

The Second Coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ Expressed in the Hymnographic Christian Thinking

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Abstract: The eschatological condition of Christianity calls for living - within the historical framework - a longing after God, which goes beyond the limits of the ephemeral existence. The eschatological longing after the eternal things is planted in each of us, because man is a being with a thirst for eternity, for the infinite. Pondering over the divine things and accomplishing the will of God call for a sharpening of the eschatological conscience and its authentic use. The eschatological dimension of the Church, included in all its liturgical books, does not designate a virtuality, but expresses a reality, that of the experience of “already, but not yet”; it is the reality and the actuality of the liturgical eschatology, in which, what was once, or what is going to be and will come to pass is already happening in the realm of the ecclesial and missionary sanctity. The issue of Parousia comes first in Orthodox theology. Parousia crowns all God’s deeds within His plan, His Holy will into the world. It is like a new creation of a state of eternal happiness for those who believed in God’s word and protected God’s word. It is the time, the very moment that all the righteous of all times were waiting and longing for, soothed in their suffering for heavens. It is the very moment when this stage will come to an end, while heaven and earth will be renewed for ever. It is the very moment when all who died into Christ will come back to life, when everyone will be judged, when sinners will be punished and righteous will be blessed.

Keywords: *Christian thinking; hymnography; liturgical books; eschatology.*

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1. Introduction

The Orthodox spirituality distinguishes itself by allowing a wide range for the eschatological experience in historical life. The Church has never encouraged apocalyptic speculations. It has always blamed chronological calculations, predictions or millenarist threats spread by various fatalist sects. It never allowed eschatological hope to be confused with apocalyptic terrorism or temporal, historical messianism. One can also approach the issue of Christian life paradox, involving the inevitable tension between the worldly existence and the denial or non-belonging to this world. The teaching concerning the after life or eschatology was developed as part of the doctrine about God's will, comprising God's creation, incarnation, redemption, sanctification and the review of the entire creation into Christ, by His second glorified Coming to earth.

Our entire cult, by means of the religious service performed everyday, has an eschatological component, by the symbolism of liturgical acts, and particularly by means of the texts in the liturgical books.

The nocturnal service, by the act of waking up, is similar to our resurrection from the dead, and makes us think of the final judgment, when God will come for the second time, unannounced, at midnight, like the Bridegroom in the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 26, 6), and the sound of the semantron at midnight was associated with the angels' trumpet at the end of time.

During each holy Service we already live moments of the eschatology, and by the urge of the litany of supplications: 'Let us ask for a positive answer to Christ's terrible judgment', while believers answer 'Give us, our Lord', which means that we should all think at the terrible moment of our judgment day after day, when we are to stand before Christ and answer for the way we lived our lives, and at the same time, praying God to have mercy on us and protect us with His Grace and angels of light.

2. Problem statement

Parousia of our God is one of the fundamental truths of the Christian Church, stated by the Holy Bible (2015) and the Holy Tradition and confessed by all the Symbols of Faith of our Church. Parousia designates a second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, as it is stated in the symbol of Faith: "And He will come again with all His glory, to judge both the living and the dead..." (art. 8). After God's Ascension to heaven, the messianic kingdom will take the form of the Church, having a hierarchical organization, having a crowd of worshipers and leaders, having an unseen

leader, our Lord Jesus Christ, animated by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and having as means of consecration the Holy Sacraments. Similar to the messianic kingdom at the beginning, the Church activates among believers stating the transformation of their lives and will land in the eternal and glorified kingdom that will begin at the same time as Parousia. The meaning of Christ's second coming was to instate the Kingdom of Heaven, just that it could not be made on entirely, and our Lord Jesus Christ had promised to instate this in His eternal and glorified kingdom at His second coming, when the Redeemer will show Himself as everybody's Emperor and Judge.

The published literature does not explore the issue of Parousia in the orthodox liturgical books, although this is important as hymnography has always been an authentic source of Christian teaching.

3. Research questions

For a better understanding of the issue approached, the study aims at answering the following questions:

- Which are the hymnographic texts identified in the liturgical books and referring to Parousia?
- How much do they weigh compared to the other hymnographic eschatological texts?
- Which is the Orthodox teaching regarding the Second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ?

