians has been mentioned in passing with reference to the opening stanzas of Ode 22.


B. Reicke, The Disobedient Spirits and Christian Baptism: A Study of I Peter 3:19 and its Context (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1946). Because of the scope of their work, the appropriate page references will be given at all the relevant points whenever Reicke’s and Dalton’s views are expressed. A more general note will be adequate for other commentators, and will only be given at the first reference in the text to their opinions.

The earliest type of comment made on these verses saw them as a reference to Christ’s preaching the gospel to the souls of the dead of Noah’s generation in Sheol, thereby raising the thorny theological problem of the possibility of repentance or conversion after death. Despite his awareness of the dangers of dogmatic prejudice in this area, Dalton seems to succumb to them with his immediate and repeated insistence that there are no New Testament grounds to support the doctrine of wider hope.

These theories are discussed briefly by Cranfield. [C. E. B. Cranfield, “The Interpretation of I Peter 3:19 and 4:6,” R.T., LXIX (1957/8), pp.369-72.]

The debate concerning the date of the epistle’s composition and the historical circumstances surrounding it cannot be entered into here. It is sufficient to note that whether persecution was present or imminent, encouragement would be needed for the Christian community to stand fast in its faith. The question of whether part of the epistle was once a baptismal sermon which has been adapted by the writer to the context of persecution will be returned to in the following chapter.

The other questions which are raised by the passage will be discussed in the next chapter.

For example, Dalton (op. cit., pp.119-21) and Beare. [F. W. Beare, The First Epistle of Peter (Oxford: Blackwell and Mott Ltd., 1958), ad loc.]

This is especially noticeable in the Lukan writings (Luke 22:15, 24:26, 46, Acts 1:3, 3:18, 17:3) and the epistle to the Hebrews (2:18, 9:26, 13:12).
This seems to be the case, since Christ's death is described in v18 by three separate words or phrases which qualify its nature, hapax, peri hamartion and dikaios huper adikon. Its purpose is stated (hina humas prosagage τo theo), as is the triumph which follows it (zoopoiethiais de pneumati). However, Reicke (pp.126-31 and 213ff.), followed by Bieder, is convinced that the idea of depicting Christ as a pattern for the Christian community to imitate is to the fore in the writer's mind. He rightly insists that the function of 3:18-22 is to explain the whole of the preceding passage (vv13-17), but incorrectly assumes that the stress there is on the Christians' attempt to convert their pagan neighbours. What seems much more likely is that the point of 3:18-22 is to detail the theological basis found in Christ's death and resurrection for Christian suffering and its victory over the pagan world. As Dalton notes (op. cit., pp.103-15), the author thinks more of Christ's death and resurrection as an exemplar, a pattern of existence in which the believer participates, than an example. This matter will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter.

Kelly observes that this would necessitate taking zoopoietheis de pneumati as an equivalent of being kept alive in the soul, or implying that Christ's soul perished and was later revived. Beare agrees that the latter thought is impossible. Curiously, Reicke devotes little attention to this phrase, only discussing it in passing. His comments are highly ambiguous but tend towards taking pneumati to refer to Christ's soul. He acknowledges that sarki and pneumati are datives of reference, and that thereby ".... a more limited sphere is indicated, one in which a judgement regarding a certain quality or a certain condition shall be considered to apply ...." (p.105). He also states that the words zoopoietheis de pneumati speak of ".... Christ as at least to some extent risen from the dead." (p.54). Yet elsewhere he maintains that pneumati in v18 ".... has the character of something higher, divine, and here should actually indicate Christ's existential sphere, His life element after the Resurrection ...." (p.60) and is ".... a person's vital principle after the destruction of his body ...." (p.99). He argues that the phrase zoopoietheis de pneumati does not imply that the spirit passes from death to life (pace Kelly and Beare), ".... but only that it becomes the bearer of the new Life which follows upon the humiliation of the body." (p.106).

This is quoted by Selwyn, op. cit., p.197.


J. R. Harris, "A Further Note on the Use of Enoch in I Peter," The Expositor, ser. 6, IV (1901), pp.346-9 and "On a Recent Emendation

(18) This assertion does not deny the possibility that Christ may be depicted in these verses as the new Enoch.


(23) Dalton, op. cit., p.140. These ancient commentators also took tois en phulakē pneumasin (v19) to refer to human souls. Kelly and Dalton appear to have no difficulty in dismissing the ancients' interpretation in that debate. They argue in a similar fashion to Selwyn on this issue that there are no examples in the New Testament of pneumata being used absolutely with this sense.

(24) Beare, in contrast, is adamant that the single word pneumati, without the participle, is the antecedent to en hō. He is convinced that the activity in v19 took place in the interval between Christ's death and resurrection.

(25) It has already been seen that Reicke (op. cit., pp.107-8) regards this as incorrect. The threefold stress on the nature of Christ's death in v18a suggests that it is on this, and not the resurrection, that the interest directly lies.

Both Kelly and Dalton argue that the kai at the beginning of v19 indicates that this is Christ's second activity in the sphere of the spirit, the first having been his resurrection which brings people to God. Yet as Kelly himself remarks, this bringing to God means a restoration of mankind's right relationship with God which has been interrupted by sin. Having described Christ's death as being "for sins", it appears likely that in the author's mind it is not primarily the resurrection which achieves this. This calls into question whether Dalton is right to so insist at this point on the emphasis in the men .... de construction being with the second member, and reaffirms Reicke's view that both parts of this construction are a parenthetical explanation (based on well known Christological formulae) of the main action in the verse. Dalton notes that the N. E. B. translators overcome this difficulty by placing the men .... de construction at the beginning of a new paragraph. In order to do this, the grammatical dependence of thanatotheis and zōopoietheis on prosagage must be violated and the participles must be taken as finite verbs.

(26) Letters CLXIV.

(27) Summa Theologica III 52.

(29) De Principiis II 5 and Contra Celsum II 43.

(30) Easter Homily.

(31) The relevant terms tois pneumasin and en phulakē are rendered by lnpsēt) and bēywl respectively.


(35) The Greek word is desmoterion and not phulakē.

(36) Dalton's comments (op. cit., pp.145-9, 157-9 and 177-83) are sufficiently close to those of Kelly to require no further elaboration.


(38) Ibid., pp.118-36.

(39) Bieder is in agreement with Reicke that the function of this passage is to depict Christ as a moral example to be followed by the suffering Christians. The word kai which occurs at the beginning of v19 indicates neither another recipient of Christ's message, nor another activity of Christ, but, as in v18, a connecting moment between Christ and the community. He states that according to New Testament usage the verb kerussein always stands in a positive relationship to the gospel or kingdom of God, and that this is the meaning here. He argues that the author's main concern is not with the content of the preaching, but the act of proclamation itself. However, it seems that unlike Reicke he implicitly takes this to be a negative message to the evil spirits, since he suggests that the triumphant announcement is one of victory over all the dark powers achieved through the cross and resurrection.

(40) Augustine clearly accepts Christ's Descensus as a matter of faith, citing Psalm 16:10 and Acts 2:24 and 27 as biblical testimony to it in his response to Evodius' enquiry, but he is unwilling to see it in I Peter 3:19ff. He evidently considers the view that all the dead were liberated by Christ at his Descent to be heretical (De Haeresibus, 79). Likewise, Luther and Calvin in their commentaries on the Catholic Epistles are emphatic that scriptural teaching is against the hope that those who during their lifetime had never come to faith in Christ (not even the faith which the righteous of the Old Testament might be said to have had) could be saved after their death. Both present more or less allegorical interpretations, as Augustine does.

Luther, who closely resembles Augustine in the hesitancy with which he writes on this text, suggests that the author offers an
ex parte totum argument in which the souls who were disobedient in the days of Noah represent all like them in this life who do not believe. Whenever a preacher physically proclaims the word of God to the ears of men who are in the captivity of the prison of the devil, as Christ commanded him, the risen Christ himself comes and is spiritually present addressing their hearts.

Calvin, in contrast, thinks of the passage as a preaching by the risen Christ through the Holy Spirit to the souls of the righteous of the Old Testament. He understands the term phulakē to signify not a prison but a watchtower or the act of watching. As a less likely alternative he proposes that it may be the Law, which according to Paul was a metaphorical prison in which they were bound.

Both Luther and Calvin appear to favour an understanding of the antecedent to en hō which has already been questioned, and like Augustine construe the passage in a spiritualized way for which the context gives no support. They also take the term pneumata to refer to human souls, which seems unsafe. A further specific criticism of Calvin's interpretation is that it breaks down at v20, since his attempt to avoid taking apeithēsasin to refer to the spirits of the previous verse is unconvincing. Against Luther, it may be directly objected that he ignores the aorist forms of the verbs poreutheis and ekeruxen.

(41) Reicke alleges that this understanding of I Peter 3:19 is implied in Hippolytus' comments (Reicke, op. cit., pp.23-7) and in the Peshitta and Vulgate translations (Reicke, op. cit., pp.34-7). Dalton thinks that Hippolytus and the Syriac are more likely to be in line with the Alexandrian school, and that the Latin will only permit it if prius is read for aliquando in 3:20 (Dalton, op. cit., pp.16-20 and 24-31).


(44) Ibid., pp.184-6.


(47) It is argued by scholars who take this line that the Christian community might gain solace from the knowledge of the breadth and scope of salvation which the passage reveals. However, the overriding concern of the epistle is not with salvation, but obedience to the Christian way of life in the face of adversity. Since the spirits are explicitly said to have been disobedient, the possibility of reconciliation for them would run directly counter to the author's purpose. Many commentators have persisted with this interpretation despite showing an awareness of this weakness.


(51) Justin, Dialogue with Trypho LXXII.


(54) Given that it has been suggested that the proclamation to the evil spirits in 3:19 is one of doom, and assuming, if interpretation (a) be adopted, that the alleged preaching of hope to the dead in 4:6 took place on the same occasion, perhaps these two incidents in 1 Peter may be thought of as a replication in Hell of Jesus' announcement of blessings immediately followed by woes found in Luke 6:20-6.
Chapter 7: I Peter 3:21ff.
Having established that there is a reference to the Descent in I Peter 3:18-22, it is now appropriate to consider the manner in which the author of the epistle relates this theme to Christian baptism. That a connection exists between these two ideas is undeniable, for mention of the sacrament is made explicitly in v21, but its precise nature remains to be determined. The chief concern of this chapter will therefore be to ask how baptism is characterized in the passage, and then to look in greater depth at the question which has already been raised of the function of these verses within the wider context. Once these tasks have been accomplished, it will be apparent that far from being an intrusion into the author’s main theme of encouragement to the community of faith, as has often been alleged, the passage represents the climax of his argument and as such forms an integral and crucial part of the letter.

It is clear that the explicit mention of baptism found in v21 is anticipated in v20. The importance of Noah and the Flood in Jewish theology and philosophy of history has been discussed by Selwyn. He notes that the Flood was at once conceived of as an act of divine judgement in which the wicked were punished, and of divine mercy in which Noah, who came to be seen as a representative righteous man, was saved. Aside from this text in I Peter, other New Testament passages in which the story occurs reflect the dualism marked in Jewish tradition. From this position of prominence, the story of Noah and the Flood readily assumed an important place in early Christianity. It was still further developed by the Fathers, who pointed to the correspondence with baptism, stressing whichever facet of it was most congenial to their own main purpose.
Most commentators have suggested that the dominant thought of I Peter 3:20 is to comfort the Asian Christians by drawing out the comparison between themselves as a tiny minority and the few of Noah's company who were saved. The further qualification that the few were eight in number may simply depend on the Genesis narrative which identifies them as Noah, his wife, their three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth and their wives (Genesis 7:13)\(^5\), but some have suggested in view of the baptismal context that there is a further significance to the specific mention of the eight. Kelly\(^6\) remarks that for Christians this number designated the eighth day, the day on which Christ rose from the dead and on which the believer entered the Church by baptism, the rite customarily being administered early on Easter Day, hence the octagonal shape of ancient baptisteries. Reicke\(^7\) too sees many possible symbolic connections, stating that the eight souls may be intended to designate completeness since in gnostic speculation the Ogdoad, or eighth house, was thought of as the highest heavenly stage.

