

## RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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### ORTHODOX ESCHATOLOGY: UNDERSTANDING END OF HISTORY BY EASTERN EUROPEAN THEOLOGICAL TRADITION

**Abstract. The Purpose of the Study** on eschatology is to open the unknown parts of the Eastern European theology regarding the Apocalypse. It brings up unique features of the Orthodox Christianity and its ability to produce the “end of history” philosophy. **The Research Methodology** includes historical analysis, theological analysis, comparative and bibliographical methods which allowed to analyze the Orthodox eschatology within a paradigm of a multi-approach to understanding several ancient manuscripts as well as modern-era theories of understanding the Apocalypse. **The Scientific Novelty** of the article is based on analyzing the Eastern European eschatology along the lines of written and oral traditions, using the juxtaposition of medieval manuscripts on the matter with contemporary eschatological theories. Special attention is paid to the Kyivan Rus theological tradition which included several unique eschatological theories which were a product of the Ukrainian medieval culture, philosophy and ethics. Article is a basis for putting Orthodox eschatology into an intellectual league of philosophical theories within the “end of history” approach. **The Conclusions.** Using an analytical approach where medieval Ukrainian eschatology is put into a wider context of the Eastern European theory of Apocalypse, based on classical Bible studies, we defined the key features of understanding the “end of history” within the Orthodox theological tradition. This is done

*in descriptive terms, some of which are related to modern day developments, like Russia's war against Ukraine that started on February 24 or climate change.*

**Keywords:** *theology, Kyivan Rus, patristics, Orthodoxy, Apocalypse, eschatology, Kyiv Lavra, end of history, philosophy of religion, ethics, theory of sin, Ukraine.*

**Relevance of the topic.** Humankind seeks knowledge of itself. This is why our species seeks its origin though it has not been able to empirically define the missing link to our beginning. Humankind is a rational creature seeking facts and not willing to believe it could have been created by a supernatural being. Our species knows and understands that it is a mortal creature and that it will not avoid death. Thus, humankind seeks its beginning and also seeks the knowledge of its end. Knowledge of the beginning will most likely not give humankind the vision it seeks of how it finishes. The rational mind understands that it cannot really know how it will end and so much of it is devoted to how humanity originated while also understanding that all things have a beginning and an end. Science has not completely answered the question and metaphysical explanations do not necessarily satisfy the rational mind. Yet, individual mortality is a reality and hence, all of humankind may suffer the same fate at some point in time. This is why humankind is fascinated with eschatology as well as scientific predictions of the end. Science cannot definitively provide the information sought about humankind's beginning and so it is often not trusted to furnish the information about the end. Rational humankind understands that whether or not it is science or theology, the end of itself is just a prediction, a myth or a mystery beyond its ability to predict. This paper primarily focuses on Christian Eschatology and more specifically on Orthodox Christian Eschatology up to and including Kyivan Rus. Only canonical Scriptures accepted in the Orthodox Christian Bible will be referred to and explored in the article. Eschatological material from Kyivan Rus that is not canonical will also be cited for their historical context.

**Formulation of the problem.** The Pew Research Center states that Christianity is still the largest religious group on Earth making up almost a third of humanity at thirty-one percent of the world population. Christian eschatology is too broad a topic as there are now some forty-five thousand different Christian denominations in existence. Each with its own interpretations, dogmas and varying levels of ritual and belief. Many of these denominations have turned Christian eschatology into a cottage industry. Popular entertainment has also taken varying interpretations of Christian eschatology and turned it into comic books, movies, songs, fictional novels and many other means of entertainment. This is because of humankind's fascination with its possible end. However, in order to best understand Christian eschatology, it is best to return to its origin which is the Orthodox Church.

**Purpose of the article.** Specifically, this paper will deal with Eastern Orthodox Church eschatology that began in Constantinople and now holds the second largest number of adherents by denomination at approximately two hundred and twenty million only overshadowed by the Catholic Church at approximately one billion three hundred and forty-five million.

The origin is best because the sources are closest to the beginning before the information was filtered and diluted just as has been the fate of Christianity itself. Thus, before one can look at Orthodox Christian eschatology, an understanding of Judaic Eschatology must be explored since Judaism is the root of Christianity.

**Presentation of the topic.** *1. Judaic Eschatology.* Judaism provides the narrative for the story of the Beginning while also having its own prophetic visions of the End. Judaism and Christianity share the same Scriptures concerning the Beginning while Islam's as the third major monotheistic religion is not as definitive. Thus, the continuation of Judaic eschatology (Old Testament) through to Christian eschatology (New Testament) is the focus. One cannot not be understood without a basic understanding of the other.

