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Summary

PhD Thesis

*Eschatological highlights in the New Testament revelation.
Missionary Perspective*

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Contents

Introduction	3
I. Eschatological Doctrinaire Aspects in Orthodox Theology	4
II. Eschatological Landmarks in Non-Christian Religions	7
III. Eschatology in the Contemporary Scientific Paradigm. Fundamental Landmarks 9	
IV. Eschatological Challenges Regarding the Orthodox Mission	12
V. Remedies and Orthodox missionary solutions to combat eschatological challenges 15	
Conclusions	16
Selective Bibliography	19

Introduction

The death of man and afterlife has always represented an important concern for man, as far back as the old times and until nowadays. From the Orthodox point of view, the moment of death does not equal the moment of the disappearance of the human being, but the abolition of life or non-existence. Life continues after death, certainly under another form. By death, the body returns to the ground from which it was made and the soul returns to God (Ecclesiastes 12:7) in order to receive the reward for the deeds done in this life. The human soul continues to exist in the place established for judgement awaiting the Doomsday.

Parusia, or the *Second Coming of Jesus Christ* is meant to judge the living and the dead, as well as to hand over to the Father the Kingdom, achieving the beginning of eternal kingdom. This Christian teaching is fundamental, wherefore, the Holy Fathers in the second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 381 felt the need to mention in the Christian Creed: "He is coming again in His glory to judge the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end." Parusia also bears various names such as the coming or arrival, revelation, kingdom or revelation of greatness, discovery of the kingdom, discovery of greatness or the Day of the Son of man.

The moment when Parusia shall occur is not known even to the angels in heaven, but only God the Father knows this. Nevertheless, the Holy Scripture specifies several signs that could be precursory of the universal judgement.

Preaching the Gospel to all the nations on earth is one of these signs. Preaching has been done for thousands of years, but even after two thousand years have passed there are still peoples who did not hear about Christ the Saviour and about the Gospel, and other peoples, especially isolated tribes, are still unknown until the present moment. Another important sign is the conversion to Christianity of the people of Israel, whose conversion shall be as "resurrection from the dead" according to the word of Saint Paul.

Both the Saviour and the disciples speak about many false "christs" and prophets and false teachers, who shall emerge and shall be clearly against the Church. However, it is also spoken about one who shall be powerful and shall have the most influence. This was named the man of wickedness, the son of perdition, the adversary, who shall rise above all that is God, or who shall be honoured with idolatry, so that he shall stay in the temple of God, proclaiming himself god. He shall appear before the Coming of God and is no one other than the "beast" in the Apocalypse.

Parusia, meaning the end of the worldly aspect, shall also mark the beginning of what is to come, of eternity, when on this renewed earth, the "eternal kingdom" of Christ shall be ushered,

which He shall then hand over to the Father when the “kingdom of grace” shall be turned into the “kingdom of glory”.

This Orthodox teaching regarding the eschatology has been attacked since the age of the primary church when the eschatological feeling was present amongst Christians and, due to the fact that the teaching was not fully completed, several heresies appeared regarding the ending of the world, the most important being chiliasm. Only that nowadays, this heresy acquired new forms being presented in all Advent heresies which daily attack the teaching and spirituality of the Church. The need and actuality of the theme proposed derive from the fact that the Church’s mission is to continuously fight and prevent such heresies and doctrines foreign to the Divine Revelation.

I. Eschatological Doctrinaire Aspects in Orthodox Theology

The Orthodox Christian teaching regarding eschatology contains the faith truths of divine revelation with regard to those last stages and events of earthly life, especially about: death, heaven and hell, the Second Coming of Christ, resurrection of the dead, congregational (universal) judgement, eternal life.

The last things of the world and of man are, on the one hand, the end of all forms of existence and life which are characteristic to this earthly life, forms which are known from experience and religious living, and on the other hand are the beginning of the human existence different from the earthly one which is not known to us humans with the help of observation and experience, but only with help of Divine Revelation. Afterlife, which is the life in the continuation of the one in here, is different than the life in here. Although it is completely different than the earthly one, the afterlife is in a causal connection with the one in here. This is because the life in here is preparatory for the afterlife, and that one, the afterlife in relation with the earthly one is, regarding its happy or unhappy content, as a consequence or better said as an effect of earthly life, for each man in particular, according to the manner in which he/she has lived here in compliance with the order of the good desired by God or against this order, more or less. The rightful Judge of each man, both immediately after death, and in the congregational judgement, is Christ the Saviour, the Embodied Logos: “He (Christ) is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead” (Acts of the Apostles 10:42), because “The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgement to the Son” (John 5:22), in the godlike judgement also introducing “every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:14), all appearing “before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Divine Revelation shows aspects regarding the beginning of our world here (Hebrews 11:3), but also about the ending of our current world, as much as the divine wisdom decided to be useful to be known for the human life and its consummation. Thus, we can state that the ending of the world represents a certainty, but without someone, apart from God, knowing when (Matthew 24:35; Corinthians 7:31).