Before leaving v20, it must be noted that the meaning of the preposition dia in the expression diesōthesan di' hudatos has been much debated. The question which is asked is whether it is used with a local or instrumental sense. Bigg\(^8\) and Reicke have argued that the local sense must be primary, so that the thought is that Noah and his family escaped through the water and not that they were saved by it. They contend that this understanding is required by the presence of the compound verb diasōzein which means "to bring safely through". Reicke states that although this verb is sometimes used in the Septuagint and New Testament as a simple equivalent of σωζειν, the dia prefix cannot be so meaningless that it could be immediately followed by the
preposition *dia* with an instrumental sense. Bigg further suggests that the local meaning is demanded by the words *eis hēn*, referring to the ark, where the preposition *eis* must mean "into" and not "in", and by the fact that the very purpose of the ark was to save Noah from the water. He proposes that the idea is that Noah and his family escaped through the water, which already surrounded them as they fled into the ark. Reicke, however, rejects this view which seems to have originated with the *midrash* on Genesis 7:7 that Noah hesitated until the water rose to his knees and so had to wade through it to get to the ark. He says simply that *dia* indicates a passage through the element water.

In fact, although Reicke and Bigg protest that the local sense of *dia* is primary in I Peter 3:20, both implicitly acknowledge that there is a shift from a local to an instrumental consideration, seeing that the allusion is to a passing which is a necessary condition for salvation. Thus a more explicit view, that the preposition is deliberately used with both its local and instrumental sense in mind, is expressed by Kelly, Beare, Dalton, Selwyn and Cranfield. They maintain that the instrumental sense is possible if it is assumed that the water buoyed up the ark, carrying it to safety. Against Bigg, they argue that here Noah and his family enter the ark and are saved within it not from the waters, but from God's judgement (Kelly) or the scene of human iniquity (Dalton), their dangerous environment of disobedience (Reicke). There is no trace of interest in the text on the destruction of the rest of mankind by the waters, for the concentration is rather on the few who were saved. As Kelly observes, it was no doubt paradoxical that the water which drowned Noah's contemporaries should have preserved Noah himself, but if anything the early Church delighted in such paradoxes. Dalton
further insists that it is really a fear of "magic sacramentalism" which leads to an exclusion of the instrumental sense of the preposition dia, since this fear cannot tolerate the notion that either Noah or the Christians should be saved by means of water. He adds that given a sound sacramental theology, there is no contradiction between being saved by means of water and being saved through the power of the resurrection. His comments seem justified.

Moving now to the first part of v21, the text as it stands appears to contain either too many words or too few. The former case is apparent in the version read by Codex Sinaiticus and p7, which omit the relative pronoun from the beginning of the verse altogether; the latter in the attempts which have been made by some scholars to adjust the punctuation between this and the preceding verse. There are two main areas of difficulty. The first concerns the relative pronoun ho at the beginning of the verse and the determination of its antecedent; the second, the meaning of the word antitupon and its syntactical function within the verse.

It is probably best to begin by asking in general terms what the meaning of the word antitupon is. The commentators generally consent that this word and the related tupos are used to draw out a point of correspondence between one thing and another, and that in the early Church the typological form of argument in which the people and events of the Old Testament were regarded as foreshadowing those of the New was very much in vogue. Selwyn states that this "type theology" goes back in principle to such verba Christi as Luke 11:29-32, 17:26-9, 32, Matthew 11:14, 17:12. But Kelly remarks that there is plenty of precedent for it within the Old Testament itself and in later Judaism, since it is based on the conviction that one and the same God is at
work in history, bringing his same purpose to ever fuller realization
in the succession of people and events.

There is some disagreement among the scholars as to whether the
antitupos is to be thought of in a superior or inferior light to the
tupos. Bernard, followed by Reicke, is adamant that the antitupos
is the lesser of the two, and points out that originally the tupos was
the die whereas the antitupos is the stamp of the die to which it
corresponds. In their opinion, the only other New Testament usage of
the word antitupos besides this one in I Peter firmly supports this
understanding. At Hebrews 9:24, antitupa is used to describe the
earthly sanctuary as a (mere) copy of the heavenly one, made without
hands, into which Christ has entered. They find further weight for
their view in II Clement 14:3 from the phrase ἄντιτυπος εστιν τοῦ
πνεύματος, which indicates that the antitupos is
the material, temporary manifestation, an imperfect and blurred
transcript of the original.

In contrast, Beare, Selwyn, Kelly, Cranfield and Dalton prefer
to regard the antitupos as the nobler party in a comparison. They note
the usage of tupos with a superior sense in Acts 7:44 and Hebrews 8:5
(which refer to Exodus 25:40), where it is the perfect archetype or
model of which the earthly representations are imperfect replicas, but
point to other passages in which the tupos is definitely the secondary
element. In Romans 5:14, for example, Adam is described as tupos tou
mellontos, and a similar application of the term to Moses is found in I
Corinthians 10:6 and 11. This usage of tupos with a secondary sense is
found in Philo’s works and became dominant in the Fathers when the
fashion for typological reasoning reached its zenith, as shown in the
writings of Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus and Origen. Moreover,
Dalton maintains that the force of the argument from the usage of *tupos* and *antitupos* in Hebrews is diminished when it is realized that there, the background to the author's thought is the Platonic one of heavenly realities, of which there is no hint in I Peter. Both Selwyn and Dalton recognize that the New Testament usage of *tupos* is equivocal, and that *antitupos* is really a neutral word which simply means "corresponding to". Thus it may either depreciate or extol something relative to that with which it is being compared. They suggest that its meaning can only really be determined by the context in which it occurs, but are in no doubt that in I Peter the meaning is "extol relatively".

Unfortunately, the grammatical difficulties which are presented by v21a suggest that the debate concerning the meaning of the term *antitupon* cannot be so readily terminated. It is uncertain whether this word is to be construed as an adjective or substantive, and either way additional subsidiary problems are raised. Admittedly, the variant preserved by Codex Sinaiticus and p72, which omits the relative pronoun from the beginning of the verse altogether, relieves the difficulties. In this case, *antitupon* may be understood either adjectivally or as an appositional substantive, and the general sense that is yielded is clear. However, the manuscript authority for this reading is poorly attested, since apart from Codex Sinaiticus and a number of inferior cursives, all the remaining uncials and many good cursives include the relative. The very fact that the sense becomes so clear when the pronoun is omitted makes it impossible to see, if it were the original reading, how it ever came to be altered.

These same criticisms may also be levelled at the reading proposed by Erasmus and adopted latterly by Hort, Bernard and Beare. According to Hort, the word order in the verse leaves it impossible to
construe the nominative singular neuter form of the relative, *ho*, in any reasonable sense. It should therefore be seen as a primitive error for the dative form *hō*, the interchange of letters being easily made by both sight and sound, and the deviation from the expected word order being justified by the fact that the stress lies on *kai humas*. In this case, the dative goes naturally with *antitupon*, a noun, and its antecedent is either *hudatos* or, as Beare maintains, the whole phrase *diesōthēsan di' hudatos* in v20.

A third, intriguing alternative is proposed by Bernard, who argues that the antecedent to *hō* is to be found in v19. He suggests that the true import of v21 is that Christian baptism is the *mimesis* or inferior imitation of the greater reality of Christ's Descent. With this construction, Bernard succeeds in establishing a very close relationship in I Peter 3:18-22 between Descent and baptism, but more importantly unearths a remarkable item of New Testament support for the interpretation of the Odist's treatment of these two themes which has already been suggested. Since the significance of his findings to this study of the Odes is clear, it is appropriate to consider his overall argument and to see whether his interpretation can be sustained.

Bernard anticipates the objection on textual grounds to his reading of the dative form of the relative, stating that even if the nominative be read with the majority of manuscripts, the sentence is clumsy but remains intelligible. The antecedent to the relative is still Christ's Descent, *antitupon* must be an adjective to be construed adverbially and the noun *baptisma* is appositional. He pursues the line that the term *antitupon* always signifies the lesser element in a comparison. Thus the antecedent to the relative cannot be the word
hudatos in v20, for Christian baptism cannot be thought of in an inferior light to the water of the Flood. In addition, Bernard insists that there is a further reason why the true antecedent to the relative must be found elsewhere, even if antitupon is to be understood as the nobler party. Taking hudatos as the antecedent, the text is made to say that baptism tout simple is comparable with water. While the water of baptism might be comparable to the water of the Flood, no one would ever wish to state that of the rite itself. Baptism, he remarks, is an act or process, and cannot be compared simply to a material element such as water.

Hitherto, what may be deemed the negative aspects of Bernard's argument have been identified, that is to say the reasons why the antecedent to the relative cannot be hudatos. Yet he also provides a great deal of evidence which in his opinion suggests that the antecedent lies in v19. Bernard clearly believes that tois en phulakē pneumasin are human souls imprisoned in Sheol, but the development of his argument far exceeds this premise which has already been shown to be dubious. He maintains that Christ not only preaches to the dead, but, having been quickened in the spirit (v18), himself becomes a quickening spirit, and delivers them from the infernal forces who are at the same time defeated. The point of the whole passage is to demonstrate that just as the power of Christ's spirit was effective in his ministry to the dead, so it saves the living in baptism.

Although Bernard's understanding of this passage is ingenious, and would certainly furnish New Testament support for the interpretation of the Odes which has been put forward, it seems it must be rejected. The negative grounds for refusing to take hudatos in v20 as the antecedent to the relative can scarcely be sustained. It has been shown that the
term antitupon is really a neutral word, which calls into question whether he is correct in insisting that it is always used to denote the lesser element in a comparison. Furthermore, his contention that construing the text in this way necessarily implies that the sacrament itself is comparable with the Flood water appears excessively literalistic. Bernard himself recognizes that the water of baptism may be comparable to the water of the Flood, and it seems legitimate to infer that this is the gist of v21, even if the word water before baptism is missing. It is difficult to escape from noticing that the real force of his argument for taking v19 as the antecedent to the relative in v21 is based on an interpretation of v19 for which the text itself provides no justification. Bernard begins his remarks on 1 Peter 3:18-22 with a review of early Christian writings in which the themes of baptism and Christ's Descent were dwelt on and came to be seen as closely related, and he uses these to defend his interpretation of v19. Yet the verbs ekeruxen and poreutheis give little indication of the Helenensturmung which was to become such a feature of the later Descensus tradition, the whole of which Bernard seems to read back into the text.

Aside from this interpretation proposed by Bernard, and the objections which have been raised on the grounds of attestation and the accepted rules of textual criticism, it must be asked whether Hort is indeed correct in his assertion that it is impossible to construe the nominative form of the relative at the beginning of v21 in any reasonable sense. There have been many attempts to do so:

(a) Brooks\(^{115}\) has argued that one way of retaining the nominative form of the relative, and easing the problems presented thereby, is to adjust the punctuation between vv20 and 21. Generally, a full stop is
placed at the end of v20, and vv21 and 22 are grouped together to form the next sentence. If though, the end of the sentence in v20 were extended to include the word antitupon in v21, all difficulties could be overcome, and a smooth translation would result:

.... a few, that is, eight people were saved through water which even in reference to you (is) a pattern. Baptism now saves, not as ....