Gerhard Von Rad posited that "the apocalyptic understanding of revelation is more closely akin to wisdom than to prophecy." This was taken from Von Rad's studies of the Old Testament and fits well with the theme of this paper where humankind seeks its origin through science. Wisdom is a key theme of the Old Testament as are its virtues. The Judaic mind is focused heavily on this wisdom and must be given credence if we are to understand or properly interpret the prophetic apocalyptic writings of both the Old and New Testaments.

The Book of Daniel is the foremost of the apocalyptic texts in the Old Testament. Thousands of opinions, papers and teachings exist on the interpretation of all apocalyptic writings of the Bible. Wisdom is required to not misinterpret the Scriptures. Mantic wisdom (dreams and mysteries) pervades the Book of Daniel and must not be confused with proverbial wisdom (wisdom of everyday life and man). Already, we see a paradox in that how can one obtain mantic wisdom? Proverbial wisdom may be in short supply, but it is attainable.

Mantic wisdom seems to be granted by God, the possessor of both wisdom and might. Does God then only grant mantic wisdom to the proverbial wise? How does humankind then determine those who profess mantic wisdom versus those that actually have it? Since Daniel is accepted by both Judaism and Christianity, then his mantic wisdom is thought to be legitimate by these faiths. Daniel's prophecies are dream-visions which humankind is left to interpret for itself. This is where the problem lies, trust in other humans. So humankind has for thousands of years of history been trying to apply proverbial wisdom to Daniel's mantic wisdom.

We see additional mantic wisdom in the Old Testament in Ezekiel, Isaiah, Zechariah and Baruch. Humankind which is searching for empirical evidence for everything, now is faced with accepting the mantic wisdom of the ancients. Many themes from the Old Testament on eschatology carry over to the New Testament and perhaps that is where some of the proverbial truth can be sought or at least a set of recurring themes.

In Daniel, we see the introduction of the terminology “The Son of Man” (Daniel 7: 13–14) which Jesus in the Gospels refers to Himself in this manner on multiple occasions. We also see themes of the resurrection in Daniel (12: 1–3) which also carry through to Ezra along with a judgement of the End (Ezra 7:33 and 7:102–115). These are just brief references to central themes which have been expounded on by multiple scholars and theologians.

Baruch seems to consummate the eschatological theme of the Old Testament with a focus on how the judgement is favorable only to those who follow the Jewish Law (Baruch 4:1–2). Jesus seems to refute this in the New Testament.

Eschatological themes and concepts run throughout the New Testament which followed with Jesus preaching how He came with a new law and that the Pharisees were more focused on the minutiae of the law rather than salvation. Jesus came to teach the faithful how to reach salvation. He fulfills part of Judaic eschatology, refutes other portions and sacrifices Himself and is then resurrected as a living example of the how all sinners may also find their own salvation. Yet, He does not completely fulfill an end of history but promises a Second Coming when the true End will come. Jesus then gives to John the Theologian a vision of the True End which makes Revelations the consummate work of eschatology.

2. *Revelations also known as The Apocalypse.* Revelations is most likely the most controversial book within the Holy Bible within the Christian tradition. *The Orthodox Study Bible* published by the Academic Community of St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology perhaps states it best from the Orthodox perspective in its introduction to Revelations:

“While seen as canonical and inspired by God, the Revelation is the only New Testament book not publicly read in the services of the Orthodox Church. This is partly because the book was only gradually accepted as canonical in many parts of Christendom. In addition, in the second and third centuries Revelation was widely twisted and sensationally misinterpreted, and the erroneous teachings brought troublesome confusion to Christians—a trend that continues to this day”.

The Orthodox Church may have its problems, but it has always taken a very cautious stance when it comes to all the Scriptures. Erroneous interpretations of other Scriptures have led to heresy and division. Non-canonical books attributed to writers associated with the canonical Scriptures have been revealed and caused further disruption of the Orthodox Church’s teaching. Of course, all worthy issues

and controversies are investigated and answered. The problem is that often these new ideas and writings are often taken up by those with a personal agenda or do not have the proper theological training.

A cautious approach to Revelation from its interpretation to admission into the official Christian Canon to the fact that even after two-thousand years of existence, the Orthodox Church does not include any readings of this “last” book of the Bible in any of its service, reveals just how controversial it has been since the beginning. Yet, humankind seeks knowledge about its seemingly inevitable end and the Book of Revelation seems to supply it in some form.

Allegory is rampant within all the Scriptures and that is why many study them for years under proper tutelage to just begin to understand them. The Orthodox Church warns the laity and the untrained to leave the interpretation to those who are properly trained. However, the natural curiosity of humankind seeks that knowledge to understand its end.