Another essential event which falls under the heading of eschatology shall be, by the godlike almightiness, the resurrection of the dead¹. This event refers to the fact that the souls of all men and women who have gone in the afterlife, separating themselves through death of their bodies, shall reunite with the bodies that they had had in this life, and like this shall await the universal judgement, remaining like this, united, after the universal judgement for all eternity.

At the same time, the resurrection of the dead also expresses the truth that, actually, only the man's body shall resurrect, because the soul is immortal and that death is the separation of the soul from the body with whom it had lived on earth, tragic event in the human destiny, being the decay of the human being into the elements from which it was made upon creation and throughout its life in here. Thus, the resurrection of the dead is the regenesiis into a new form of existence² and for all eternity of the living unit of man created with the face and the likeness of God.

The resurrection of the dead represents a deed of almightiness and of divine justice. Taking into consideration the fact that in his earthly life he lived and activated with the soul and body, inseparable, it is normal that in the end both the soul and the body shall be rewarded or punished. If it were not like this, meaning if only one of the component elements of the human nature, either the soul or the body, would receive different from one another the blessing or the punishment appropriate for the deeds done on earth, then, the godlike almightiness would be touched, which would be inconceivable, being about the judgement of God, who cannot contradict Himself working in one manner according to the almightiness and in another manner according to justice.

The moment of the Parusia of God is known only by God, even if the in the Holy scripture there are several signs mentioned which shall signal the closeness of the Parusia of God, such as: the preaching of the Gospel worldwide (Matthew 24:14), the conversion to Christianity of the Jewish people (Hosea 3:5; Rom. 11, 25-26), the emergence of Antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4:8; 1 John 2:18), signs on the sky and earthquakes, persecutions, rebellions and wars, hunger and plague, false prophets (Matthew 24:4-12; Mark 13:7-13; Lucas 21:9-16), departure from faith, from the true teaching (2 Timothy 4:3-4), great human sins (2 Timothy 3:1-5), but these have always been

¹ See Saint John Chrysostom, *On the Resurrection of the Dead*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, Bucharest, 1943

² *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, editat de John Anthony McGuckin, Union Theological Seminary, New York, 2010, p. 136

throughout history and again in the Holy Scripture it is stated that these “Such things must happen, but the end is still to come...”, but “the beginning of sorrows” (Matthew 24:6-8). It is self-explanatory that all these shall happen before the Parusia of God, without being able to determine neither their duration nor their succession and nor the time between these and the Second Coming of the Lord.

Unfortunately, this teaching had led to the emergence of many false prophets, erroneously interpreting the words of the Holy Scripture, which were separated from the rightfully confessing Church and who spread many heresies who pretend they can know the exact date of the Coming of Messiah, actually cheating or deceiving the ones who are unsettled or with a precarious religious training. Therefore, we must carefully follow the commandment given to the Apostles by the Saviour: “Take heed that no man deceive you” (Matthew 24:4; Mark 13:5) and we shall maintain the rightful path of Christian life, moving forward without deviation from the rightful faith, in terms of cult and morals, according to the teaching of our Worshipping Church, being permanently led by its eternally living Leader, Jesus Christ, and assisted by the Holy Ghost always coefficient with it, through which is and shall always remain “the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth” (1 Tim. 3, 15).

In all the writings of the New Testament the faith that through Christ our Saviour, God has entered into the history of man is expressed. Thus, we can state that eternity entered into time and the history of man entered its last stage, the eschatological one. The desire to describe this new situation was actually not easy because the human language, characterised by relativity as every human experience is, easily revealed its inherent limits. The eschatological perspective brought by the Son of God revealed the shortcomings and the limits of the human language, forcing Christian writers to find new means of expression. Future tense which is specific to the eschatological language was replaced, but without being removed, by the present tense in an attempt to prove that for those who believe in Christ, history has already entered the last stage and the end of history has begun.³. Certainly, the future tense specific to the eschatological language did not disappear, as in the New Testament books it is spoken about an end of history, history which did not cease when the Son of God was embodied.⁴. Eschatology was initiated by the coming of Jesus and is a consummation process, but the achievement and conclusion of this process is still subjected to the future.