Brooks' translation suggests that the antecedent to the relative must be the phrase diesōthēsan di' hudatos, and by construing the text in this way no objections may be raised on the grounds of the word order. Against him it may be argued that the expression ho kai humas antitupon is extremely elliptical if this is its meaning. Brooks is forced to supply a verb, which may not be seen as an insuperable difficulty, but it does seem that the absence of a preposition before the pronoun humas, and the accusative form of the pronoun, render his construction improbable.

(b) Ignoring Hort's caution on the grounds of word order, Dalton, Kelly and Bigg propose that antitupon be taken with ho as a predicative adjective having the force of an adverb, while the noun baptisma is appositional. All are convinced that the term antitupon is used to denote the superior party in the comparison. Bigg notes that the antecedent to the relative may be either hudatos or the whole phrase diesōthēsan di' hudatos, but Kelly and Dalton are convinced that it is hudatos alone. It will be remembered that this type of interpretation was criticized by Bernard since it seemed to imply that the rite of baptism was simply being compared to the Flood water. Both Kelly and Dalton clearly suggest that the real comparison is between the element of water common to the two events. The point is brought out explicitly
in the N. E. B. translation which embodies this construction of the 
verse, and includes the word water before baptism:

This water prefigured the water of baptism through 
which you are now brought to safety.

Bigg comments that the grammatical difficulties may be accounted for 
by the fact that although the writer is first struck by the thought 
that Christian baptism is in some sense analogous to the Flood, this 
comparison does not exhaust the significance of the sacrament, which 
the rest of v21 goes on to bring out. Reicke protests that the lack of 
an article before the noun baptisma tells against this understanding of 
the verse.

(c) As in Hebrews 9:24, where the only other occurrence in the New 
Testament of the term is found, antitupon in I Peter 3:21 may be a 
substantive. The appositional construction can be paralleled in 
Hebrews 10:20, and again the antecedent to the relative may be hudatos 
or the phrase diesothesan di' hudatos. In support of this 
interpretation, Selwyn comments that antitupon was a substantive which 
by its very connotation lent itself readily to appositional 
construction. However, he ultimately rejects it, arguing that the double 
apposition of the two substantives antitupon and baptisma to the 
relative pronoun is exceedingly clumsy Greek, and quite unlike the style 
of the epistle's author. With Hort, it may also be argued that the word 
order militates against this construction.

(d) Reicke goes to great lengths to defend his understanding of the 
text. Like Bernard, he is clearly motivated by the twin beliefs 
that the term antitupon in v21 must denote something secondary in 
relation to the original, and that the antecedent to the relative cannot 
be hudatos in v20 since what saves Christians is an action and not an
element. He translates v21a "which 'antitypical' baptism now saves you", maintaining that baptisma is an apposition to the previous sentence drawn into the relative clause, and antitupon is an adjectival attribute to baptisma. Thus grammatically he regards baptisma as the antecedent to the relative. In this case, antitupon retains the sense it has in Hebrews 9:24 and II Clement 14:3, for the term baptisma should not only be understood as concerning Christian baptism, but that Noah too underwent a form of baptism which was antypical. Like all related to the Law, it was a figure of what was to come.

Reicke addresses the question of the word order by suggesting that the placement of the noun baptisma at the end of the clause is due to the emphasis it has. He contends that with such cases generally in the New Testament, where a noun serves as the antecedent and is drawn into the relative clause, the noun is not placed directly after the relative. There are, however, other objections to his construction of the verse. Dalton\(^{21}\) states that though grammatically possible, it is unnecessarily complex and really arises (as does that of Bernard) from Reicke's refusal to accept that the antecedent to the relative in v21 is the word hudatos in v20. In Dalton's view, the premise from which Reicke's argument proceeds, that what saves Christians is an action and not an element, is unconvincing. Dalton insists that there is no contradiction implied in acknowledging that at I Peter 3:21 two different aspects of baptism are mentioned, both water and eperōtēma, and that these are complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

(e) Selwyn is certain that the antecedent to the relative ho in v21 is the word hudatos in v20, and that the neutral word antitupon is used here to connote fulfillment of its Old Testament type. Like Dalton, Kelly and Bigg he proposes that the noun baptisma is appositional, but
in contrast to them argues that antitupon is to be understood as a substantive in apposition to the pronoun humas. He offers the following translation:

And water now saves you too, who are the antitype of Noah and his company, namely the water of baptism ....(22)

The main point of antitupon is not to compare the water of baptism in a favourable light to the Flood water, but to draw out the similarity between Noah's company and the Christians of Asia Minor. Selwyn defends the singular form of antitupon by comparing the usage of the singular number in Philippians 3:17, I Thessalonians 1:7 and II Thessalonians 3:9, and attributing it to the author's view of the Christians as a community. He finds further support in the comments by Cyprian and Justin on this text which stress the personal element.

Selwyn's interpretation, followed by Cranfield, has much to commend it. The nominative form of the relative is retained in line with the majority of manuscript evidence and a straightforward, unforced sense results. There are no difficulties with the word order, and in Selwyn's opinion the natural rhythm of the Greek is respected. Dalton's exception, that the primary point of contact between the Flood and baptism is the element water rather than the people concerned, must be discounted. Firstly, because Selwyn's interpretation does not deny the importance of the water, and secondly because Dalton himself overlooks the fact that the people are emphasized, as has already been noted in the discussion of v20.

It seems then that Hort's contention cannot be sustained, and that it is possible to construe the nominative form of the relative at the beginning of v21 in a reasonable sense. Most commentators are agreed, regardless of how they understand ho kai humas antitupon nun sōzei
baptisma, that these words are to be taken with di' anastaseōs Iēsou Christou at the end of the verse. But before the mention of the resurrection, the author gives two important insights into his understanding of baptism.

In the first he draws out a negative aspect, asserting that the rite is not sarkos apothesis rhupou. Here, the term sárk appears to be used in the literal physical sense (cf. v18), thus some have reckoned that the phrase is intended to show that baptism is superior and more valuable than a merely physical cleansing. Selwyn takes sarkos as an objective genitive governed by apothesis rhupou, and understands the whole expression as a periphrasis for washing or cleansing, probably suggested by the fact that apotithētai was a key word in the primitive Christian catechism. But Reicke finds this an unsatisfactory explanation for the inclusion of the remark, arguing that it would simply be a truism. He insists that it would have been quite obvious to the epistle's readers, no matter how new they were to Christianity, that the effects of baptism belong within the realms of the spiritual and not the physical. Furthermore, these negative comments about physical uncleanness form the first part of an ou ... alla construction in which ou is not simply the equivalent of ou monon, but implies an absolute denial.

Reicke adds that the purpose of the phrase is not to enhance an inadequate estimation of the sacrament's power, but to correct an erroneous baptismal theory. He therefore regards it as a polemic against Judaism with its zeal for ceremonial cleansing and possibly also against pagan lustration rites, namely ritual purifications with physical or material blamelessness as their aim. Beare is in substantial agreement that this expression is intended to contrast the
Christian rite with Jewish ritual ablutions and the washings which preceded initiation into the pagan mysteries. He suggests that there is a close parallel in Hebrews 10:22, though Reicke denies this, arguing that in I Peter baptism is said not to imply a physical purification, whereas the writer to the Hebrews unreservedly assumes that it is.

Bernard too is convinced that the phrase ou sarkos apothesis rhupou would be otiose and irrelevant were it simply intended to deny that baptism is a bodily cleansing. Led by his belief that Christian baptism is antitypical to Christ’s Descent, he maintains that here a contrast is drawn between Christ who put off his body in the journey to Hades, and the catechumen for whom there is no apothesis of the earthly tabernacle (see II Peter 1:14) as he goes down into the baptismal waters. Apart from the objection to his understanding of the term antitypon, Bernard clearly considers that it is Christ’s disembodied soul which descends to Hell. This understanding of pneumati in v18 has been firmly rejected.

Dalton and Kelly seek to take Reicke’s argument a stage further, contending that there is no thought at all of washing in the text. Kelly identifies three reasons why it is improbable. First, he alleges it is difficult to believe that the view of baptism as either a literal or ceremonial cleansing needed to be refuted. Dalton adds that there is no indication elsewhere in the epistle that the readers were tempted to confuse sacraments with magic rites. Secondly, the true force of the ou .... alla construction must be respected. The thought in Hebrews 10:22 clearly shows that baptism is in one sense a washing, so that if the idea of cleansing were in the author’s mind at I Peter 3:21, the words ou monon would be more appropriate. Dalton notes that although Reicke indicates an awareness of this need to retain the force of ou
... aila, his view that the words form a rejection of the idea that baptism is a ritual purification scarcely does justice to it. Finally, Kelly states, the choice of the noun apotelesis is surprising if the notion of removal of dirt by washing is uppermost.

This last point is discussed at length by Dalton. He argues that the corresponding verb apotithesthai is often used to refer to the taking off of clothes or some integument, but above all in the New Testament with the moral sense of disposal or abandonment of the evils associated with life before Christian conversion and baptism. The terms apotithesis and apotithesthai are closely related to apekduasis and apekdusin, the verb forms occurring together in Colossians 3:8ff. The noun apekduasis is found at Colossians 2:11 where it is connected with circumcision, and in Dalton’s view this verse furnishes the clue to understanding the phrase sarkos apotelesis rhupou in I Peter:

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ...

He suggests that in Colossians the contrast is between the type and the antitype, between Jewish circumcision and Christian baptism, just as typological reasoning is used in I Peter. Moreover, in Colossians, the thought is that whereas circumcision requires the removal of a small piece of flesh, baptism involves the whole flesh and complete renovation. This interpretation is wholly supported by the Jewish understanding of circumcision and the idea of the foreskin as a thing of literal or symbolic uncleanness. Dalton insists that the reason for this allusion to the Jewish rite in I Peter 3:21 is thoroughly in keeping with the dominant catechetical concern of early Christianity to show that the covenantal promises attached to circumcision in the Old Testament, the religious book of the primitive Church, were to be found
fulfilled in Christian baptism. His understanding, which is shared by Kelly, not only overcomes the many difficulties which are inherent in seeing a reference to washing, but also builds on the foundation of typological argument which is clearly established in the text.

In contrast, a positive aspect of baptism is brought out in the phrase suneidēseōs ἀγαθὴς ἐρωτήματος εἰς τὸν θεόν, and herein lies the crux of the author’s argument. The meaning of the two key terms eperōtēma (a hapax in the New Testament) and suneidēseōs has been much discussed. So too have the issues of whether the latter genitive should be construed subjectively or objectively, and of where the words εἰς τὸν θεόν belong (i.e., with eperōtēma or suneidēseōs).

It seems that the fundamental sense of the verb eperōtan both in profane Greek and the New Testament is "to ask a question", thus the related noun eperōtēma may be translated "enquiry". The line taken by Bernard, that the phrase means "an enquiry of a good conscience after God", based on the Septuagint reading of II Kings 11:7 *καὶ εἶπεν δαύιδ εἰς εἰρήνην ιοαβ* is rejected by Bigg. He maintains that the term "enquiry" may have been applicable to a person who was just embarking on a spiritual quest, but would not have been suitable for someone making a baptismal commitment. In any case, this reading of the phrase hardly forms an adequate antithesis to sarkos apothesis rhupou.