4. Purpose of the study

The present study aims at synthesizing in the issue approached, the hymnographic compositions in the orthodox liturgical books, as well as the conception of the Eastern spirituality referring to eschatology and the importance and signs of Parousia. As some of us mistakenly interpret the scripture texts regarding Parousia, the present study aims at explaining and set a chronological order of texts and scripture references in the light of the authentic Christian teaching of our Holy Parents kept untainted by the Church.

5. Research methods

To discover the extent to which hymnographic texts in the orthodox liturgical books comprise teachings of the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, I underwent a quantitative, exploratory research of the orthodox liturgical books (Missal, Euchologion - including servants, ordinances and prayers by priest from various necessities of Christians' life, Aghiasmatar,

Great Octoechos - Resurrection service comprising eight voices, Triodion - including church services on Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee to the Holy Resurrection, Pentecostarion, Horologion, Menaion during the months of: January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November and December; Arhieraticon, Acatistier, Catavasier, Panihida). Based on the dogmatic Eastern teaching I substantiated the issue of Parousia, by a chronological research and ordering scripture texts regarding the Second coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ, founded on the teaching of our Holy Parents and the Holy Tradition of the Orthodox Church.

6. Results

Although nobody knows when the Judgment Day will be, Our Lord Jesus Christ, by encouraging the righteous and enlightening sinners, was willing to show signs of the Second Coming, of the end of the world and of the judgment day approach. In the physical world we will witness: hunger, earthquakes, plague, terrible natural phenomena and various Heavenly signs (Matthew 24, 7). In the moral world we will witness people's suffering and despair, out of their fear and prediction of something bad that will come into the world (Matthew 24, 21). Faith will be so weak among people that when the Son of God will come on earth, He will barely find any faith (Luke 18, 8). Mutual relationships among people will deteriorate and the love of many of us will grow cold (Matthew 24, 12); hatred, treason (Matthew 24, 11) and excessive feud will appear among the closest relatives (Marcus 13, 12). "Who will be able to endure, Christ, the threat of Your terrible Coming? Then, the sky will be torn apart just like paper in the wind and stars will fall; all creatures will be shaken with fear and light will change." ("Molitfelnic", 2002: 286-287)

By the signs of times one can understand, according to the verse of Mathew 16, 3: "You can judge the face of Heaven but you cannot understand the signs of time?", the desire to be able to understand our God Jesus Christ, Christians have already admitted and accepted the Redeemer's first signs, but now we must seek for other types of signs, the signs of Christ's Second Coming. These signs are shown in several places of the Bible (2015), especially in chapter 24 of the Bible according to Matthew. The Holy Apostles, after their discussion with Jesus Christ, started to think of the end of the world and asked our Lord: "Tell us when all these will come and which one is the sign of your coming and of the end of time?" (v. 3).

One of the signs mentioned by Jesus is that of preaching the Bible (2015) to all the people of the world, a fact that has taken place for two thousand years; still there are people that have never heard of Christ or the Bible (2015): “And this Gospel of His kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come” (Matthew 24, 14). By the phrase “The Gospel of His Kingdom” one must actually understand that it belongs to the kingdom the Son of God will create on earth, when He will come into the world. This Kingdom comes from God and He aims at bringing the human kind towards God by means of the Gospel and the Holy Sacraments. That is why it is called both “The Gospel of His Kingdom” and the ‘Gospel of Salvation.’ (Mircea, 1986: 915).

Our Savior announced the arrival of the false gods, a phenomenon which is noticed in the history of the Church, those who denied Jesus and pretended to be God or Christ: “See to it that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, claiming: I am the Christ, and many of you will be deceived by them.” (Mathew 24, 4-5)

“And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you do not get alarmed. Such things must happen but the end is still to come. Nations will rise against nations and kingdom against kingdom and there will be hunger and plague and earthquakes in various places. But all these will be the beginning of suffering.” (Mathew 24, 6-8); all these happened from the very beginning of Christian era and are still happening today, but, as our Savior Jesus Christ says, they only represent the beginning of suffering.