The theme of eschatology plays a prominent role in the teachings of the New Testament. Christianity, from its own origin, has an eschatological nature. This derives from the fact that the teaching is based on the coming of Messiah and the inauguration of His work; and from the point of

³ C. Kingsley Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John. An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1978, p. 68

⁴ Nicole Chibici-Revneanu, “The hour comes and now is here”(In. 4:23; 5:25). The Eschatological meaning of the johannine wpa”, in *Sacra Scripta*, no. 1, 2008, p. 73

view of the Old Testament, these events are part of the eschatology. It is very true that in the Hebrew theology, the days for the coming of Messiah had not always been included in the actual eschatological era, but were often considered as being an introduction into the eschatological times⁵.

Eschatology represents a special theme of the teaching of the Orthodox Church, constituting a fundamental part of the entire content of the revealed faith truths. In the content of the Orthodox teaching, eschatology does not represent a simple chapter of Dogmatics located at the ending of the treaty or the textbook, but it is necessary that the entire Orthodox theology be situated in an eschatological pattern. As we have seen, eschatology is the theological teaching regarding the last things that shall happen, respectively the last moment of creation. The Orthodox Christianity has a complete eschatological doctrine, as for Christians, especially for the contemporary ones who are confronted with various challenges coming from the laic area, the eschatological area or the afterlife, does not represent something which shall occur in the future, but it started in and through Christ who resurrected from the dead. Due to the fact that Christ stays with the ones who believe in Him in an intimate and living connection through the impartation with His Body and Blood, for the contemporary Christian afterlife has already begun here on earth. Thus, this meeting and communion with Christ shall not remain only as an eschatological faith which shall occur in the future, but entails the faith of a genuine presence of Christ in each Christian, in a not yet consummated manner on earth and fully consummated in eternity. Hence the overwhelming importance of the eschatological faith for the life and mission of the contemporary man.

II. Eschatological Landmarks in Non-Christian Religions

The Christian tradition has inherited the faith in the resurrection of the dead in the Old Testament, where we find several important texts on this topic. Most of them highlight the important role of the body in the resurrection, which is generally described as a reunion of the soul with the body.

In the Old Testament, one of the most admirable confessions regarding the faith in the resurrection of the dead was represented by the episode of the martyrdom of the seven Hebrew brothers and of the mother in the Second Book of the Maccabees. In order to not violate Moise's lawm the seven brothers refused to subject to the order to the king and eat pork. For this deed of insubordination, they were condemned to death. One of them told the king: "You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws" (2 Maccabees 7:9). And when another brother

⁵ Louis Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology*, Behrman House, Millburn, NJ, 1973, p. 271

was ordered to extend his hands in order to be cut, he extended them and “stated with dignity: I have received these limbs from heaven, and I give them up for the sake of God’s laws. But I hope to recover them from God again” (2 Maccabees 7:11). Another brother said right before he gave his last breath: “It is better, being put to death by men, to look for hope from God, to be raised up again by him: for, as to thee thou shalt have no resurrection unto life” (2 Maccabees 7:14). The mother of the seven brothers, who was to die the last, encouraged her sons towards martyrdom, telling them: I do not know how your life began in my womb, she would say, I was not the one who gave you life and breath and put together each part of your body. It was God who did it, God who created the universe, the human race, and all that exists. He is merciful and he will give you back life and breath again, because you love his laws more than you love yourself” (2 Maccabees 7:22-23). The words of the martyrs and of their mother indicate that even in the pre-Christian times there was amongst the sons of Israel a faith in the Doomsday. Moreover, it is presented in the Book of the Ecclesiastes: You who are young, be happy while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart [...], but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgement” (Ecclesiastes 11:9).

On the other hand, another monotheistic religion, Islam, teaches that life on this earth represents nothing but a test and that it is transitory. Moreover, Islam teaches that there is a reward and a punishment, that there is another life after this one and the reward or the punishment are not necessarily kept for the Doomsday, as one or the other starts immediately after death and the soul leaves the body. Islam also believes in resurrection, in human responsibility which determines the status of the soul after death and on the Day of the Final Judgement. The image of Koranic eschatology is represented by the joys that man can have in heaven if he had had a life dedicated to Allah or the punishments of hell that the heathens shall live.

The eschatology of Pantheist religions is translated through a transformation of the world, a cyclicity of it taking into account that especially all traditional Buddhist cults have adhered to a vision of the world constituted by an endless cosmology, known under the name of samsara. In Hinduism and Jainism, we can find a vision on the paradoxical world: more pessimistic and more optimistic at the same time, as, although they believe that we are living in the final ages, these ages shall be concluded soon.

In Roman and Greek polytheist ancestral religions an especially important chapter is constituted by the doctrine on the communication of man with the real gods compared with a bliss which represents only a pre-taste of the joy that shall be felt after death when the soul, ascending into heavenly worlds, shall penetrate all their secrets. The transitory exaltation, which enlightens man’s intelligence here on earth, is a prefiguration of the joy that shall be inoculated in him by the

immediate perspective of the stars and the complete understanding of the truth. The most idealistic concerns of salvation in this world are only a weak sketch of the blessing that shall be perfected in the life to come.