The verb form appears to have the extended meaning "to ask for" or "to request" in Matthew 16:1 and the Septuagint of Psalm 137:3, hence the R. S. V. and N. E. B. translations of the noun in I Peter 3:21 by "appeal". Beare suggests that the thought is of the prayer made by the believer following the administration of the sacrament asking forgiveness, inward cleansing and the power to live according to God’s
will. But several commentators regard this as unlikely, and Beare himself appears dubious. The main objection is that such a translation of *eperōtēma* relies heavily on the occasional instances of the related verb meaning "to request", and ignores the fact that the noun itself nowhere bears this sense. The usage of the compound *eperōtan* at Matthew 16:11 and Psalm 137:3 with the import "to request" may simply have arisen through confusion with the verb *erōtan* which quite normally has this meaning, and is found as a variant reading of the Psalm text. Furthermore it is argued that there is no evidence in the New Testament to support the notion that baptism was envisaged as a prayer or an appeal.

Consequently, Dalton, Kelly, Reicke, Selwyn, Cranfield and Brooks have all contended that another meaning of *eperōtēma* which is found in Greek literature is more fitting to the thought of the epistle. They note that the verb *eperōtan* was often used to refer to the questioning put to an oracle, and in time grew to include also the answer or declaration made in response. The latter sense is probably the meaning *eperōtēma* has in Theodotion's version of Daniel 4:17 and in the Sinaiticus reading of Ecclesiasticus 33:3. From this, both the noun and the verb became technical legal terms associated with the making of contracts, which were struck orally by means of a formal series of questions and answers. These commentators therefore translate *eperōtēma* in I Peter 3:21 variously by "pledge" (Kelly, Dalton, Cranfield, Selwyn), "undertaking" (Reicke) or "declaration" (Brooks). In the early Church, baptism was most certainly viewed as a contract between God and the believer, and there are hints of the role played in the rite by questions and answers within the New Testament (Acts 8:37, Romans 10:9, I Timothy 6:12 and Hebrews 4:14). As Selwyn observes,
this idea is not far removed from that which led to the application of the word *sacramentum* (military oath) to baptism and the Eucharist. It is clear from the Qumran literature that those joining the community there also submitted to a similar procedure (1 QS v 8-10).

Bigg presents a variation of this interpretation stating that the words *eis theon* belong with *sūzei* to form an antithesis to *diesōthēsan eis tēn kibōton* in v20. In this case the thought is not of the pledge made to God by the baptismal candidate, but of the question or demands asked of him.

It may be inferred from Selwyn's translation of the adjective *agathēs* by the word "clear", that he sees *suneidēseōs* as a reference to a personal perception of rectitude. Reicke, Dalton, Kelly and Brooks are opposed to this essentially modern, psychological and subjective understanding of the term, objecting that it is entirely unsuitable to the context. They allege that the other occurrences of *suneidēsis* within the epistle at 2:19 and 3:16 positively exclude such a thought. This is particularly obvious in 1 Peter 3:16, where the author can hardly mean that his readers are to maintain a feeling of innocence, but rather that they are to hold fast to the sound moral disposition or attitude appropriate to the Christian life. This latter sense of *suneidēsis* as attitude, disposition or awareness also harmonizes with certain passages elsewhere in the New Testament in which the term is found such as Acts 23:1, Hebrews 9:9, 10:22-24 (notably in a baptismal context), 13:18 and 1 Timothy 1:5, 19.

The genitive form of the noun at 1 Peter 3:21 may be construed subjectively or objectively. Selwyn, following his psychological understanding of *suneidēseōs*, implies that it is subjective and renders the whole phrase "a pledge to God proceeding from a clear conscience",

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taking the words eis theon with eperōtēma. Dalton, whilst diverging from Selwyn in his understanding of suneidēsēs, also acknowledges that this is possible. The phrase then would refer to the investigations made into the moral character of the candidate for baptism before he was admitted to the sacrament. However, he concludes that this construction is less likely than that suggested by Reicke and followed by Kelly and Beare29, which takes suneidēsēs as an objective genitive giving the sense "a pledge to God to maintain a right attitude"30.

Having arrived at this translation through an analysis of its constituent parts, it is now appropriate to consider the overall significance of the phrase. Though it has been suggested that the words eis theon be taken with eperōtēma rather than suneidēsēs, it is clear that the underlying thought is of the believer's loyalty to God. Brooks has denied the moral connotation, stating that the reference is primarily to the Christian's awareness of God's immediate presence in his life or knowledge of Christ as Lord31. But Dalton, Kelly and especially Reicke have all insisted that there is an inevitable ethical and social consequence as a result of this "right attitude". In their view the real content of the pledge is an undertaking to live according to the Christian ideal, that is to the sound moral disposition which follows naturally from a consciousness of duty to God.

It has already been noted that the use of the term eperōtēma reflects an understanding of baptism as a contract between the believer and God, and recalls the questions which were put to the candidate and the answers given. Kelly argues that these undoubtedly consisted of assurances about belief which were demanded, and the undertakings given. Among the latter would have been a repudiation of the
immoralities of paganism and acceptance of the Christian way of life with all its ethical implications. The following passage from Pliny's *Letter to Trajan*, referring to the Christians, and cited by Dalton and Beare, illustrates this point:

...... they bound themselves by an oath not for any criminal purpose, but that they would commit no theft, brigandage or adultery, that they would not violate their word, that they would not refuse to return a deposit when called upon to do so.

Dalton is in fact convinced that behind *suneidēseōs agathēs eperōtēma eis theon* in I Peter 3:21 lies a full blown renunciation of Satan, the inspiration for these sins or immoralities. Clearly this became at least at a later point, and remains today, a formal part of the baptismal rite. Hanson*23* concurs that the phrase has more to do with renouncing the devil than confessing the faith, though the two can hardly be regarded as mutually exclusive. This interpretation is supported by the usage of *suneidēsis* at I Peter 3:16 with an ethical import, and by the repeated exhortations throughout the epistle to cease from sin and an idolatrous lifestyle (2:1, 11, 3:10-12, 4:3). The contrast implied in the *ou .... alla* construction between the Christian pledge or undertaking with its interior moral dedication, and the purely external token removal of a despised part of the flesh in the Jewish covenantal rite, clearly has its roots in the call found in the Old Testament to a circumcision of the heart (Jeremiah 4:1-4).

The verse ends with a mention of Christ's resurrection, and it has already been suggested that these words be taken immediately after *ho kai humas antitupon nun sōzei baptisma*. They evidently recall the thought right at the start of the letter:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born*
anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead .... (I Peter 1:3)

The author does not explain how precisely baptism saves through Christ's resurrection. He may mean that the risen Christ exercises his power through the rite, or that in baptism the believer enters sacramentally into the mystery of the resurrection so that he has eternal life with God, but it is impossible to be sure at this stage. Many point to the correspondence between the ideas here and those at Romans 6:4-11 and Colossians 2:12ff., but it must be admitted that in I Peter 3:21 the ideas are only hinted at rather than exploited.

The allusion to Christ's resurrection leads on to a reference to the ascension, heavenly session and subjection of the angelic powers (v22). Reicke is surely correct in stating that though formulaic in style, these words must be more than a mere mechanical repetition of well known phrases. In the previous chapter it was urged that the powers in v22 are to be identified with the spirits in v19, but that it is unnecessary therefore to assume that the journeys in the two verses must be equated. The grounds for this were that the real function of v22 is not to provide chronological data, but to describe the position or status of the angels in relation to Christ. It seems that this observation is the clue to understanding the reason for its inclusion.

Following the mention of Christ's Descent and condemnation of the spirits in v19, the author has raised explicitly a subject which is hinted at throughout the epistle, that of Christian baptism. The climax is reached in his assertion that the sacrament is a pledge to maintain a sound moral disposition. It has been shown that the underlying thought is of the renunciation of the sins and immoralities which
characterized pre-baptismal existence. Thus the motive behind the mention of the angels' subjection in v22 is to end the passage with a dramatic assurance that the evil forces who inspire those sins are subject to Christ, and have been robbed of their ability to deprave. Christ now rules over them from his position of authority at the right hand of God, having ascended to be with him. The condemnation of the spirits and their implied subjection in v19 is cemented in v22 with the explicit mention of Christ's enthronement in power. This is precisely the divine guarantee by which the baptismal pledge is underwritten.

The significance of the connection between Descent and baptism which occurs in 3:18-22 within the context of undeserved suffering will be considered again when the opening verses of I Peter 4 have been discussed. For the moment, it may be stated that Christ's Descensus activity provides the divine pattern on which the believer's baptismal eperōtēma is modelled. Just as Christ proclaimed doom to the evil spirits who inspire human sin in his Descent, so the believer renounces the sins of his former life in the sacramental pledge. It is interesting to note that this conclusion, whilst reached via an entirely different route, is markedly similar to that which Bernard draws about the meaning of the passage. His interpretation of v19 and of antitupon in v21 were both rejected, nevertheless, it could still be argued that Christian baptism is in some sense antitypical to Christ's Descent in I Peter 3:18-22.

The examination of the baptismal material in I Peter 3:18-22 is now concluded, but it is evident that the sacramental theme is not abandoned in the verses which follow:

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same thought, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no
longer by human passions but by the will of God. Let the time that is past suffice for doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing and lawless idolatry. (I Peter 4:1-3)

Bigg and Selwyn have remarked that the opening phrase Christou own pathontos sarki simply resumes the thought of 3:18a, and that the intervening verses (18b-22) are parenthetic to the main argument, which is concerned with the *imitatio Christi*\(^{35}\). In this case, the central thought in 4:1 is of encouragement to the Christians to endure their suffering in meekness and humility as Christ did (v1a), and of the purifying effect that such bodily suffering produces (v1b). But the view that the function of the passage from 3:13 onwards is to depict Christ as an example to be copied has been roundly rejected, and there are additional grounds for supposing that this is an inadequate understanding of 4:1.

Cranfield, followed by Dalton\(^{37}\), argues that while it is no doubt true that suffering patiently and meekly borne might cleanse the sufferer, the expression pepautai hamartias (4:1b) would be a most extravagant way of stating this were it all that was intended. Dalton adds that the phrase ten auten ennoian indicates that there must be a certain identification or point of contact between Christ's sufferings and those of the Christian, and that the aorist participle pathon in 4:1b refers to a definite and specific occasion rather than the general purifying process which goes on for the whole life of the Christian.

In the previous chapter, when the variant reading of epathen for apethanen in 3:18a was discussed, it was noted that the verb paschein is frequently used in the New Testament with the extended meaning "to die". Many commentators have therefore argued that the notion of Christ's death must be included in the phrase Christou own pathontos
sarki (4:1a) and that the thought of the second part of the verse is parallel to the assertion in Romans 6:7, likely to be proverbial and pre-Pauline in origin, "for he who has died is freed from sin". This echo of the thought in Romans 6 is considered by Kelly, Beare, Cranfield and Dalton to provide the key to understanding the opening verse of 1 Peter 4:10. They deny that there is any thought of purification by bodily suffering, or that the idea of martyrdom is at all present, but suggest instead that the author is thinking of the believer’s participation in Christ’s death through baptism. The whole of the verse finds its parallel in Romans 6:10-11:

The death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Dalton freely admits that in 1 Peter there is no explicit statement that the Christian through the mystery of baptism enters into Christ’s death, but he maintains that the writer continues as though this had been mentioned.

There is some debate among the scholars about the meaning of the noun ennoia, and of how the word hoti which begins the second part of the verse is to be understood. The noun is rare in the New Testament, occurring only here and at Hebrews 4:12, but it is used frequently in the Septuagint of Proverbs, especially with the meaning “practical insight” or “discretion”. Its compass is primarily, though not exclusively, intellectual. Thus Reicke goes so far as to argue that it is very close in meaning to suneidēsis in 3:21, with all the ethical implications he finds in the latter term. In his opinion, this ennoia with which the Christians are to arm themselves is equivalent to living...
thelēmati theou (v2) and no longer practising to boulema tōn ethnōn (v3).