Revelations is also referred to as The Apocalypse and it is probably the most widely studied, quoted, emulated, and widely interpreted book of the Bible. This paper only deals with the Orthodox Church history as the only and earliest Christian Church up to the Great Schism of A.D. 1054. Authorship of the Book of Revelation is accepted by the Eastern Church to be that of Apostle John (St. John the Theologian) written from exile on the Isle of Patmos in A.D. 81–96. The cave where St. John wrote the book on the island of Patmos is still in existence and a Greek Orthodox monastery (The Monastery of Saint John the Theologian) established in AD 1088 is still active there. St. John is the only Apostle not to have suffered a martyr’s death as said by Jesus Christ in the Gospel of John who is also recognized by the Orthodox Church as the author of said Gospel. Thus, the Orthodox Church’s expertise and history seems to be a “safer” one to follow due to its Apostolic succession and experience in establishing the Christian Canons.

The Orthodox Church has recognized the dangers presented by misinterpretations of the Book of Revelations which is why very few commentaries or interpretations have ever been accepted and admitted by the Eastern Church. The Latin West accepted the Book of Revelation at the council of Carthage in A.D. 397, but it was not accepted by the Christian East until the council of Trullo in A.D. 692. The first commentary officially accepted by the Eastern Orthodox Church is a commentary from the 6<sup>th</sup> century by Andrew of Caesarea.

3. *Apocalypse Commentary of Andrew of Caesara.* Andrew of Caesarea (Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia) commentary on the Apocalypse (Book of Revelation) was preceded by one written by Oikumenios who was considered to be a Monophysite philosopher. Monophysitism is the belief that Jesus Christ is only of “one nature” whereas the official Orthodox belief is that Christ is both

“God” and “man”. The Fourth Ecumenical Council held in A.D. 451 condemned Monophysitism as heresy. Speculation is that Andrew’s commentary followed that of his predecessor because the former lacked proper religious knowledge and training. Also, Oikumenios may have been considered a heretic whose teachings and writings could not be accepted by the Eastern Church-at-large. Eventually, Andrew’s commentary would take precedence in the Christian East because of its references and basis on the Church Fathers (patristic). Dr. Eugenia Constantinou dates Andrew’s commentary to A.D. 611. This commentary has been the basis for Eastern Orthodox eschatological thought and belief for nearly fourteen centuries despite the fact that Andrew’s identity and his record of existence is obscure at best.

Pawel Dziadul states “Andrew’s commentary reveals the attitude to eschatology typical of the Eastern Christianity: paschal, pastoral, and liturgical elements prevail over the pessimistic, gloomy and apocalyptic ones” (Dziadul, 2014).

Andrew seemed to be motivated by historical events occurring in his time that were causing major disruption and threats against the dominance of Constantinople. This same attitude exists in the current War in Ukraine. A rise of the spirit versus sinking into the pit of despair and hopelessness. Eastern Orthodoxy from the Church Fathers through modern times always teaches that despair and hopelessness are sinful and come from the devil.

The dark times now facing humankind due to the War on Ukraine, mass shootings in the US, climate change and other disasters also are giving rise to speculation about the Anti-Christ and the apocalypse. This is dangerous territory even for the holiest of humans. Perhaps, a reading of Andrew’s Commentary for those who seek to understand is again in order nearly fourteen hundred and eleven years after its composition. Humanity seems to never learn from its past and rarely seems to consult history. If Andrew’s commentary is still the consummate work on the Revelation within the original church of Christ, then Christian believers who are seeking answers to these dark times might do well to study it. A more modern work based on Andrew’s Commentary on the Revelation may also be a worthwhile point of reference.

4. *The Apocalypse In the Teachings of Ancient Christianity by Archbishop Averky and Father Seraphim Rose*. This work is the only modern commentary since that of Andrew and has found some acceptance by the Eastern Orthodox Church. However, it is not accepted across all the various Autocephalous Orthodox Churches but primarily only within the Slavic Orthodox tradition. Furthermore, one must keep in mind that one of the modern foremost authorities on Andrew’s commentary, Dr. Constantinou states about Archbishops Averky’s and Father Seraphim’s work is “Without the complete commentary as a guide,

isolated passages from Andrew's commentary are translated and carelessly presented as Andrew's own opinion because Andrew often reported the opinions of others as alternative interpretations".