Thus, the astral mysticism based on a psychological experience, help towards building a complete doctrine of immortality. This has glorified the idealism of earthly life and projected him in the afterlife. These ideas, as they have spread throughout the entire Roman world, did not manage to profoundly modify the entire concept of man's destiny.

III. Eschatology in the Contemporary Scientific Paradigm. Fundamental Landmarks

Science represents a field of systematic knowledge difficult to define, representing one of the main activities of human mind. From this point of view, it resembles religion, art or philosophy very much. In Latin, *scientia* means *knowledge*⁶, but, in nowadays' sense, it represents only *a certain type of knowledge*. Science has three stages: *guided observation* which leads to the *classification* of knowledge; and from classification we reach, by deduction, to *general laws*, which can further be applied to new phenomena, either not generated, or generated in an experimental manner. If the laws established as such do not apply to the new observations or experiments, or lead to errors, then the law is modified according to the new experience. Science is an endless research, "which must meet the general accord of experts"⁷.

As science advances in the understanding of the world in terms of the fact that God instituted in man an understanding of things that he tends to attribute to himself as a quality independently obtained, more fragile and more false our image about the world proves to be, and matter itself more delusive, seeming rather an expression of thought, as Christian French philosophers state: matter is studied. From a Christian point of view, we doubt things are as such. Except that, firstly, it was studied by God and only then, by imitation and gift, it was also studied by man.

Cosmological researches of modern science established that the universe or the cosmos would have a certain weight, but this theory did not correspond almost at all with physical laws as over 80% of the universe matter does not exist, which would necessarily lead to the disappearance of the world. The stars, the suns, the cosmic dust that we can see, with our naked eye or with the most sophisticated devices, did not explain almost at all the phenomenon of universal balance, our galaxy

⁶ *Historical Dictionary of Medieval Philosophy and Theology*, edited by Stephen F. Brown, Juan Carlos Flores, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, 2018, p. 284

⁷ Gary Edmond, *Expertise in Regulation and Law*, Routledge, London, 2017, p. 16

and the other galaxies being maintained into existence. An overwhelming percentage of the matter was missing. Scientists, in order to give themselves an explanation, invented the term of *dark matter*, meaning something invisible, not noticeable, which intervened in order to supply to the cosmos the gravitational force necessary for the purpose of building the huge structures of its existence (but which represent only 10-12% of the matter necessary for the balance). Certainly, contemporary scientists have a strictly materialistic thinking which does not take into account the existence of a providence divinity and cannot extend outside its patterns. For this purpose, various theories regarding the end of the world have been issued, one of them being the one of matter towards anti-matter resulting in a catastrophic clash, where everything shall disappear, only pure energy remaining. However, the Holy Scripture speaks very clearly about the end of the world: “But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgement and perdition of ungodly men. But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:7-10).

After the material world shall end, there shall be a “new sky” and a “new earth”, that contemporary scientists do not infer, due to their spiritual blindness, but that the Christian teaching knows through God’s revelation and through faith.

The gradual discoveries of the last centuries regarding the huge sizes of the universe gave birth to the theory that we are part of a cosmos that is shrinking in terms of space and time. The intensity of the universe suggests a huge future, which automatically raises the question, from a scientific point of view, whether humanity shall resist this long future. Regarding the Christian theology, it involves the need for vocalizing doctrines regarding the Second Coming, of the end of the world and of a renewal of creation in the context of contemporary cosmology, but not in the sense of modifying these teachings, but rather in the sense of thoroughness. The subject of the future of the universe has been frequently approached in the scientific environment in the last decades⁸. Physical eschatology, after it reluctantly emerged as a branch of cosmology itself, has significantly changed recently, while interdisciplinary thinking about eschatology is still in an incipient stage. The dialogue between science and Christian eschatology is marked by a “surprising lack of commitment”⁹, although in the last years one can notice certain significant contributions in the still rare literature

⁸ Milan Cirkovic, “A Resource Letter on Physical Eschatology”, in *American Journal of Physics*, no. 71(2), 2003, pp. 122-133

⁹ Robert John Russell, *Cosmology from Alpha to Omega*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2008, p. 302

about it. Humanistic schools, in turn, have started to get involved, the work of philosopher J. Leslie being a remarkable exception¹⁰.

This lack of involvement can, of course, be owed simply to certain important epistemic barriers: the future simply does not subject to scientific research as it usually studies the previous evolution of the cosmos and humanity. This is reinforced by natural sciences - including Logic and Mathematics - which have concerns further than the Laplacian concept of cosmos as being completely predictable. Moreover, certain cosmogonic theories which see the world as essentially being unchanges are completely different than the new theories which speak of an “open universe”¹¹ which evolves in time.