But a sign which nobody can deny and a painful one is this: “and because crime will flourish, the love of many will grow cold” (Mathew 24, 12). This is not a typical phenomenon as love is a specific sign of the Christians, the love they share for each other: “Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13, 34-35). This seems to be a distinguishing feature of our times as consumerism and secularism are more and more present in a post modernistic society, that has no values and depreciates values, and the phrase of love growing cold can be understood by what we call nihilism in our days. People commit crimes and hurt others driven by the pleasure to cause suffering.

“For then there will be great affliction, such as has not taken place since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will take place again” (Matthew 24, 21). This will certainly be a turning point, of great challenges for God’s disciples, for the Christians still faithful to Christ, challenges and suffering that have never occurred since the beginning of time and will never occur again. “And talking about the escape on Saturday and in winter, the

Teacher speaks wisely about the disturbance of the present time and of the seventh century, which will bring about the winter of the end.” (“Triod”, 2000: 556).

“And as soon as the trouble of those days will come to an end, the sun will be darkened and the moon will stop giving light, and the stars will fall from the sky and the powers in heavens will be shaken” (Matthew 24, 29); then the whole creation will be destroyed in order to be recreated, through new heavens and new earth, a new creation. “Fall down, all you faithful ones and weep before that judgment, when the sky will perish, the stars will fall, and the earth will be shaken; so that at the end we can find a merciful God of our parents.” (“Triod”, 2000: 556).

The same is shown by Saint Peter at Pentecost, when talking to the people in Jerusalem and marking the signs to prepare the way for Christ’s Second Coming: “and I will show wonders in heavens above and signs on earth below: blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will become dark and the moon will turn blood red, before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.” (Facts 2, 19-20). And again Saint Peter says: “and the day of the Lord will come like a thief and the heavens will disappear with a roar, the heavenly bodies will burn up and be destroyed and the earth and everything in it will vanish” (2 Peter 3, 10).

And after all these signs, there will be a last sign announcing the Judge’s Glorified Coming, to judge the living and the dead, Whose Kingdom shall have no end (acc. art. 7 of the Creed): “At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in Heaven and there will be deep mourning among all the peoples of the earth. And they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with great power and glory. And He will send out His angels, with a loud trumpet call and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heavens to the other.” (Matthew 24, 30-31). The Holy Cross, which is the sign of the Son of Man, will be there for this great event in the history of mankind redemption, showing the entire living world that Jesus, the Crucified, is the Christ, the Redeemer of mankind, and the one many of them are unable to acknowledge.

Our Lord Jesus Christ brings another important fact to the attention of Christians, and according to this they shall understand the times showing His coming, and the moral decay of people: “For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark. And they were oblivious until the flood came and swept them all away. So will be the coming of the Son of Man” (Matthew 24, 38-39). “As Jesus explained that His coming will be

unannounced, He spoke of the unthinkable damage that once took place, in Noah's days." ("Triod", 2000: 565).

Saint Paul wrote the following to the Thessalonians: "By the word of the Lord, we tell you that we, who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not meet Him ahead of those who have died. For the Lord Himself will descend with a loud command with the voice of an archangel from heaven and with the trumpet of God and the dead in Christ will be the first to rise. And only then, it is time for us, the ones still alive, still remaining, we will be taken with them to heaven, to welcome our Lord in heaven and for ever we will be with our Lord (1 Thessalonians 4, 15-17)." ("Molitfelnic", 2002: 232). „When we come in fear, with Your unspeakable glory to judge all of us, be king, Lord and let us welcome You, Our Redeemer, with great joy, in heavens, as we are Your faithful servants, taken from earth." ("Penticostar", 1999 : 302). "The one to come again in order to judge everyone with righteousness, allow me to welcome You in heavens, as You are my Judge and my Creator, together with all your saints." ("Liturghier", 2012: 338).