Kelly and Dalton prefer to construe hoti closely with tēn autēn ennoian, so that the clause it introduces forms an explanation of the same ennoia which Christ and the Christians share. Dalton overcomes the difficulty inherent in this construction of how Christ might be said to have ceased from sin, by proposing that the thought is of Christ's solidarity with sinful humanity and his suffering from the effects of this solidarity. Cranfield notes that this is a possible translation of hoti, but favours, with Beare, the rendering "because". In this case, the ennoia which the Christians are to make their own refers in some way to the words which precede, and the following hoti clause must be seen as an explanatory parenthesis. Though this construction is rejected by Dalton on the grounds that in vie Christ's suffering in the flesh is presented as an event, and there is no interest shown in his mind or thought, it seems the more likely. Neither Beare nor Cranfield attempt in their comments to reconstruct Christ's frame of mind at the time of the crucifixion. Rather they suggest that the idea is that the Christians should reckon themselves as having died to the present life just as Christ did himself. 

Beare observes that in the hoti clause there is a double word play, with both the participle pathōn and the noun sarx being used in two senses. The participle recalls the thought of physical suffering from which the discussion started (3:14 and 17), but its aorist form points to the spiritual experience of death with Christ at the time of baptism. Similarly, sarx is used of the physical body in which Christ suffered but also of man's sinful nature. It recalls and anticipates the contrast between flesh and spirit which is found in 3:18 and 4:6.
Before leaving I Peter 4:1, some comment should be made on the meaning of the expression *pepautai hamartias*. Bigg maintains that there can be no doubt that the verb *pepautai* is middle and that *hamartia* in I Peter always refers to a sinful act, so that the meaning is "he has ceased to do evil". Selwyn considers that this understanding is supported by the variant reading of the dative plural form of the noun, likely to be original, found in Codex Vaticanus and the Latin, Syriac and Aethiopic versions. Both commentators think that the dominant idea is that it is not the suffering itself that cleanses, but the endurance of that suffering in patience and humility. Dalton, of course, is dissatisfied with this interpretation, based on the theory that the author is describing the purifying effect of suffering, and asserts that the verb may also be construed as passive. Its sense is very close to the middle, except that it may further imply the intervention of another, "to be stopped". In the baptismal context, the thought is not of the believer's initiative but of God's influence. The genitive singular noun *hamartias* may then be taken to refer not to sin which is committed, but to a state of sinfulness due to past sin\(^{13}\).

The words *eis to* (4:2) may be seen as introducing either a purpose clause ("so as not to") or a final clause ("with the result that"). In the former case, the clause depends on *hoplisasthe* (so Dalton and Cranfield), in the latter it may depend on *hoplisasthe* (Beare) or *pepautai hamartias* (Selwyn and Bigg). The sense is little affected whichever construction is adopted since it is clear that the author's main interest lies in contrasting two polarized ways of life.

Again, the thought may be compared with Romans 6:

> Let not sin therefore reign your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions (*epithumiais*). Do not yield your members to sin as instruments (*hopla*) of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God
as men who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments (hopla) of righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. (vv12-14)

Reicke seems justified in his observation that thelemati theou here is connected with ennoia in v1, which is in turn related to suneideseis agathês eperôtêma eis theon in 3:21.

In the following verse there is a detailed list of vices which characterized the believers' lives prior to their conversion to Christ. The opening statement of v3 is a meiosis; its meaning is that far too much time has already been spent in profligate living. There is no need to discuss the specific vices catalogued in greater depth, it will suffice to note that the language clearly indicates that those who are addressed stand precisely at the turning point of life which baptism constitutes. Even Selwyn, who argues that the mysticism of Romans 6 is entirely absent from the phrase ho pathôn sarki pepautai hamartias in v1, readily acknowledges that the emphasis on baptism as involving a conscious ethical change and redirection of life, which is implied in the eperôtêma at 3:21, is brought out in 4:2ff. If the word "baptism" is not explicitly mentioned, then it is certainly implicit in the vigorous contrast between the new life the Christians are called to live and their shameful past.

The passage ends (vv4-6) on a note of comfort for the believers in their attempt to live by the will of God. The interpretation of these verses will depend on the extent to which the danger of persecution is thought to exist at this point in the epistle. Having asserted that baptism marks the end of the time for immorality, the author adds that those who still participate in depraved activities are surprised that the Christians no longer do so, and abuse

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them as a consequence of their morally regenerated lifestyle. In ordinary Greek usage, as in the New Testament, the verb blasphēmein is not employed exclusively in the sense of speaking evil of sacred things, but of defaming or reviling generally. So it may be said that in v4, the reference is simply to a general social vilification at the hands of those who are put out that their neighbours no longer join them in debauchery.

Reicke seeks to press the legal point. He argues that the reaction of the pagans recalls the attitude of the wicked to the righteous man as it is described in Wisdom 2. They are suspicious and discomforted by his upright behaviour and drag him before the court to punish him for it. In his view, the verb in I Peter 4:4 has the same connotation of slandering with a legal punishment attached, and at 4:15-16 prosecution is envisaged to be taking place on the grounds of faith alone. It is suggested, however, that a significant shift in the letter's tempo occurs at 4:12, from the idea of suffering only in the most general terms to the reality of persecution, so it is questionable whether these later verses should be cited to illuminate the background here.

Beare takes up the idea that until 4:12 suffering is only alluded to in passing. He, like many others, is convinced that the bulk of the letter was once a baptismal sermon, its main theme an exposition of the nature of the Christian life. This life must at all times be conducted in obedience to God, despite the inevitable difficulties presented by the heathen environment in which it is led. He argues that from 4:1, the connection with the theme of suffering has become little more than verbal, since the writer has become wholly absorbed in the significance of the moral and spiritual transformation effected in baptism.
Pursuing the theological sense of the verb blasphēmein as being better suited to the baptismal context, he treats the participle blasphēmountes in v4 as a substantive used in interjection, "blasphemers!". The attitude of the pagans to the Christians is seen in the technical sense of blasphemy against God, since it is founded in their failure to recognize the divine origin and quality of their new life.

Even if the legal aspect is not present, the parallel with Wisdom is quite close. As in Wisdom 3:10 and 4:20, where it is stated that the ungodly will have to face God's judgement, so in 1 Peter 4:5 the blasphemers will meet with the same end at the imminent judgement of the living and the dead. This and the following verse were discussed at length in the previous chapter and it was concluded that there are only two viable interpretations of v6. The first, which involves a reference to Christ's preaching to the souls of the dead in Hell, assumes that the author is giving an explanation of the basis on which the coming judgement will be conducted and that v6 must be parenthetical to v5. The second, which considers that nekrois evaggelistē refers to those who heard the gospel during their lifetime but have since died, assumes that he is at pains to reassure his audience about the fate of their deceased loved ones. Following what has been said here about the meaning of 4:1-4, the latter interpretation becomes all the more probable. Only a few further comments are required to bring out its full contextual significance.

In the wind of eager anticipation of the Parousia known to be prevailing across the early Church, the deaths of believers were a cause for deep concern. At best it was felt that the departed brethren would be at a disadvantage at the Second Coming, and at worst that
they had been entirely cheated of the fulfillment of their hopes. This anxiety would definitely have been heightened in a setting of persecution or social harassment leading up to it. In addition to their own nervous questions of each other, the Christians could then expect the scoffing jibes of their pagan neighbours to include derisive comments about the worth of a religion whose adherents died just like everyone else. The function of v6 is therefore to quell this unease with the assurance that the faith of the dead had not been in vain.

Admittedly, this understanding requires a shift in meaning between the two instances of the term *nekroi* in vv5-6 and it has been remarked that in I Peter the concern over the fate of the Christian dead is not nearly so marked as it is, for example, in I Thessalonians. Nevertheless, a further implication must clearly be that life in the Spirit is the reward of all believers, not only those who have already died, but also the living who were struggling to conduct themselves with Christian moderation in a pagan environment. As Kelly comments, the flesh/spirit antithesis in 4:6 pointedly recalls that in 3:18; Christ’s experience of death followed by resurrection becomes through baptism the experience of all Christians including those who have already undergone physical death. In the de clause the verb *zēn*, which in the New Testament denotes eternal life, may be contrasted with *bίζειν* in v2 referring to the transitory earthly existence which must still be lived subject to the will of God.

At the start of this chapter it was suggested that the primary objective was to consider the way in which the author of I Peter relates the theme of Christ’s Descent to Christian baptism in 3:18-22. It has been shown that strictly the transition is effected through Noah and the symbolism of the Flood. The train of thought in the passage
may be summarized as follows. First, Christ descends to Hades in the interval between his death and resurrection, preaching condemnation to the spirits who are to be identified with the fallen angels of Genesis 6:1-4 (v19). Their offence is specified as having been disobedience, which, in line with the Genesis tradition, is reported to have occurred at the time of Noah. In preparation for the coming Flood, Noah constructs an ark, entering it with his seven companions, and they pass through the water to safety (v20). Similarly, the tiny Christian community, who correspond to Noah and his family, pass through the baptismal waters. This sacrament of baptism is not to be thought of as a perfunctory rite which only involves the removal of a token part of the flesh. Instead, it is a complete redirection of will and loyalty, a promise to God to maintain a sound moral disposition (v21). Its saving efficacy resides in the resurrection of Christ, who has gone to heaven, occupying a privileged position of power over the angels (v22).

Yet it is also evident from the foregoing examination of the baptismal material within the passage and 4:1ff. that the relationship between Christ’s Descent and Christian baptism goes far deeper than that of mere symbolic or personal affinity. There exists between these two themes both an identity of thought and a unity of purpose which cohere with the wider aim of the epistle to sustain the Asian Christians who were under threat of persecution in their faith. In order to show conclusively that the connection is neither arbitrary nor a digression it is necessary to look again at the wider context.

The notion that the point of 3:18-22 is to encourage the writer’s audience in their potential suffering by depicting Christ as an example to be followed was rejected in the previous chapter, and again above in the discussion of the meaning of 4:1. The objections raised were that
the fourfold qualification of Christ’s death in v18 indicates that its value surpasses the merely exemplary, and that in 4:1ff. the author may be developing the thought of baptism as a mystical participation in Christ’s death. There are, however, additional reasons for believing that this idea of the verses as a dilation on the theme of the *imitatio Christi* must be abandoned.

Reicke’s view, that from 3:13 onwards the writer takes up the argument from 2:21ff. that Christ is a *hupogrammon* to be copied by the Christians at large in the pagan world⁴⁵, is extended with his suggestion that Christ’s preaching to the spirits in v19 is to be imitated by them in the fearless proclamation of the gospel to their heathen neighbours⁴⁶. It was shown that his remarks on the meaning of *exoruxen* in v19 (with the implicitly positive note eventually coming to the fore) are problematic, and his subsequent ability to reconcile this with the subjection of the angels described in v22 dubious.