The challenge for such a dialogue between the physical and theological eschatology is double, on the one hand, the idea of space-time ampleness which does not suggest, at first glance, that the end of humankind shall coincide with the end of the universe, and, on the other other, that the law of thermodynamics states that any living aware organism is subjected to the decay process. The words of English physician Paul Charles William Davies lined up his theory regarding the end of the world with the Christian one “if there is a purpose to the universe and it achieves that purpose, then the universe must end, for its continuous existence would be gratuitous and pointless”¹².

A part of the difficulty of the dialogue between the scientific and the theological eschatology consists in the fact that we are working with two “epistemic manners”, meaning the ones of the prediction based on natural laws, and prediction also entails limits, on the other hand, the faith in the things promised by the Son of God, and the two cannot be compared or weighed directly against one another. Firstly, if the *caeteris paribus* assumption - according to which the universe shall be in the future governed by the same laws as now, and consequently, we can surely extrapolate based on these laws - shall be embraced or rather challenged, either by the scientific part (for instance, through the emerging optimism, reference to the provisory nature of scientific knowledge or to more exotic scenarios in the physical eschatology), or by the theological approach.

Many times we find that we are to a great extent ignorant regarding the future, even though we have much information at our disposal, especially in the context of Christian eschatology, hence, an “awakening” for this purpose if absolutely necessary. For the purpose of the relationship between the scientific and the theological eschatology, the scenarios of physical eschatology are generally divided in those who believe that the future is infinite or the end of the world shall be in the distant future and the ones who present various types of theories, stating that eschatology shall be achieved in a more imminent future. In both cases, we are talking about a limitation of scientific knowledge as

¹⁰ vezi John Leslie, *The End of the World*, Routledge, London, 1998

¹¹ Vezi Karl Popper, *The Open Universe: An Argument for Indeterminism*, Rowman and Littlefield, Totowa, 1982

¹² Paul Charles William Davies, *The Last Three Minutes*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1994, p. 155

theories are based on the current level of knowledge and by the subsequent discoveries of the humankind, one can conclude the fact that it began from erroneous premises in the formulation of one or the other of the scientific eschatological theories.

Physical eschatology falsifies theological eschatology. The most interesting point of view that I found was the one of Bertrand Russell: “Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system.”¹³

Similarly, scientific predictions about the future of the universe have led Steven Weinberg to the conclusion that “the more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless”¹⁴. Such arguments regarding cosmic “desperation” are usually based on a combination of reductionism, together with the thermodynamic perspective of the destruction by heat, having as fundamentals three ideas: 1. life, consciousness and the entire area of the significance and values are reduced to physics, relying on complex structure of matter; 2. this complex matter is forced to disintegrate, as thermodynamics states; 3. the universe cannot truly have a meaning.

IV. Eschatological Challenges Regarding the Orthodox Mission

Christian eschatology has its role and place in the teaching of the Church of Christ. Its importance is undeniable, as proof there is the existence of a faith article in the Nicene-Constantinople creed symbol which refers strictly to the Orthodox eschatological teaching ““I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.”

Therefore, eschatology is very important also due to the close connection with the Christian soteriology. In other words, the resurrection of the bodies of the dead, God’s Parusia, the congregational judgement and the institution of God’s Kingdom are quasi-concomitant events. However, on this dimension there are serious Advent heresies, which speculate, manipulate and terrify the naive, the gullible, the ones with little faith and with little training amongst us. Amongst all Advent themes, by far the most dangerous one is the one connected to the end of the world.

The teaching and mission of the Orthodox Church is to competently answer, based on God’s Revelation, to a challenge arising from the occult sphere of Romanian society, disseminated without

¹³ Bertrand Russell, “A free man’s worship”, in *Mysticism and Logic, and Other Essays*, Allen Unwin, London, 1963, p. 41

¹⁴ Steven Weinberg, *The First Three Minutes: A Modern View of the Origin of the Universe*, Basic Books, New York, 2015, pp. 154-155

thinking, so that the impact is an extremely powerful one, especially for the ones who are outside the Orthodox Church or the ones who are religiously indifferent inside it. It is about the known year 2000 as the end of the world! The data regarding this event are supplied to us by many Neo-religious movements within which we can find almost all the component parts of a false occult-sectarian religiosity advocated by the New-Age movement, we find fundamental aberrant assumptions with scientific pretences and most importantly, we face an impressive occult and pseudo-scientific syncretism regarding the end of time and what is to come from a magical-religious point of view (it is about the Non-Christian pseudo-religiosity of the old and current days).