Another sign accompanying the ones mentioned above is that showed by God to the Apostle of all Peoples, that is the conversion to Christ of the people of Israel, which will be similar to „a rise from the dead" (Romans 11, 15, 26). To convert the people of Israel, two witness prophets of the Lord will have to come, and, according to the words of our Holy Parents, they are Elijah and Enoch, who "did not taste death until then, as they were taken to heavens, and after preaching to Israel for 1260 days, they will be killed by the beast, that will start a war with them" (The Apocalypse 11, 3, 7). And working with Satan-the dragon, the antichrist-beast and the false prophet 'they will „raise for the war of the great day the emperors of the entire world against the faithful ones, for the day of God's anger" (The Apocalypse 16, 13-14). "Rejoice as at the end of time great signs will be shown by You and wonderful miracles will happen to encourage people in their true faith, to fight against the antichrist enemy; Rejoice, Elijah, great prophet and Forerunner of the Second coming of Christ!" ("Acatistier", 1994: 593).

And then "the man of crime, the son of perdition, born in lust, the enemy will appear, and he will oppose and exalt himself above every so called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God" (2 Thessalonians 3-4). He will appear at the end of time, before the coming of God, and he is no other but the beast in the Apocalypse, the antichrist (Mircea, 1986: 916).

Saint John Golden Mouth (Chrysostom) refers to the person of the antichrist “he will not turn the world to worship idols, but he will oppose God, he will reject all gods and ask the world to worship him, instead of God and he will be seated in the temple of God” (Kuraev, 2005: 103).

Another important sign will be that many of us will lose their faith, the general apostasy: “Let no one in any way deceive you, for the day of God will not come unless the apostasy comes first and the man of crime, the son of perdition is revealed.” (2 Thessalonians 2, 3). Apostasy is the result of the actions of the antichrist, shortly after killing the two great witness prophets.

But, after the great war, Armageddon, the antichrist will be killed by Jesus Christ with “the breath of His mouth and destroy him by the splendor of His coming” (2 Thessalonians 2, 8). For the antichrist it is impossible to coexist with God, he is not like God, in other words he is unable to see His genuine Glory (Santi, 2018: 45). “Watch the fig and learn, soul, about the end, that when the fig is young with fresh leaves and bearing fruit, soon after the time of harvest comes and when you see all these, know that He is by the door.” (“Triod”, 2000: 557).

After all these signs and pains, the Parousia of God will take place, through the clouds serving as a throne for the Great Judge, Our Lord Jesus Christ, through the crowd of angels and the trumpet sound at the command of Michael the Archangel, and through the changes of nature that will turn this event into a great one, a powerful one but also a fearful one. The trumpet will tell the world not only of the victorious arrival of Christ, but also of the call for the dead to come to life; it is the sign of the victory of life over death (Constantinescu, 1975: 339). We need to understand that man’s life on this earth is short and getting shorter day by day. Yet, the future life has no end. As the soul goes over the threshold of death, so he will enter eternity, at the end of ages (Santi, 2018: 40).

“Like a fading flower and a passing dream is the life of man but when the trumpet will sound again, all the dead, as shaken by an earthquake, will rise to welcome You, Christ, Our Lord. And then, Lord, put those moved away from us in the places of Your Saints, pardoning their mistakes, Redeemer.” (“Penticostar”, 1999: 310).

But all these signs seem insufficient to satisfy the curiosity of those who want to know the time when Jesus will come back. It seems that this ambiguity of signs related to the end of the world is based on two reasons: the first is to create a state of vigilance to help us be permanently prepared for the coming of Christ and for the final judgment: “Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day, nor the hour when the Son of Man will come.”

(Matthew 25, 13). “Who can know Your Father, if not You? Or who can, but You, know the day or the hour? As You, Christ, Our Lord, are the keeper of all the stores of wisdom.” (“Triod”, 2000: 557).

Thinking that the coming of our Lord is close, we become motivated to prepare ourselves to welcome the Truth, by turning towards the truth, while the second reason founding the ambiguity related to the signs of the end of time is represented by trial. Not knowing the hour when Christ will come must not stop Christians from deep reflection on the course of historical events and from noticing the signs of the last day approach (Frazier, 2007: 468). The contemplation of such mysterious and profound issues, as it is the Second Coming of Christ and the Kingdom of Heavens, demands spiritual insight and one can reach such a state only by cleaning one’s mind. Only the one enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit can hope to search their accomplishment in Christ, without useless speculations and dreams of fantasy. Only those who cleaned their hearts by fast and prayer can be enlightened to be able to understand the course of historical events. But not even they can know the day or the hour of Christ’s coming. The one thing we can do is be grateful for the gifts we have received and leave the rest to God.

