

THE PRAYER AGAINST THE ENEMIES: A HERMENEUTICAL PROBLEM IN THE ORTHODOX EXEGESIS*

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Abstract. The paper discusses the reality of the prayer against the enemies in the OT, analyzing as a study case Ps. 109:6-19. The Patristic exegesis developed especially the prophetic and the allegoric interpretation, but failed to recognize the reality of the imprecations in the psalm, while the modern commentaries took into consideration the curses in their historical context. Nevertheless a group of commentaries tried to soften the brutality and assumed that vv. 6-19 quote the psalmist's accusers. Modern scholars vary regarding the reception of the psalm in the church, from rejecting to pray such curses to the total and literal reading. This aspect raises a serious question about the *authority* of the OT. Being primarily an archive of ancient texts, and not a corpus of laws, the OT seems not to have an authority in se, but depends on an external authority coming from the community. Therefore the Orthodox Christians should not use the historical meaning of the imprecatory psalms, but can read such imprecations assuming the Patristic interpretation.

Keywords: imprecatory psalms, curse, Ps. 109, biblical interpretation, Scripture authority

Recently the stunt journalist A.J. Jacobs made a yearlong experience to obey the Old Testament laws as strictly as possible, observing at the same time that such an effort cannot be accomplished by the modern readers.¹ Although written in a humorous style, his book could offer a real challenge to Christians who are trying to apply the Old Testament texts to their devotional life.

This paper aims to discuss the exegetical issues of Ps. 109 in the Orthodox Church, starting with the Patristic interpretation, but confronting it with the modern academic commentaries. This part might seem to the reader contrasting and

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¹ A.J. JACOBS, *The Year of Living Biblically: One Man's Humble Quest to Follow the Bible as Literally as Possible*, Simon & Schuster, New York etc., 2007, p. 245: "But if you read the Hebrew Bible literally, it's often not compassionate at all. Huge chunks of it seem downright barbaric. You've got slavery. An eye for an eye. Capital punishment for everything from adultery to checking your horoscope. God-approved genocide against the Canaanites. And sexism..."