Advent heresies regarding the end of the world are an integral part of anti-Christian and anti-ecclesiastic heresies with which the Church was confronted and which it shall confront until the End of times. The danger of heresy was high from the point of view of persecution, because: “a persecuted idea is reinforced, but a falsified idea is corrupted, is deformed, is compromised and buried, while the danger of persecution is fleeting, of the heresy is permanent as Christianity itself for heresy is the shadow of the truth and it continuously follows it as an unsuccessful imitation.”¹⁵

In this context, Pr. Prof. Dumitru Radu, PhD, highlights the importance of maintaining the rightful faith as an efficient means of defending and preventing the heresy: “Preserving the rightful faith entails the real and supported belonging of the Christian in the Church and in everything occurring in the Church for the Church as a sacramental community of faith of people with God and for its members. Hence, both knowledge and thoroughness and the right application of the godlike truth contained in the Scripture, as well as this truth being preserved by the Christians, can only occur inside the Church and together with the ones who are the treasurers of the sacraments of God, meaning with the bishops and the priests of the Church”¹⁶.

All the false prophets whom Christ the Saviour mentioned, those “bad wolves” about which Saint Apostle Paul recalled, the “false teachers” about whom Saint Apostle Peter spoke and the “anti-christs” about whom Saint Apostle John speaks, are “heretics”, meaning that all these “Christians” digressed - knowingly or unknowingly - from the healthy and genuine teachings of religion and of the Church of Christ”¹⁷. Prof. Teodor M. Popescu states that for the Apostles and for the Holy Parents, heresy is not only the incapacity to know the truth, but also the incapacity to do good: “the heretic, not knowing and not confessing the truth of faith does not act as a Christian, but as a false, pharisaic and sinful person.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Pr. Gheorghe Petraru, *Ortodoxie și prozelitism*, Editura Trinitas, Iași, 2000, p. 349

¹⁶ Pr. Prof. Dumitru Dumitru Radu, *Păstrarea dreptei credințe, condiție pentru mântuire*, în *Ortodoxia*, nro 1, 1990, p. 13

¹⁷ Pr. Prof. Ilarion Felea, *Ereticii și răătăcirile lor doctrinare*, Editura România creștină, Bucharest, 1999, p. 21

¹⁸ Prof. Dumitru Teodor M. Popescu, *Privire asupra schismelor, ereziilor și sectelor*, Editura România Creștină, Bucharest, 1999, p. 349

Although 2000 has passed, Advent unrest, either Neo-Protestant or occult sectarian, have not decreased, on the contrary, they have exacerbated, adding new eschatological milestones.

The erroneous doctrines regarding eschatology found in denominations with an Advent origin are very much based on the chiliast heresy still present in the primary church. Classical chiliasm emerged against a background of Judaic and heathen persecutions on the Christian Church in the primary church. The chiliast heresy was influenced by the concept of the “eternal return”¹⁹, from the periods of the Judaic exile. “Modern” millenarianism is an update of chiliasm, on the other hand, it has its origins in the “uncertainty of societies and in the religious instability which give rise to discontents and social conflicts which also refer to religious psychology on the one hand; on the other hand, the phantasmal interpretation of the texts of exile prophets and apocryphal writings, in conjunction with the Apocalypse, create and maintain the religious psychosis manifested through gullibility and the disturbance of the mind, through millenarianism theories and calculations”²⁰.

From the point of view of the Scripture, millenarianists (or milleniasts) count very much on Apocalypse 20, a text that they interpret literally. However, if we were to approach the literal interpretation of this text, we should position ourselves in contradiction with the other texts of the Holy Scripture. Therefore, it must be stated that the Apocalypse, being a prophetic book, cannot be interpreted literally and especially those texts that would position themselves in contradiction with other clear texts of the Holy Scripture, or with the teaching of the Holy Scripture seen as a whole²¹.

Eschatology within New Age movements is central to the idea of millenarianism, as being an imminent event, all their attention being focused on this event. Therefore, it is normal to view the Movement from the point of view of millenarianist scholars. In the eschatological doctrine of the New Age movement it is said about the Apocalypse, the Christhood and chiliasm (approximately synonymous with millenarism), as distinct analytical concepts, but their limits are emphasized, most of the times the fact simply do not accomodate their compartments. However, it is difficult to specify, to emphasize the relative difference between apocalypticism and millenarianism.²² In a strictly apocalyptic vision, the new world shall come as a catastrophe for what already exists, and shall replace the order of the current world, through a different, transcending order. The dream for millenarists is that of perfection, of an earth surrounded by peace and satiation, without inequity

¹⁹ Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, OR, 2003, p. 191

²⁰ Deac. Prof. Dumitru Petre.I. David, *Invazia sectelor*, vol. I, Editura Crist-1, Bucharest, 1997, p. 390

²¹ Prof. N. Chițescu, Pr. Prof. I. Todoran, Pr. Prof. I. Petreună, *Teologia Dogmatică și Simbolică*, Editura Renașterea, Cluj-Napoca, 2005, p. 316

²² Barbara Potrata, *New Age, Socialism, and other Millenarianisms. Affirming and Struggling with (Post)socialism*, in *Religion, State & Society* magazine, vol. 32, no. December 4th, 2004, p. 384.

and injustice. On the other hand, the vision of apocalypics, takes into account the world that shall disappear so that it can be replaced by a different one.