Brother Joh Damascene in writing his Preface to the above edition specifically mentions that Father Seraphim Rose truly believed that humanity was already living in apocalyptic times. Many highly regard the works and beliefs of Father Seraphim and his zeal, intellect and devotion to the Orthodox Church are unquestionable. Yet, Orthodox Christians are also taught to be especially cautious when listening to the works of men. The Divine Liturgy of the Orthodox Church in the Second Antiphon from Psalm 146 says "Put not your trust in princes, in sons of men in whom there is no salvation. When his breath departs, he returns to his earth; on that very day his plans perish". This is not to say that Archbishop Averky or Father Seraphim's intentions were to be ignored but that as the church teaches that "Man be the salt of the earth" and so modern Orthodox writers should also be taken with a "grain of salt".

Archbishop Averky was considered an expert on Patristic Thought who lived at times of great disruption in the 20<sup>th</sup> century from the rise of the Soviet state in his homelands through both World Wars and the Vietnam War in his new country. He is a renowned leader and teacher within modern Eastern Orthodoxy. Thus, we cannot completely discount his commentary as it is based thoroughly and completely on Andrew's commentary and Patristic Thought. Archbishop Averky also strongly states that he believed that humanity was living in apocalyptic times, and this must also be considered with some skepticism. Unfortunately, he did not complete the work and so Father Seraphim expounded on the original produced by the Archbishop.

Father Seraphim Rose is well respected within many Eastern Orthodox traditions in the United States and various branches of Slavic Orthodoxy. He is not without controversy, however. But who on this earth that questions modernism is not without controversy? Father Seraphim was also a highly dedicated monastic who based his studies and opinions on Patristic teaching.

Yet, Archbishop Averky writing in the mid-1970's clearly states in his Introduction that humanity is right at that time, humanity is truly living in apocalyptic times and that seeing the Book of Revelation as only allegorical is to be "spiritually blind". Most Eastern Orthodox experts and those who study patristics and theology would refute this statement especially now that fifty years have passed since they were written.

Several things need to be explained on why Archbishop Averky had this special interest for eschatology. In his early years, he was learning the spiritual sciences from Archbishop Serafim in Bulgaria who was trained in Orthodox eschatology. One of the authors of this article talked to followers of Serafim in

Moscow in 2004–2007, who knew his teachings from Rev. Vsevolod Shpiller, a popular Moscow priest and Serafim’s student. Those followers had their own, oral version of interpreting the Apocalypse writings, which wasn’t too significant in terms of quality of its theological vision, but nevertheless had an important idea: Apocalypse may be induced by certain actions. For instance, these followers believed that by pointing to these great sins of the modern civilization through a prayer may motivate God to send Jesus Christ on earth for the second time to conduct a final eschatological action. Such a prayer could be as simple as this: you mentally focus on a major sin that the civilization is committing and then repeat a verse from the Psalms like “Blessed be he that shall take and dash thy little children against the rock” (Psalms, 136:9). This, according to theology of Serafim’s followers, could bring Godly apocalyptic action against the sinful civilization into force. Analogous theology we may find within the line of St. Sergius Theological Institute in Paris, whose leader Fr. Sergiy Bulgakov would put a phrase “Come my Lord, come my Jesus” at the end of his writings, therefore requesting the Second Coming.

Besides this, Serafim’s theology of Apocalypse, which had a profound influence on Archbishop Averky, was based on a mathematics of grace. That meant, that when a power of grace in the worldly matters becomes too weak for the reason of too many sins committed through a course of living upon the Christian ethics – this creates grounds for eschatological expectations first and final apocalyptic events occurring and putting humanity into the stage of existential judgment by God and saints. We may see signs of this approach in a classical Orthodox prayer that a bishop says over a man who gets his priesthood consecration: “God’s holy grace which heals the weak and renews one’s emptiness with power...”. Mathematics of this theology is very simple: lack of grace should be renewed by spiritual life, prayers, Church activities and such.

Then, Archbishop Averky was also close to Metropolitan Lavr as both were leading the monastic life in St. Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, NY. Lavr learned a quite conservative version of the monastic theology from the monks of Pochayiv Lavra in western Ukraine and brought it with him to the U.S. for further preaching. This Pochayiv theological tradition is very unique and was accepted by the monastic community in Jordanville as a proper Orthodox teaching that would allow to reach the salvation. Moreover, Pochayiv Monastery has its own eschatological theology that still lives there and is quite popular with the believers. It’s quite precise and short, sometimes presented on two pages of a paper that monks just give away to folk walking on the streets of the Ukrainian cities. This theology is telling about the “digital concentration camp” which is the way the Anti-Christ will be building his nets of temptations during the latter-day period to make sure most people won’t survive the Apocalypse as Christians and will finally



be judged as sinners with all the following consequences, including suffering in hell.