Curiously, although Selwyn in his direct comments on the text⁴⁷ expresses the opinion that it is the defeat of the spirit world which is at stake in vv19 and 22, his more general impressions come remarkably close to those of Reicke. Elsewhere in his work, whilst recognizing that the thought in 3:18-22 soon passes from the *Christus patientis* to the *Christus victor*, he is adamant that the purpose of v19 is to show the scope of Christ’s redemptive work as an example to be followed by the Christians in their own attempt to win people for God⁴⁸. Yet it must be asked, if Christ is victorious over the spirits⁴⁹, how his work in their realm can then be thought of as redemptive. Selwyn appears to overcome this difficulty by reverting to the anthropological view of the spirits in v19, both fallen angels and the souls of the dead being encompassed by the term *pneumata*. As has
already been remarked, the anthropological line is unsustainable. It would hardly be of any direct relevance to be told in a context of undeserved suffering of the breadth of Christ's redemption, and worse still, that the notoriously hardened sinners of the Flood generation had been offered salvation. In any event, Selwyn's oscillation between such mutually exclusive lines of interpretation can scarcely be considered satisfactory.

It seems that Selwyn, like Reicke, exaggerates the importance in I Peter of the imitatio Christi as a means of proselytization. At 3:1-2 it is certainly stated that unbelieving husbands may be won over by their wives' behavioural conformity to the Christian way. There is also mention of the positive effect that good conduct has on those outside the faith (2:12). Yet at other points the thought is not of conversion, but of silencing (2:15) or putting to shame (3:16). Clearly, at 4:4-5 those who attack the Christians for their abstinence, be it verbally, legally or doctrinally, are threatened with divine judgement. The author is primarily concerned with the welfare of his fellow believers and sustaining them in their existing faith, not the evangelizing of those who stand outside it. So much is stated in 5:12, where he tells of the purpose for which he has written.\(^{50}\)

This dismissal of the imitatio Christi understanding of the passage has led Dalton\(^{51}\) and Kelly to suggest instead that it should be seen as an objective statement of the doctrinal grounds from which suffering can be faced confidently\(^{52}\). Of the four qualifications about Christ's death in v18, perhaps the most important is the reference to its purpose (hina hinas prosagage to theo). This clause should be taken epexegetically with peri hamartion, so that the sense in which Christ's death is for sins becomes clear. The idea must be
that in his death Christ breaks down the walls which sin has built between God and men. There is no need to see any technical meaning behind the verb other than the straightforward sense of access to God spoken of in Ephesians 2:18, 3:12, Hebrews 4:6, 7:25 and 10:22, which is, as Selwyn remarks, "the be-all and end-all of religion". Through his death Christ restores man's right relationship with God which has been interrupted by sin. Following this in v18 there is an assertion of the triumph of the resurrection; Christ was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.

Viewed in this light, it is clear that the themes of Descent and baptism alluded to in 3:18-22 are far from a digression from the immediate requirement to provide comfort for those who may be called to suffer undeservedly (3:13ff.) or the author's wider purpose of sustaining the faith of his readers (5:12), nor is their connection accidental. Although a distinction has been drawn here between the thought of comfort in suffering and sustaining in faith, it is evident that this is artificial to the author's mind. The suffering that is spoken of from 3:13 is not for its own sake, but for that of righteousness, and it is in this precise definition that a crucial aspect of the author's notion of faith is recalled. It is obvious that in 1 Peter faith is equated with obedience, and has overwhelming ethical implications (1:2, 14, 22, 2:8, 3:1). Thus comfort is provided in v18 with a statement of the doctrinal grounds which guarantee obedience to the Christian way of life, the righteousness for which the believers may have to suffer. The verses which follow only serve to furnish this with more detail, and the argument continues in 4:1ff. enriched by the considerations in vv19-22.
It was said in the previous chapter that the spirits to whom Christ preaches condemnation (v19) and who become subject to him (v22) are to be identified with the rebellious angels of Genesis 6, whose apostasy and fate had become such an area of fascination in Jewish tradition. In I Enoch it is explicitly stated that these angels are not only responsible for the coming of sin into the world, but that all human sin is attributable to them. They stand behind every type of human transgression as its source and continued inspiration, and it is precisely this sin which is renounced in the sacramental eperôtēma (v21) and stated to have been ceased from following baptism in 4:1ff.

The Descent motif as depicted here underlines the point that Christ's death was for sins, and underpins the Christians' ability to remain free from immorality and practise righteousness. The baptismal candidate reproduces Christ's preaching to the spirits in his own personal pledge of loyalty to God and a sound moral disposition, and it is of this that the readers are reminded in 3:21 and 4:1ff. They are saved in baptism through Christ's resurrection, and so share in his triumph over the spirits who entice them to sin. There is no illogicality in the thought of baptism following on from that of the Descent, for its undertakings and renunciations mirror Christ's preaching of condemnation to the fallen angels.

Moreover, in the specific context of persecution indicated in the closing stages of the epistle, there is still further solace to be gained by the Christians from these themes of Descent and baptism. There can be little doubt that the author also directly relates the fallen angels to those who were persecuting the Church at the time of its composition. This is expressed at 5:8ff., and is potentially implied in the assertion that the pagans blaspheme against the
Christians (4:4), when it is recalled that one of the sins which the angels introduced was that of blasphemy. Just as the spirits did not obey (v20), so the hostile world in which the Christians find themselves as a tiny minority is an unbelieving world stirred up by these rebellious spirits. The relationship in the letter between belief or faith and obedience is well established, so it may be safely assumed that their respective opposites correspond accordingly. If the spirit of sin has been defeated in Christ's Descent, then the spirit of persecution has also. The baptismal experience, in which salvation comes through the resurrection and all related to it, echoes this victory. It is easy to see how the author can exhort his audience to a fearless disposition in their adversity through the description of the Descent and its association with their baptism, since he assures them of blessing and triumph.

The theory that the epistle was once a baptismal sermon, which is used to sustain the faith of the believers who were threatened by or were enduring persecution, appears justified. It certainly accounts for the dramatic assertion "... nun sōzei baptisma ...." in 3:21. The author shares the view appropriate to a baptismal address that faith is made manifest in the Christian way of life, and thinks that this is every bit as fitting in extreme hardship as it is in more peaceful times. From the readers' perspective, it is clear that a reminder of the tranquility and beauty of the Christian life, and indeed of the baptismal rite itself with its atmosphere of celebration and confidence, would have been supremely comforting in a context of persecution. The stiffening of their morale at a time when their faith could so easily have been in crisis, and the temptation to lapse into the old ways strong, would have been all the more readily achieved by the particular
recall of their share in baptism of Christ's Descensus victory and triumphant enthronement in honour and glory which is found in 3:18-22.
Notes to Chapter 7
(1) This approach is indebted to Reicke, who entitles the seventh chapter of his work, "How baptism is characterized in 21b-22". (E. Reicke, The Disobedient Spirits and Christian Baptism: A Study of I Peter 3:19 and its Context (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1946), p.173.)

(2) Beare, for example, maintains that "The passage is in some degree a digression, moving away from the subject immediately in hand, the exposition of the meaning of undeserved suffering. It may at least be said that the thought is not closely sustained and connected. By a violent tour de force the writer seeks to relate the Christian doctrine of suffering to the saving experience of baptism ....". (F. W. Beare, The First Epistle of Peter (Oxford: Blackwell and Mott Ltd., 1958), p.144.) It seems inevitable that this should be Beare's view, given that he thinks the passage deals with Christ's preaching of salvation to the souls of the dead in Sheol. This chapter, building on the alternative interpretation of v19 proposed previously, will demonstrate that such a statement cannot go unchallenged.


(4) The references to Noah and the Flood in the patristic writings on baptism are too numerous to mention individually. It is sufficient to note that every possible angle was explored to the full, each slightest nuance exposed.

(5) In II Peter 2:5 they are stated to be Noah with seven others.


(13) Kelly notes (op. cit., p.159) that Josephus remarks on the similar paradox of Moses' preservation "through the sea" in Antiquities II 347. Elsewhere in this passage in I Peter it would be possible to think of the paradoxical nature of Christ's proclamation, normally associated with the preaching of hope, but because of the audience in v19, become a message of defeat.

(15) Bernard also cites the instance of *tupos* at I Peter 5:3. The usage there is not "typological" as such.


(17) His primary correlative is *archetupos*, hence Bernard's remark (op. cit., p.261) that *antitupos* would be an infelicitous term to describe the fulfillment of the *tupos*.

(18) His words on the subject (found in *The New Testament in Greek*) are quoted by Selwyn (op. cit., p.203) and Bernard (op. cit., p.264).


(20) In addition to his initial discussion of the textual matters (op. cit., pp.143-8), he devotes the following chapter (ibid., pp.149-172) to the citation of numerous examples which support his understanding of I Peter 3:21a from all types and ages of Greek literature including the New Testament. It appears from the exaggerated scale of this defence alone that his construction must be regarded at best as less than obvious, and at worst as improbable.

(21) His first argument against Reicke's construction of v21a is that it understands "antitypical" in the sense found in Hebrews of heavenly realities being represented by inferior copies on earth. It seems that this criticism must be regarded as unjust. Although Reicke states that *antitupa*on in I Peter 3:21 has the same meaning as at Hebrews 9:24, it is clear that all he intends is that the term in both texts is used to denote the inferior party in a comparison. His construction of the verse does not imply that the Christian rite is a lesser representation of a greater metaphysical reality, as Dalton suggests it does, but rather that Noah's baptism foreshadowed Christian baptism. Reicke himself is quite explicit on this point, "Here strictly speaking the attribute 'antitypical' refers only to Noah's baptism ..." (op. cit., p.146).


(23) Ibid., pp.393-400.


(25) Dalton discusses further points of contact between Colossians 2 and I Peter 3:21 on pp.217-8.

(26) This interpretation is hinted at, though not developed, by Selwyn (op. cit., p.205). It will be shown that the covenantal idea is taken up in the following words *suneidéseós agathês eperotéma eis theon*. 

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In the Hebrew Bible, the reference is to II Samuel 11:7.

It should be noted that Bernard also refers to these verses to support his interpretation of I Peter 3:21a. He believes that the meaning of eperōtēma in Daniel 4:17 is "matter", and in Ecclesiasticus 33:3 "oracle". The underlying Hebrew term in both cases is סֵפֶר, and from this he glean the sense "concern" or "business", which appears to move him away from the idea of an enquiry.

He adopts this translation as an alternative to "appeal". It was stated above that Beare seems doubtful about the latter.

Cranfield alleges that the best sense is yielded by translating the phrase "a pledge of a good conscience toward God", which he interprets to mean that baptism is an earnest of God's forgiveness of sins. His paucity of comment makes it difficult to see how he extracts this meaning.

It must be acknowledged that at a later point in his argument Brooks does recognize the moral responsibilities faith brings in this epistle.


After the words "in dextera Dei", the Vulgate adds "deglutiens mortem ut vitae aeternae heredes efficeremur". It is possible that this phrase has been included under the influence of I Corinthians 15:54 (cf. II Corinthians 5:4), which in turn derives from Isaiah 25:8. Given what is known from the study of the Odes of early Christianity's ideas of Death as a voracious and insatiable monster and its tendency to portray Christ's death as a reversal of all previous patterns of existence, it is difficult not to see in these words an echo of the same thoughts. In the Odes the language of poisoning is used to depict the reversal; here, and in Paul's writings (where the royal metaphor is also present), the Gorgon becomes the gorged.

The subjection described in v22 could have taken place at the time of the ascension, in which case the preaching in v19 must be thought of as a preliminary condemnation. Alternatively, the subjection and preaching may both have taken place on the same occasion before the resurrection.

Reicke agrees that this is the purpose of v22 but, following his interpretation of v19, relates it to the proclamation of the gospel to the heathen (op. cit., pp.198-201).

It is not surprising that Bigg should do this (though Beare and Cranfield do not), in view of his understanding of 3:19, but it is strange to find that Selwyn agrees. Selwyn thinks that there is a parallel to the thought of the verse in I Corinthians 5:5. He also cites examples from rabbinic writings of the idea that suffering is in itself a means of atonement.