V. Remedies and Orthodox missionary solutions to combat eschatological challenges

In the missionary activity of the Church methods, remedies and solutions for the purpose of fighting erroneous conceptions regarding eschatology are used, such as journals, symposiums, radio and TV shows, websites, social networks and e-mails. By these means, the Church's mission aims at increasing the degree of addressability, contact with certain segments of society that do not have a large acceptance towards the Church, as well as a higher visibility amongst Christians. Christian-Orthodox mass-media, very developed nowadays due to an acceptance and a very articulated program at the level of the Romanian Orthodox Church Patriarchate, offers the possibility of knowing church life and teaching, both for the churchgoers and for the ones outside it, within the limits of Christian expression, without a commercial purpose and with the clear intention to advertise to as large a number of persons as possible.

There are very many publications, at the level of each eparchy, bulletins, magazines, almanacs that are useful for Christians and efficient means for the Church's mission. Moreover, highly important are the two mass-media means, Trinitas radio and television, as well as Basilica news portal. Both the Romanian Patriarchate and each Episcopacy, own highly important official websites as means through which the Church has increased its mission possibilities.

When people are not entirely discredited by certain anti-Christians in nowadays society, the target of disproofs is represented by the Western culture inherited from Antiquity: Israel, Greece, Rome and Byzantium. Nowadays, certain means of expression of neo-western and heathen societies are excessively promoted, things that are found even in university lectures, but which are spreading much more with the help of technology and the Internet. The real and rightful inheritance of Christianity (its past, culture and civilisation) are forgotten through sin, while important things belonging to heathen societies are in the pipeline. Thus, doctrines that are foreign from the Church's teaching regarding the creation and end of the world are beginning to be found at every turn.

Unfortunately, the important achievements of Western civilisation are considered worn-out in comparison to other cultures, especially the Eastern ones. The trust into the Judaic-Christian civilisation was replaced by the faith according to which one can speak about moral, artistic and religious equivalence in all cultures, regardless of the manner of behaviour, of what they generate, of the manner in which they treat people. In many areas, it has come to conclusion that Eastern and

Western Christianity are inferior to all the other cultures. This point of view has reduced sociology and anthropology, similarly to literature and history, to simple political and ideological assertions in the atheist company of de-Christianizing the Western culture and of subjecting it to a social engineering guided by a powerful secular and desecrated state.

Contemporary society is marked by an incredible inflation of language, especially the one belonging to mass-media and advertising, a language of artificial promoted needs (rarely expressions of an essential desire), affectation of the discourse, political language barrenness, vaguely esoteric abstractions of economical peroration which sees economy as an idol and as destiny, endless search for “communication” in the unreal and in the language crisis. Thus, hope in the word awakening, freedom, revelation is increasing. On the one hand, language is a noise and word is a modulation of silence, and on the other hand faith lives in the word and dies in language. Genuine word is a vivid, mysterious and communicable one to the ones who want to listen to it.

however, for the Church it represented something positive as it was challenged and determined to create and to invent its own mass-media means. “Trinitas” broadcasting station, “Lumina” daily newspaper and “Trinitas TV”, works created with the blessing and under the careful supervision of His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel.

Conclusions

The teaching regarding eschatology is based on the divine revelation contained both in the Old Testament, and especially in the New Testament as Christ our Saviour, in His speeches to the Jewish people, He has many references regarding to the end of the world and to God’s judgement. Apart from the Saviour’s preachings, the Apostles in some their writings developed the teaching about eschatology, being known that the Christians of the primary Church were expecting a Second Coming of God to arrive soon, even during their life. From this perspective, we conclude that the Revelation of the New Testament truly represents the foundations of the teaching regarding eschatology as it is found in the Orthodox Theology.

Eschatology was initiated through the Embodiment of the Son of God, but is consummated in God’s Parusia. Being Orthodox means living Christianity to the fullest, hence, Orthodox eschatology is first and foremost one of experience. The participation of the Orthodox Christian in the life of God is done through the consummation of divine grace through the Holy Sacraments and through the mystical experience of the Christian. There is no difference between the two manners of living as the same Holy Ghost works in both experiences in order to achieve the likeness of God.