Meanwhile, Father Seraphim in his “Translator’s Introduction” agrees that we live in apocalyptic times but then walks it back by stating “We should not be overly definite or overly narrow in our interpretations of these images and visions”. Further on he states, “With symbolic language it often happens that images have multiple meanings and levels of interpretation” (Taushev, Archbishop Averky and Rose, Father Seraphim, 1998). Father Seraphim ends his introduction with the wisest of words to all Christians “... and so we must read it with the fear of God, and with a humble distrust of our own wisdom”. Perhaps we should take it all with a grain of salt to avoid becoming a pillar of salt.

The year 2022 has brought a new reality to the world, especially in Ukraine and Europe. Those who are living the horrors can be expected to see the events before the eyes as the Apocalypse or at least its beginning. Humanity has survived worse in the past and may endure and survive even more brutal calamities in the future. Humankind, it seems, does not get to write its own end although it will certainly try. The War on Ukraine is taking place around the foundation of an ancient society established in Kyiv over fifteen hundred years ago. The rise and fall of Kyivan Rus also brought much speculation about the Apocalypse. A rich Orthodox tradition began in Kyiv and through it, the development of Orthodox eschatology in the Slavic world.

*5. Orthodox Eschatology of Kyivan Rus: origins and Influences.* Eschatology was once the most popular line of theology within the Christian spiritual tradition. During first five centuries of Church existence, dozens of theologians, some recognized as Church teachers and some not, produced a whole universe of texts describing what the Apocalypse could look like and why.

Any theory of eschatology usually involves these elements: theology of sin, description of hell, description of heaven, metaphysics of spiritual world and ethics of preventing the Apocalypse. So far there is only one recognized teacher of the generally accepted eschatology – and that is St. John the Theologian. But we have to admit, Christian theology has this principle of not letting any ideology monopolize a certain sector of Christian thought. This is why the Church remained open to new teachings on eschatology in the centuries coming immediately after the age of St. John.

Kyivan Rus, a medieval state of Slavs who resided on the shores of the Dniro river in what is now Ukraine, had its own version of eschatology and Apocalypse. This was a part of a classical Christian theology adapted to the needs of local population, that required theological arguments within their unique ethnic worldview and mentality, by clergy in Kyiv.

Local tribes in the Dnipro area managed to create a centralized government and a set of rule-producing institutions as early as 7<sup>th</sup> century AD, following two centuries of unrest after the collapse of the Roman empire which used to control these lands in 1-5<sup>th</sup> centuries. After the invasion of Mongolian tribes in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Kyivan Rus ceased to exist, eventually becoming a part of the Mongolian empire and later to join the Lithuanian Principality with a high degree of autonomy.

Christianity remained a rather unpopular religion up until the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Alternatives to Christian religion were much more popular in previous ages – local versions of pantheism, inherited from pre-Christian times and involving an old tradition of having faith in nature as God, and a unique religion of Slavs that produced a Greek-style theology of polytheism that had its mystical, ethical and societal elements and teachings.

In the 8<sup>th</sup> century the situation for Christianity in Kyivan Rus started vastly improving. An occasional visit by one of the Roman Church bishops, preaching of traveling monks, spread of Christian jewelry had their impact on the local population that had to accept that Christianity is a much more developed religious system, than many of the alternatives. One of the Latin bishops of early Medieval age brought the sacred head of St. Clement, bishop of Rome of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, to Kyiv and it still remains an artefact of the Kyiv Lavra collection. Recently, Ukrainian archeologists discovered there was a Christian mission of the Celtic Church operating in Ukraine approximate at this stage of historical development.

Prince Volodymyr of Kyiv, a Scandinavian ruler who was seeking a religious ideology for organizing a more sustainable political regime in then-Ukraine, invited a bishop from Constantinople in 988 to establish a classical ecclesiastical rule for this part of Europe. The Byzantium Church chose a monk to lead Kyivan Rus spiritually and gave him the traditional Ukrainian name, Myhailo. After receiving consecration, Myhailo arrived in Kyiv where he was eventually elevated to the rank of metropolitan.

Metropolitan Myhailo's contribution to the Ukrainian Church was very substantial, but with a focus on administrative policy – building new parishes and monasteries, producing new monks and priests, serving the political needs of Prince Volodymyr. Myhailo didn't have much time left to create an authentic Ukrainian theology and decided to delegate this mission to a person he had trust in.

He sent a young Ukrainian man, whom he tonsured to a monastic status with a name Antony, to Athos, also known as Holy Mountain Monastery, in what is now Greece. Myhailo explained Antony his mission: learn as much theology in Athos monasteries as possible and then come back to Kyiv to produce a number of texts for the needs of early Ukrainian Church.