(38) Cranfield notes that in Romans 6:3, Paul appears to suggest that what he is saying about baptism is already generally accepted. Dalton agrees that there are further allusions to this acceptance in vv8-9, though unlike v3 they contain no direct reference to baptism.

(39) The meaning of this difficult verse and indeed the whole of Romans 6, which have caused much scholarly consternation, cannot be discussed here. It is enough to note that many commentators have seen a reference to the believer's mystical participation in Christ's death and resurrection through baptism in the chapter, and the same notion has also been detected in I Peter 4:1ff.

(40) Reicke only hints at the connection with the Pauline text in passing (op. cit., p.247).


(42) It seems that Dalton is really too insistent on the force of auten.

(43) Selwyn, though he states initially that hamartia is always used in I Peter in the concrete sense, approaches this understanding with his further comments, in which he speaks about ending the dominion of sin (op. cit., p.210). Interestingly, the words he quotes in illustration are from a writer who makes the connection between the ideas in I Peter 4:1 and those in Romans 6, a connection which Selwyn himself denies exists. The verb pauesthai is not found elsewhere in the New Testament with either the genitive or the dative to express the thing or activity ceased from.

(44) The final thought in v14 about the dominion of sin may be further compared with I Peter 3:22, in which Christ is enthroned at the right hand of God with the angels subject to him.

(45) Even here, the significance of Christ's death extends beyond the purely exemplary.


(48) Ibid., pp.97-101 and 314ff.

(49) It should be acknowledged that Selwyn does not, of course, deny the importance of the defeat of the spirits as grounds for Christian confidence. He refers to this as "the dying life triumphant on a cosmic scale" (op. cit., p.318).

(50) It seems that Selwyn may also have been led into an inadequate reckoning of the passage's worth by his misunderstanding of the meaning of term suneidesis (3:21), and resultant failure to make any connection between the renunciation of sin which this word
implies and Christ's defeat of the evil spirits (vv19 and 22) who inspire that sin.


(52) Brooks considers that the preaching in v19 is a proclamation of the gospel to the dead in Hades, so for him the idea of Christ as both grounds of salvation and model of Christian conduct merge in 3:18-22. He falls into the same error as Selwyn and Reicke do of overstating the importance of evangelization in I Peter. The problems raised by this have been demonstrated.


(54) It is unnecessary to rehearse all the matters which were discussed, except to remark that their misdemeanour was specifically defined as disobedience and rebellion against God's ordinances.

(55) Dalton (op. cit., pp.191ff.), Kelly and Reicke (op. cit., pp.76ff.) concur on this point. Reicke only runs into difficulty when he comes to interpret ekēruxen in v19.
Conclusion
Having completed the studies of selected Odes and the passage at I Peter 3:18ff., we can now make a few concluding remarks. Given that the main concern of this work has been to examine the Odist’s usage of the Descensus motif, the primary objective will be to draw together the many disparate threads of the preceding discussions so that the overall picture of his treatment of this theme can be allowed to emerge. It will also be interesting to compare his usage of the motif with that of the biblical author, and to ask what the comparison reveals of the differing natures of the two works.

One of the most remarkable facts to have come out of the studies of the Odes is that the Descensus theme is much more prevalent within the collection than has previously been supposed. Besides the undisputed reference in the final hymn, Odes 3, 10, 15, 17, 21, 22, 24, 25, 28, 29, 31, 33, 36, 38 and 39 have also been shown to contain allusions to this motif and its related ideas. Furthermore, the essential unity of the collection has clearly been demonstrated, since traces of the theme exist in the so called interpolated and non-interpolated parts of the hymns alike. In addition, much of the Odist's obscure imagery has been shown to be intelligible in the light of the Descensus. Particularly noteworthy in this respect are the mention of the crown, the image of the Way, the references to physical healing, the bridal and amatory language, the figures of the Corruptor and seven headed dragon, the abysses and the garments of skin.

It has been suggested that the Odist uses two main images of Death and Sheol in his treatment of the Descent, which may appear mutually exclusive, but are often placed side by side in the hymns without any sense of dislocation. In the first, personified Death is depicted as an all consuming and insatiable monster, accustomed to
swallowing the dead and holding them in his belly. The descending Christ poisons the monster so that he is forced to vomit up all whom he has guzzled, thereby effecting the release of the dead. This picture of Death as a monster, with Sheol variously as his lair or belly, is certainly to the fore in Ode 42:11-13 and it is hinted at in Odes 24:6 and 28:10. When the origins of this imagery were investigated, they were ultimately revealed to be the Canaanite accounts of the battles between Ba'al with Yam and Mot, which had continued to influence Jewish and Christian tradition long after Ba'al, Yam and Mot had faded from the scene. Thus evidently related to the picture of Death as a devouring monster is the image of the seven headed dragon that occurs at Ode 22:5. Also connected is the depiction of Sheol as a plurality of abysses at Odes 24:5ff. and 31:1, or as a place of lashing waves at Ode 39:10-11.

The other thanatological imagery used by the Odist in his depiction of the Descent is that of Sheol as a dark and gloomy prison, in which the dead are held captive by Death, their gaoler. Here, the release of the dead is effected by Christ who arrives in Sheol to shatter Death's bolts and free his prisoners. This picture is dominant in the 17th hymn, but it was also found to be present in Odes 22 and 42. Since its roots lie ultimately in the myth of Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld, where the descending deity is a goddess, it seems it may be hinted at obliquely in the cryptic and elusive language of the 33rd Ode. In this hymn, Christ appears in feminine form initially as Grace and then as a perfect Virgin, and Death is styled the Corruptor.

From these two basic images of the monster and gaoler, which are unselfconsciously intermingled, the Odist creates an extensive wardrobe for personified Death and Sheol, who are themselves seen as equivalent.
Here, Death appears in his monster form as a gorger; there, he is the Corruptor. At once he is a solitary figure and yet he is a plurality of abysses; sometimes his domain is subterranean, at others it is subaquatic. Perhaps this shifting picture of Death is attributable to the lack of constraints imposed on the Odist by virtue of his chosen medium of expression, or it may simply stem from the vast wealth of chthonic imagery that had evolved in the ancient world from which he felt free to draw at random. What seems more likely, though, is that the reason for Death’s constantly changing costume in the Descensus Odes is bound up with the wider question of how Christ’s victory in Sheol is conceived.

The Odist’s understanding of Christ’s Descent, which remains consistent throughout, has been shown to proceed from three basic inter-related beliefs regarding its significance, namely that it is comprehensive, final and definitive. Clearly, Death is viewed by the author as a wily and universal opponent of the Lord, whose chameleon appearance and ubiquity have been the key to his continued success in opposing and undermining the divinely ordained plan for life and order. Thus by depicting him in a wide variety of guises, the Odist not only emphasizes his subtlety and universality, but also stresses the totality of his defeat. In all his manifestations and in every hideout, he is comprehensively overcome.

The finality of this victory is underscored by means of reference to the fact that not a trace of Death or his loathsome abode is allowed to endure. The guzzling monster in the 42nd hymn not only vomits up those whom he had already consumed, but is also systematically poisoned so that he can gorge no more. In Ode 22, it is the seven-headed dragon’s very seed which is destroyed, he is completely
eradicated. Similarly, in the 17th hymn, besides the allusion to the captives' release, the prison building is razed to the ground and its guards are wiped out.

For the poet, Christ's Descensus victory is also definitive, that is to say that it establishes forever a new pattern of existence, replacing all previous ones in which man was subject to Death. The antiquity of these previous patterns is explicitly spoken of at Ode 24:7 with a reference to the primordiality of the abysses' hostility. Moreover, it is implicit in the close connection that exists between the Odist's depiction of the Höllesturmung and the biblical detail of the Chaoskampf. It has been noted on numerous occasions that in the Odes the Descent replicates, with Christ as the protagonist, the battle waged by God to establish order against the unruly waters in creation. The new pattern which is established by Christ's victory is not seen as being an improvement to an existing scheme, but a complete overturning of everything that has gone before. This is most obviously expressed in the final verses of the 22nd Ode where, after Christ's defeat of the seven headed dragon and the raising of the dead, there exists the thought of destruction, followed by renewal and the establishment of the kingdom. It is further evident in the complete reversal of fortunes of Death and his cohorts which takes place during the Descent. The Corruptor is himself corrupted, the one who causes grief is made to mourn and the abysses are themselves submerged. Death is given a taste of his own medicine, but it is the Medicine of Life.

The charge levelled against the Odist in the past, that he shows little interest in Christ's death and resurrection, cannot be sustained. It seems that he conflates the whole of the Passion into the Descensus episode, preferring to say that Death has been defeated rather than
that Christ has been raised. The resurrection victory is depicted as just that, a victory over Death. Abstract theological notions have no place in his vocabulary since he favours the colour and texture of the battle scene, which befits his hymnic genre. Likewise, the docetic tendencies which were detected in some of the Descensus hymns would tend to indicate that he is prepared to sacrifice orthodoxy on the altar of poetic impression. At any rate, the whole question surrounding Christ's ability to remain effective in Hell, while fully sharing the condition of the dead, was one which thoroughly exercised the minds of many early Christian authors because of its inherently paradoxical nature, and often led to strains of docetism being heard in their works.

Hitherto, little has been said about the characterization of the dead in the Descensus Odes, or of the author's thoughts concerning their fate. Yet it is from these matters that vital insights were gained into his extended understanding of the Descent and the further use that he makes of this motif. It is clearly the case that he spiritualizes the Descensus, so that the effects of Christ's victory are seen to transcend the boundaries of place and time and to be carried beyond Sheol to the living believers of his own day who had been spiritually dead. There are several traits which feature repeatedly in the Descensus material indicating that this is so.

In the first place, although it has been argued that the defeat of Death is complete in every respect, great emphasis is placed on the requirement of faith on the part of the dead as a necessary condition of their release. In the final hymn this is expressed in terms of their recognition of Christ's divine sonship. Similarly, in Ode 33 the speaker draws to him those who are obedient, whereas in the 22nd hymn,
the Way is levelled for those who believe. In other words, Christ's relationship with the dead in Sheol is constituted on precisely the same foundation of faith as that which he has with the living. Moreover, it seems that the gathering motif which features in Odes 10, 17, 22 (mutatis mutandis) and 42 could not avoid reminding believers of their own living ecclesiastical community. Nor would it fail to recall the gathering of Israelites in the wilderness during the Exodus, which had become synonymous with salvation and spiritual rebirth.

Another indication that the author tends toward a spiritualization of the dead is to be found in the timing of their resurrection. When the disgorging of the dead by the Death monster at Ode 42:11 was discussed, it was noted that it is envisaged to take place simultaneously with Christ's own resurrection. This is in line with the report at Matthew 27:52ff., which relates that the tombs of the saints were opened at the time of Jesus' death and after his resurrection their bodies were raised and they appeared to many in the holy city. The thought is repeated in the 17th hymn, since the release of the captives happens on the same occasion that Christ's own bonds are broken. It also occurs in Ode 22, where the dead bones are covered with flesh and revivified immediately after the overthrow of the seven headed dragon. However, both the Matthaean episode and the Odist's timing are at odds with the more prevalent view in the New Testament, which expected the general resurrection of the dead to take place on the Last Day. The very fact that for the Odist all this is realized fully at the time of the Descent would suggest that he transposes the achievements into the spiritual realm, regarding the resurrection as an anastasis in the spiritual life of the believer.
Arguably the most striking item of evidence that the Odist develops the Descent in a spiritual direction exists in the closing stanzas of the *Descensus* Odes. The shift towards the general thought of salvation and blessing, and away from language specific to the condition of the dead, has been witnessed time after time. Interestingly, this phenomenon was discovered to exist even in the 24th Ode, where there is little interest shown over the fate of the dead. Here, it is the destructive effects of the Descent that are broadened, so that they encompass not only the deadly subterranean opponents of the Lord, with whom the context is directly concerned, but also his earthly ones, and by implication those of the believers.