We have seen that the book of Apocalypse is very important for Orthodox eschatology taking into account its prophetic nature. In the book one can find many elements regarding eschatology which have a great importance for the Church's teaching, especially for that part of Dogmatics, "God, the Judge". We can say that apocalypse completes all aspects regarding the end of the world, of universal judgment and Parusia, aspects found both in the four Gospels and in the books of Apostles in the New Testament.

We must not forget that the teaching about the resurrection of the dead is also present in the Old Testament as a training and a preamble for what Christ the Saviour would reveal to the Apostles and the Jewish people. From this point of view, the Old Testament had also represented a genuine guide towards Christ.

Another monotheistic religion, Islam, has a more materialistic vision when speaking about eternal life and the rewards that it shall have for those who believe in Allah. We have seen that Islam teaches that there is a reward for the good persons and a punishment for the bad ones, that there is another life after this one and the reward or the punishment are not necessarily kept for the Doomsday, as they begin right after death when the soul leaves the body. Koranic eschatology speaks about the joys that man can have in heaven if he had had a life dedicated to Allah but also about the punishments of hell that the heathens shall live, the ones who did not convert to Islam. The eschatology of Eastern religions is far from the Orthodox one as it discusses about a cyclicity of the world and about an endless cosmology (samsara).

Sects that have an Advent nature consider that the eschatological events shall carry out in three stages. The first stage, as we have already seen, is identified with the beginning of the millennium kingdom. The second stage shall know the events characteristic for this millenarianist kingdom, that, in the opinion of certain Advents shall be carried out in the sky, where all the saints shall judge the ones who did not believe in God and who have done bad deeds, while the earth shall not be inhabited. Other Advents state that on earth there shall be a millennium kingdom, where Jesus Christ shall rule together with the just who shall enjoy complete bodily happiness. In the last stage, the events occurring at the end of the millennium shall happen, when the remission of Satan shall occur, bad people shall be brought before God and the Universal Judgement shall take place. In the case of the teaching on eschatology, as is the case of many such misinterpreted teachings, Advent denominations have used certain biblical texts from which they created a doctrine foreign to the true revelation brought by Christ the Saviour and transmitted through the Apostles and the Church until the present moment.

As we have seen, there is a multitude of scientific theories regarding the end of the universe which is based on various calculations and all these theories see the end of the universe in a distant

future, even in million years. Scientific research in this area was an intense, ample one and materialized through a series of studies where scientists attempted to foretell the future of the universe by establishing several fundamental parameters. We could observe from scientific theories, how physicians and astronomers attempted, based on the nowadays scientific level, to calculate the time for the destruction of stars, for the clash of galaxies, amongst which the Milky Way, in order to predict how much time the Earth shall resist from a physical point of view, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the universe resistance in its integrality. Certainly, these calculations and theories are not exhaustive for most of the times speculations, assumptions and uncertainties are used. However, researchers and scientists do not take into account God's real will and His final decision regarding the transformation of this world into a new sky and a new earth. Ultimately, it is really not important how much time a star shall "survive" or how long it will take until the Sun, the star that physically supports the Earth, begins to know transformations that would lead to the destruction of life on Earth, as only God, through His divine providence, knows how much time it must be until the Second Coming of the Saviour and until the final Judgement. Although these theories are based on speculations and assumptions, they can represent important and plausible directions for the contemporary person who puts his/her faith in scientists. The challenge is great for the Church for it shall have to fight these theories having as weapon the teachings of Christ the Saviour, who for the contemporary man no longer represent real landmarks.

As a general conclusion, eschatology represents a fundamental theme of the teaching of the Orthodox Church, constituting an important part of the entire content of the revealed faith truths. In the Orthodox teaching, eschatology does not mean a simple chapter of Dogmatics that we find at the end of a classical Dogmatics textbook, but rather the entire Orthodox theory is placed on an eschatological pattern. Orthodox Christianity has a complete eschatological doctrine, as for Christians, who resist against the multitude of challenges coming from the laic area, the eschatological area or the afterlife, are not events that shall occur in the future, but rather this life had begun in and through Christ who resurrected from the dead. Taking into consideration that Christ stays with the ones who believe in Him, who have an intimate and vivid connection with Him through the impartation with His Body and Blood, for the contemporary Christian afterlife has already begun in his/her living on earth. Thus, communion and living with Christ does not only represent an eschatological faith that shall take place in the future, but it entails the faith of a genuine presence of Christ in each Christian, in a not yet consummated manner in this life and fully consummated in eternity. Seeing things from this point of view, the right understanding of the teaching on eschatology is fundamental for the life and mission of the contemporary person.

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