None of the Ukrainian sources mentions how many years Antony spent in Greece, but the most likely he went through a classical 12-year course in theology that was a usual thing for Christian academies of that region in Europe. Such a course required producing a dissertation to be granted a theological degree. Athos had its own library with many of the original Christian writings of early ages, including various apocryphal texts of 1-5 centuries that involved a heavy degree of mixing Biblical plots with Neoplatonism theories.

After spending several years learning, the Greek language, Antony was guided by his Athos professors that he should pay attention to eschatology, a line of Christian thought that once was the most popular one, but gradually lost its influence on the European intellectual culture. This would let Antony do an original contribution into the Christian theology and bring some order to the Athos library – many manuscripts remained either unread or not properly assessed and analyzed, while Athos professors had this goal of creating a set of modern texts with comments on the ten previous ages of the development of Christian thought.

While preparing his dissertation, Antony paid a lot of attention to writings of St. John Chrysostom, early archbishop of Constantinople who was a very original teacher of theology. Being a native of Hellenism-age Syria, St. John included many models of religious thought in his writings: Neoplatonism, Zoroastrianism, pre-Islamic monotheism, leftovers of Egyptian monotheism, Middle Eastern religious folklore. All of this was interpreted by St. John Chrysostom in a Christian context along the logical line of the philosophy of religion that said: all the nations on earth were expecting nativity of Jesus Christ with their natural religious instincts, preparing their theologies to be adapted to the needs of Christianity. Moreover, some of the manuscripts that St. John had were signed with his name since they were anonymous. Probably, he also had access to what was left from the ancient Alexandria Library in Egypt.

Therefore, Antony inherited from St. John Chrysostom's writings some of the elements for creating a text on how Christian eschatology should look like in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Through Chrysostom, Antony absorbed a lot from other religious schools, mentioned above. After producing a dissertation on Christian eschatology, Antony gained a degree in theology and eventually came back to Kyiv where, not far away from the Dnipro River, he established a Greek-style monastery for men – Pechersk Lavra. According to the available Ukrainian sources, we don't see anyone mentioning that Antony had a priesthood rank, but it is probable that he did. It's highly unlikely that Athos didn't consecrate him into priesthood for producing a high-quality dissertation.

In Kyiv, Antony was joined by two local priests who wanted to live the monastic life – Nykin and Ilarion. While Nykin wasn't a monk at that time, Ilarion had been pursuing a life of spiritual solitude for many years already, inspired by

metropolitan Myhailo, a Greek bishop who came to rule the Kyiv diocese of Byzantium Church. Antony brought his dissertation on eschatology to Kyiv and wanted to spread it around for people to have some original Ukrainian theology and make their own ethical conclusions upon it.

However, after some considerations and living several years as a monastic leader in Kyiv, he decided he was too heavily influenced by Athos traditions, while Kyivan Rus needed more authentic theology produced by someone who understands the local realities much better than him. This is why Antony found a young Ukrainian man who looked promising in terms of his intellectual abilities and invited him to become a monk at Kyiv Lavra. Eventually this man was tonsured, received the monastic name of Theodosius and later was consecrated into priesthood.

Antony taught Theodosius Greek language and inspired him to become a theological writer. After Theodosius proved he was able of conducting sophisticated intellectual work and went through all kinds of monastic spiritual exercises, Antony asked him to take a look at his dissertation and write his own text or maybe several based on it. Antony obeyed his spiritual father and did the work.

This way three texts were prepared by him: “Journey of Theotokos through Hell”, “Journey of Apostle Paul through Hell” and “Glorification of Father Abraham”. Antony probably did the editing, allowing Theodosius to be creative in what he thought needed to be adapted to the Kyivan Rus culture. Later, St. Nestor the Historian added several episodes to the manuscripts, however focusing on secular features of the Kyivan Rus life. From his editing, we see evidence of how the economic ethics was explained to local business by the old Ukrainian Church. For instance, competition between the Kyiv entrepreneurs for getting access to clients was a grave sin, so if you had a client coming to you from another entrepreneur’s base and you sold him or her your goods, you committed a sin. We have German entrepreneurs doing commerce in Kyiv in 11<sup>th</sup> century mentioned in the later version of the manuscripts – and they were expected to obey the same business ethics.

These texts are mentioned by Ivan Franko, a professor of Lviv University, in his research on early Christian writing tradition of the Kyivan Rus (Franko, 1984). From the dissertation, produced on the matter by Jennie Zayachkowski for the University of Ottawa in 1988, we know that authorship of all three texts has been questioned many times (Zayachkowski, 1988).