„May the God of peace bless you completely, and may you keep your entire spirit and soul untouched, for the Coming of Our Lord, Jesus Christ” (“Molitfelnic”, 2002: 164). Therefore, according to the Orthodox teachings, the end of the world will not actually take place at the end of time, it will only be an end of its present shape, which is incomplete, opaque, thickened by the sin and its effects and, through a process of transfiguration, it will turn harmonious, transparent, filled with the breath of the Holy Spirit and bathing in the light of God. The present life of the world is nothing but a way towards accomplishment, towards the final purpose of existence and its entire meaning. Similar to the man who conceives his life on earth as a way to prepare for the after life, mankind, on the whole, runs its way towards a new sky and a new earth.

7. Conclusions

After a retrospective of the texts in the liturgical books regarding the orthodox teaching about eschatology, one can emphasize the essential features of Eastern spirituality and faith. The orthodox Christian has always started the way to redemption from the idea that his good deeds are the result of a synergist action, of the combination of his deed and God. For this reason, the texts regarding the moment of death are present in almost all the

church religious services, with the purpose of raising the Christians' conscience to the unannounced coming of the moment of death, for which we must be prepared at all times: "Watch, therefore, as you know neither the day, nor the hour when the Son of Man shall come" (Matthew 25, 13). Hymnographic compositions referring to the damnation of the soul after death and the place of hell are often met, Christian hymnographers wishing to illustrate as clearly as possible the fearful state of damnation, to make Christians conscious of their sinful condition, thus setting the beginning of their redemption by meditation and remorse for their sins. Therefore, there are many texts regarding the memorial of the dead (120 texts), the saints' martyrdom (37 texts), and, generally speaking, all that is related to death (over 240 texts), proving the development and importance of the cult of the dead for Eastern Christians, the close connection between the ones that are gone from this world and the ones remaining, between the Fighting Church and the Triumphant Church. Christian hymnographers did not ignore issues referring to the Private and Universal Judgment (approximately 180 texts), the person of the Supreme Judge (55 texts), Parousia (81 texts), the resurrection of the dead (36 texts) and eternal life (heaven - 84 texts and hell- 210 texts). Summing up the liturgical texts in the Orthodox liturgical books regarding Christian eschatology used our days in our church; one can come to a number of over 1120 texts. As a conclusion, these texts in the liturgical books (23 liturgical books were studied) are a theology in verse, expressing divine mysteries and truths, accessible for believers, a priceless treasure of Orthodoxy, representing Christian hymnographic art. The role of liturgical texts is laetetical, charismatic, pedagogic or catechetical, and esthetical, that is to embellish the religious services together with the church songs, but at the same time it is a public confession of faith in Christ and His Church (Santi, 2012).

After studying Christian hymnographic texts, one can notice, that by a systematic start from the orthodox dogmatic texts regarding cosmology, anthropology, christology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, soteriology and eschatology, our Saint Parents and Christian hymnographers composed texts having in mind the characteristic features of Eastern spirituality, and its specific virtues, such as modesty, love, faith, hope, patience, kindness etc., virtues that are necessary to attain redemption. From the very beginning of writing liturgical texts, the saint authors, in their compositions regarding eschatological events were guided by biblical texts, such as "Watch, therefore, as you know neither the day, nor the hour when the Son of Man shall come" (Matthew 25, 13) and 'and of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father' (Matthew

24, 36), without emphasizing in the liturgical songs ideas referring to the second coming of (9 liturgical texts), but only texts based, particularly, on the end of man and not the end of the world, typical for our orthodox Spirituality and Tradition.

Both spirituality and theology emphasize the creation of a strong and genuine relation with God, by living or feeling, by man's climbing towards accomplishment, towards resemblance with his Creator. The orthodox Christian is encouraged to discover God and to build a relationship based on genuine love, which does not give much importance to cold and dry knowledge of certain ideas and issues related to the supernatural and apocalyptic.

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