It seems that the scope of the speaker's words in the final verses of the hymns is extended to reach an ever widening audience, with the effects of the Descent travelling like ripples that spread across a pond. Yet these ripples are evidently concentric, for they proceed from the central fact of the defeat of Death. Salvation in the Odes is, above all, salvation from Death and the perception of blessing comes from confidence in the possibility of eternal life. It is only because the estrangement which had been caused by Death has been brought to an end, that the believer can be restored to God's possession and new spiritual life.

In fact, the effects of the Descent are not only invested with spiritual significance in the Odes, they are also given their own specific historical setting in a particular event in the believer's life, that of his baptism. The Odist obviously regards Christ's battle with and defeat of Death as being imitated at the time of every single believer's baptism. Nowhere is this thought of the Christian *mimesis* of the Descent more sublimely expressed than in the 17th Ode. Here,
the celebration of the believer's liberation, which is introduced with a reference to the ritual practice of crowning the baptized, develops into the detail of the Höllestürmung in the latter part of the hymn. The idea must be that as Christ overcame Death in his Descent, the believer accomplishes the same victory through his baptism, emerging regenerated to new life.

Thus for the poet, Christ's triumph in Sheol not only provides a new pattern of human existence, it is also the pattern that is replicated on every baptismal occasion and indeed underpins the believer's confidence in victory. Odes 21 and 25, with their numerous allusions to baptismal practices or beliefs associated with the rite and their opening reference to release from bonds, clearly echo this same idea. So too does the 38th hymn, in which the mention of the deadly machinations of the Corruptor is preceded by a reference to the notion of baptism as the vehicle in which the believer is carried to the Church, a haven of salvation. Likewise, it is indicated in the 24th Ode, where the author retimes the Descensus to coincide with Christ's own baptism. Here the transition is all the more readily facilitated through the medium of water, since the picture of Sheol is aquatic in nature, as it is in the 39th hymn.

This recognition that the Odist employs the Descensus theme in such a manner goes some considerable way towards resolving a few of the more intractable problems which have beset those who have attempted to interpret the Odes. It has already been suggested that his particular association of the Descent with baptism renders much of their obscure imagery intelligible. It also accounts for the frequently encountered difficulty in determining whether the speaker is Christ or the believer. However, of far greater significance is the fact that
there are firm grounds for assuming, as Bernard maintained, that the collection is an anthology of baptismal hymns. The sacramental setting gives the Odes a *Sitz im Leben* which helps explain their allusive nature, and is in absolute accord with what is known of the rite and its importance in the early Church. There would be no need for explicit references to baptismal doctrine as this would have been dealt with in the catechumens' instruction, and the rite itself would be performed for all to see. Nor should the reader expect to find such doctrinal statements, since the hymnal's function lies rather in expressing the worshippers' feelings in poetry and imagery that were immediately accessible to them and reflected their own age and cultural milieu.

Originally, the reason given for examining the text at I Peter 3:18ff. was that it appeared to provide early biblical evidence of this same combination of the Descent with Christian baptism which is found in the Odes. Given that it has since been concluded that the Odes are to be seen as an anthology of baptismal hymns and it has long been reckoned by a number of scholars that the body of the epistle was once a baptismal sermon, this approach is rendered all the more appropriate. At the outset it was suggested that it would be interesting to compare the authors' respective usage of this *Descensus*/baptism combination, and to ask what the comparison reveals about the differing natures of the two works. It seems there are both remarkable similarities which are attributable to the writers' shared Christian beliefs, but at the same time important differences that are due to their divergent aims within particular historical contexts.

The most immediately apparent distinction between the Odist's treatment of the *Descensus* theme and that of the biblical author lies
in its level of development. In the Odes, the Descent is described at great length in language which occasionally borders on the lurid in its detail, and the significance of the whole of the Passion appears to be encapsulated within it. It is a veritable Hellensturmung, a defeat of the Death monster in all his manifestations and a shattering of Sheol in every guise; it ensures Christ's resurrection and guarantees eternal life. However, in the Petrine text, all detail is lacking. Christ simply goes and makes proclamation to the spirits in prison, though their status of subjection to him is later alluded to. There may be just a hint of the thought of battle in the verb hoplisasthe at I Peter 4:1, but it is far from obvious. Furthermore, the Descent is only depicted as a single scene, albeit an integral one, in the Passion drama. The others, which are enumerated separately, are Christ's death, resurrection, ascension and heavenly session. This would tend to indicate that the Odes were composed at a much later date, when the Descensus tradition had fully evolved, leaving its indelible mark on Christian literature and art.

Notwithstanding the obvious lack of detail in the biblical passage, it was argued that underlying the phrase tois en phulaké pneumasin at I Peter 3:19 stand the fallen angels of Genesis 6:1-4 who, following their apostasy, were thought to have been imprisoned beneath the earth. According to later Jewish tradition these angels were the source of all human sin and its continued inspiration. Thus it is in this characterization of those whom Christ encounters during his Descent that the most crucial difference in the two authors' treatment of the Descensus theme is glimpsed.

Whilst it is true that the ideas of evil and Death are inextricably related in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, since both are
opposed to God who is goodness and life, it seems that the fact that the Odist conceives of Christ's Descent primarily in terms of a battle with Death, whereas the biblical author sees it chiefly as an encounter with evil, is significant. Admittedly, there are elements of the struggle against evil in the Odes. At Ode 33:4, for example, the Corruptor, who is Death, is implicitly identified as the Evil One. Similarly, in I Peter, the thought of the meeting with Death is not entirely absent, since at 5:8 the Devil is depicted in Death's leonine form. Nevertheless, the concern with sin is clearly secondary for the Odist, just as the interest in Death is evidently subordinate for the author of the epistle.

Why then this disparity, and what does it reveal of the differing circumstances surrounding the composition of the two works? The purpose of the epistle is indicated by the writer himself at 5:12, and it has frequently been suggested that it is a message sent to the churches of Asia Minor who were experiencing the first violent shockwaves of legal persecution. Its aim is to reassure the Christians of the truth of their faith and to sustain them in all its moral demands. Only from 4:12 onwards does the author speak in terms of a persecution that is actually raging, but the possibility of being called to suffer for righteousness' sake heaves into view throughout the letter. Up to this point, the problem of suffering is not the central theme, though it is certainly raised in relation to the general exposition of the nature and significance of the Christian life. It may therefore be argued that the body of the book is a baptismal sermon, delivered at a time when the storm clouds of persecution were already gathering over the heads of the Asian Christians, who would need to be encouraged to remain firm in their faith despite all the difficulties
apprating to their heathen environment. In this section of the epistle, the author enjoins on his readers patience, meekness and humility and the determination to persist in well-doing, whatever the cost. Its mood reassuringly breathes tranquility and peace, and its style and pace are deliberately measured.

However, none of this is found in the Odes whose atmosphere, on the contrary, is one of celebration, joy and effusive thanksgiving. The poet’s concern for the ethical implications of Christian faith is restricted to a single passage at Ode 20:5-6, but even here the thought is rapidly abandoned in favour of rejoicing at entry into Paradise, coronation and praise. Furthermore, nowhere in the collection does the term ἡττίον or any of its derivatives occur. It seems that the Odist’s Christian life is untroubled by the menace of persecution and he remains free to eulogize over his extraordinary felicity and its newness.

In the light of these entirely differing depictions of the Descent and the varied historical contexts in which the two authors worked, it is all the more remarkable that their development of this theme should follow such similar lines, as well as occupying the same central position in their respective arguments. In both works, Christ’s Descensus activity provides the pattern which is also mirrored by the believer in baptism.

It has already been suggested that the biblical author is primarily concerned with the moral consequences and practical application of Christian faith, thus by using the Descensus motif in combination with a reference to Christian baptism, he issues a statement of the doctrinal grounds from which righteousness proceeds and a reminder of the believers’ undertaking to it. Just as Christ died
for sins, and in his Descent announced condemnation to the spirits who inspire human sin, so in baptism the Christians replicate this with their own renunciation of Satan, for such was discovered to be the meaning of the phrase "a pledge to God to maintain a right attitude".

Given that the Descent is followed by a mention of Christ's resurrection, through which the believers are saved in baptism, the Christians can be confident of vindication even if they are called upon to suffer for their ethical behaviour. It is precisely this notion of undeserved suffering for righteousness' sake that forms the main theme of the passage in which the Descensus motif occurs in the epistle. Moreover, as there is clearly a connection between the demonic spirits and those who were persecuting the Church, the Descensus proclamation and subjection of the evil angels, which is echoed in the believers' sacramental pledge, assumes still more immediate significance. The thought is not so much of Christ as an example of meek and patient suffering to be followed, but of Christ establishing a new pattern of existence defined by righteousness and triumph in glory, in which the Christians share through their baptismal eperōtēma.

For the Odist, it is not what Christ says in his Descent that is mirrored by the believer in baptism, but what he does. Yet as in I Peter, the Descent in the Odes forms the soteriological basis on which the believer's own personal defeat of Death at baptism can be accomplished. It also sets up a pattern that is not only to be imitated in the rite, but marks a new existence for mankind where Death no longer has dominion. Just as the biblical author regards Christ's death and Descent as effecting a restoration of the relationship between men and God which had been interrupted by sin, so the poet considers the reconciliation to have been achieved through the
overthrow of Death. It must be acknowledged that he goes further than the writer of I Peter in his thought of mystical union with Christ and elevation of the believer to God's presence. However, there is no contradiction implied in asserting the centrality of the Descensus theme in the Odes, whilst at the same time suggesting that they be seen predominantly as the joyous outpourings of one who has found his Lord and enjoys a uniquely intimate relationship with him.

The Descensus theme is not so much critical to the Odist's argument, since his work is celebratory rather than hortatory in tone, but it is used to express what he perceives to be the one central, glorious truth of the Christian kerygma. This is that Death has been overcome by Christ and eternal life is assured. It was the celebration of this belief that so hallmarked early Christian literature and accounted for the rapid and successful dissemination of the Christian message. In deeming the effects of the Descent to be imitated, commemorated and celebrated at the time of every single baptism, the poet also ensures that the personal and abiding significance of that truth is communicated to each believer.

The final thoughts must remain with the Odes. This thematic approach to their study has been valuable and yielded a far greater understanding of their elusive nature than those which have been adopted previously. Although the questions concerning their original language, provenance and date of composition have not been addressed directly, certain tentative conclusions may be drawn regarding these matters from the evidence that has been presented. The paronomasia which features in the Descensus hymns would tend to plead in favour of Syriac as the original language, and the preponderance of thanatological imagery that is ultimately Canaanite lends support to
the claim for a Syrian provenance. Similarly, the detail in which the Descent is described, and the extent to which developed sacramental practices and beliefs are presupposed, indicate a date of composition well into the second century of the common era.

It further seems that a re-evaluation of Bernard's theory concerning the Odes, which was so roundly rejected at the time of its publication, is distinctly overdue. An examination of the rest of the collection with this in mind could well prove to be a fruitful line of enquiry, and signpost the way forward for the Odes from undeserved scholarly obscurity. The lack of hymnic material from the early Church has long been lamented, but with the opening of this route to the study of the Odes, their neglect is no longer justified.
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