Let’s go deeper into this. We have three basic facts – as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> century copies of these manuscripts travelled to the St. Sergius Lavra near the city of Moscow in then-Russia. In our earlier writings, we established that the Kyiv Lavra had its Christian mission there, helping St. Sergius to establish a monastery

in a much worse environment, since early medieval Russia was too heavy on local ethnic polytheism. Then, the manuscripts were spread around Eastern Europe and were very well accepted by the Churches of Bulgaria, Poland and Serbia, which provided spiritual guidance for all the Balkan region. Finally, these manuscripts get mentioned in 1604 as a part of the archives of St. Michael's Monastery in Kyiv. Their later fate remains uncertain.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Russian Church through a network of loyal intellectuals, who had access to magazines where they could publish their writings, did a lot to recognize these manuscripts as those which contradict classical Orthodox theology and are uncanonical. This was a general Russian line for downgrading the importance and impact of the Ukrainian intellectual culture, especially of the early ages, using administrative methods for this purpose. Besides, Russian Empire authorities wanted the Kyivan Rus to look like proto-Russia and not proto-Ukraine, which it was.

Now I'm going to assume based on research I've done in 2006-2022. For this research, I talked so several sources: grandson of Vasyl Lypkivsky, leader of Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church-1921 (UAOC-1921); Kyiv priests who shared with me monastic anecdotes of Kyiv Patriarchate monasteries of the 1990s; monks of Kyiv Lavra. Besides this, I collected as much evidence as I was able to about life of Kyiv Lavra in the 1920s and fate of monks who were forced to leave this monastery when it was closed in mid-1920s. Many of them moved to Georgia, where they were provided with an opportunity to live a monastic life under guidance of metropolitan Zenoviy Serafim (Mazhuga), a Ukrainian bishop of the Georgian Orthodox Church (Chesnokov, 2013).

Following is my fact-based historical reconstruction of what happened to the old Lavra manuscripts. After Russian Bolsheviks established a sustainable political and military rule over Kyiv in 1922, it became clear to local religious leaders that they shouldn't be expecting any mercy from the Vladimir Lenin's government.

Vasyl Lypkivsky, leader of the UAOC-1921 that was never officially recognized as a bishop and metropolitan for the unconventional way of his consecration at St. Sophia cathedral in Kyiv, had this idea that he should try to preserve as many icons, books, manuscripts from Kyiv diocese archives as he could. So, when he decided to send Ivan Teodorovych, UAOC-1921 archbishop, to America for a mission in 1924, he asked him to take some manuscripts from Kyiv Lavra with him. Otherwise, they might be destroyed by the Russian Bolshevik government in Kyiv. Those were late Lenin years when he introduced some sort of liberalism for policies in Ukraine and people were still able to travel abroad. Bolsheviks weren't able yet to introduce their own Border Guard Service

at a full scale yet, so crossing the Socialist Ukraine's border wasn't that hard back then.

This is how Teodorovych brought the Lavra manuscripts to America, where Jennie Zayachkowski got access to them at the University of Ottawa. Zayachkowski in her dissertation doesn't really mention how and when she saw the Lavra Manuscripts, making references to 19<sup>th</sup> century versions of these papers that were mentioned by Ivan Franko and Russian intellectuals. Somehow Oleksandr Biletsky, a Ukrainian literature theorist popular in the 1960s, also knew about the manuscripts and probably had access to them. Most likely, KGB assessed his profile and identified him as a intellectual loyal to the Communist Party and let him study the manuscripts that Ivan Franko had.

But let's pay attention to this: Zayachkowski was producing her dissertation in the late 1980s, when the USSR still existed, so she might be afraid to get the full story of the manuscripts out to avoid KGB agents in Canada or the U.S. stealing or destroying the Kyiv manuscripts or their earlier copies.

Another big question is why we don't see Metropolitan Ilarion (Ogienko), who was a leading Ukrainian bishop in Canada in 1950–70s and wrote a great deal on the history of the Ukrainian Church, producing any comments on the Kyiv Lavra manuscripts. Of course, we might assume he did those comments, but they weren't published yet, though this is unlikely. The reason might be this: manuscripts remained classified information in pre-Gorbachev era and Metropolitan Ilarion couldn't get access to them.

Now, the final question – why we believe the Kyiv Lavra manuscripts were prepared by St. Theodosius as a leading author. First: the early Lavra had a really minimal number of monks, where only St. Antony and St. Theodosius were educated to a degree that they were able to produce a highly original and intellectually sophisticated theological writings. Second: we know St. Theodosius was a vicar for Kyiv monasteries and in the manuscript, we see signs of complaints about the low morality level in some monasteries, especially those, where women were had their monastic life. Third: on ancient icons of St. Antony and St. Theodosius, we see them holding pieces of paper with their writing. According to the traditions of symbolism of the Orthodox art, this means they were authors of original theology.

*Kyiv-style Theory of Eschatology.* The following is the explanation of Kyiv eschatology based on three manuscripts mentioned above: “Journey of Theotokos through Hell”, “Journey of Apostle Paul through Hell” and “Glorification of Father Abraham”.

Kyiv theologians have always paid a lot of attention to Theotokos theology, and this became an important feature of the Ukrainian Orthodox culture. In 2006, I had a chance to see the original Vyshgorod icon of Holy Mother, produced

during the early age of Kyivan Rus, in an art gallery in Moscow. It represents a set of symbols which stand for substantiating the lines of metaphysical divisions that exist between earthly life, heaven and hell. Later, Kyiv-inspired theology of St. Spirit and St. Sophia did a successful attempt to explain these lines and even connect them to a philosophy of somewhat pantheistic, but still relevant Christian teaching on God's presence in the worldly matters.

Most likely, "Glorification of Father Abraham" is the earliest text in this three-partite set of manuscripts, however it was written when the author already had all the ideas in place that would later be described in "Journey of Theotokos through Hell" and "Journey of Apostle Paul through Hell". Let us explain the logic for why this text was created earlier than the others.

The author needed to provide theological grounds for why questioning God on the nature of hell is a perfectly Christian idea which doesn't contradict neither Old, nor New Testament. Father Abraham put these types of questions to God and we know this from the Bible (Guillet, 1960). Therefore, by using the theological genre of glorification, the writer in Kyiv obtains a legal and moral right to use the case of Abraham for producing his own set of theological ideas based on that case.

This method allowed the writer to produce both, "Journey of Theotokos through Hell" and "Journey of Apostle Paul through Hell". They're somewhat similar in their vision of Christian eschatology and we think it would be better to focus on "Journey of Theotokos through Hell", since this text has a higher priority due to a special status of the Holy Mother in Orthodox theology.

The plot of this manuscript is based on the original Kyiv theology of "disagreeing with God". It has some grounds in the Old Testament, but Kyiv monks adapted this theology to New Testament rules, principles and ideas. The logic of "disagreeing with God" is based on Holy Mother's right to question God's will for the purpose of saving the sinners, where those are men or women.

In the manuscript, the Theotokos asks God to show her hell and Archangel Michael conducts this mission. After seeing an enormous suffering that sinners have in hell and hearing their post-mortem prayers, Holy Mother takes up a role of an advocate for people who committed sins and asks God to grant mercy at least to some of these people. In a response, God explains there are no reasons to have mercy on these sinners, since they did a lot of horrible things during their earthly lives. When the Holy Mother insists on her request, God says there's at least one thing that may not be ever changed: eternal punishment of Jews who crucified Jesus Christ. Theotokos accepts this and prays for some easing to all the other sinners. After some consideration, God decides to grant the sinners the ability to see light in hell in a period from Easter to Pentecost. Before that decision, all the sinners in hell were cut off any opportunity to see the light.

Athos on how to not be disturbed by other people's sins, St. Theodosius and others didn't have such a type of spiritual exercises. As a young man who took the monastic vows and never got married, it was a great temptation for St. Theodosius to learn that some nuns in Kyiv probably had sexual affairs – and this might have an impact on his thinking back then. However, we think this is rather a minor impact that was softened by St. Antony's editing.

Second, Kyiv Lavra monks had a feeling of being spiritually and intellectually superior to all the people around. After many of Ukrainians ignored the Christian teachings in early Kyivan Rus age, the monks became snobbish and behaved in a way to show the great degree of intellectual advantage over lay people. St. Antony clearly saw this was a problem and this is what he did. While editing St. Theodosius's text, he emphasized two arguments made by Theotokos: don't think, if you're living a Christian life and even doing the theology studies, that you're not responsible for saving people around; don't focus on making sinners look stupid, help them instead. Then, to prevent intellectual snobbism among the Kyiv monks, St. Antony offered them to write their theology, while focusing on the audience of theologians like themselves. This was a hard decision for St. Antony, since metropolitan Myhailo tasked him with producing popular theology for laity, but probably if that argument wouldn't have been made, Lavra monks would produce many more writings which would have an aggressive style about judging people's sins.

Eschatology was an extremely important line for the Ukrainian medieval theology as it provided a good intellectual opportunity to create highly original texts that would have an impact on Kyivan Rus historical development. By being radical, it contributed to the purification of Ukrainian Christianity and its ability to survive the intellectual challenges of further eras. By being an existential attempt to face the life and death question, this theology gave Kyiv reasons to become an important center of Christian culture and, later, create a whole tradition of high-quality religious literature. Finally, Kyivan Rus eschatology gave grounds to this special type of Ukrainian mentality where virtues of going through suffering and pain for saving other people's lives are critically important ethical values.

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