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## The End of Everything as *Transcensus* and *Transformatio* in S. Bulgakov’s “Apocalypse of John”<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The article analyses the work of one of the greatest Russian Orthodox Church writers of the 20th century, Apocalypse of John, by Sergius Bulgakov, more precisely, chapters 21-22 of the book. This is his last work, published after his death in 1948 in Paris and it is a commentary on the New Testament book of Revelation. The article chooses to treat the backdrop of the Apocalypse – the end of everything after the end of this world. Sergius Bulgakov paid particular attention to Christian eschatological themes in his work, so this book of his is like a backdrop to his entire work and life itself. Sergius Bulgakov, referring to the Apocalypse 21-22, teaches that the transition (Latin: *Transcensus*) from this world to eternal life will be like a powerful transformation (Latin: *Transformatio*) of everything that exists in general. That transition from earth to heaven is like a continuum, i.e., it does not destroy the existing creation, but renews, transforms, and ultimately saves it. Bulgakov follows the idea of the Church Father Origen that apokatastasis will then occur – universal salvation and the unification of all things in God. In apocalyptic language, then the heavenly Jerusalem will descend and Christians will meet their Saviour. The Heavenly Jerusalem in the Apocalypse of John 21, 10-27 symbolizes the messianic times that the entire Church awaits as the Bride of Christ. Until this happens at the end of the ages, the Church is now living a time of waiting. According to Sergius Bulgakov, this characterizes the entire life of a Christian. It should be understood as a state of eschatological waiting until the Church’s “wedding with Christ” takes place. The Parousia of Christ will bring with it the universal resurrection of the dead, the last judgment, and the final inauguration of the Kingdom of Heaven. This will be the final victory of the Lamb.

**Key words:** Sergius Bulgakov, eschatology, Apocalypse of John.

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<sup>1</sup> The article partly repeats a section of my own book on the Apocalypse of John in the work of Sergius Bulgakov, but is enriched with latest theological insights and other new literature on this author: A. Ramonas, *L'attesa del Regno. Eschaton e apocalisse in Sergej Bulgakov*, Roma 2001.

## Introduction

Sergius Bulgakov (Father Sergius) (1871-1944) is considered one of the greatest theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian Orthodox Church, yet more widely recognized abroad than in his own homeland, Russia. In recent decades, there has been no shortage of scientific research on his work<sup>2</sup>. It is a pity that now, due to the war waged by Russia against Ukraine, there has been a certain hostility towards Russian culture and traditions without exception, which are actually not directly related to the current political and military situation. The most famous and comprehensive work of Sergius Bulgakov is the so-called “great trilogy” about divine humanity, consisting of three parts: *The Lamb of God* (1933), *The Comforter* (1936) and *The Bride of the Lamb* (1945). He had previously written a “little trilogy”: *The Burning Bush* (1927), *The Groom’s Friend* (1927), and *Jacob’s Ladder* (1929). The last work of the author is the *Apocalypse of John*, published posthumously in Paris in 1948<sup>3</sup>. This book is not only the epilogue of the great trilogy, but also a kind of dramatic biography of the author himself, and so far this book, unlike other works by Father Sergius, has not been studied much. The most recent commentary on this book could be attributed to

<sup>2</sup> Cf. B. Hallensleben, R.M. Zwahlen, A. Papanikolaou, P. Kalaitzidis, *Building the House of Wisdom, Sergii Bulgakov and Contemporary Theology: New Approaches and Interpretations*, Munster 2024; В.В. Антоненко, *Развитие учения об апокатастасисе и проблема зла в «Большой трилогии» прот. Сергия Булгакова (The Development of the Doctrine of Apocatastasis and the Problem of Evil in the “Great Trilogy” of Archpriest Sergius Bulgakov)*, Вестник ПСТГУ, Серия I: Богословие. Философия. Религиоведение, 2021 (Вып. 95), с. 88-105; J.M. Oravec, *God As Love. The Concept and Spiritual Aspects of Agape in Modern Russian Religious Thought*, Eerdmans 2014; L. Žak, *La ricezione della teologia di Bulgakov in Occidente: un capitolo importante della storia della teologia*, <https://mondodomani.org/reportata/zak02.htm> (accessed: 25.08.2025); P.L. Gavriluk, *Universal Salvation in the Eschatology of Sergius Bulgakov*, “Journal of Theological Studies” 57(2006), no. 1, p. 110-132; L. Razzano, *La sofologia come bellezza in S. N. Bulgakov*, Roma 2004; R. Zaviysky, *Shaping modern Russian Orthodox Trinitarian theology: a critical study of Sergii Bulgakov with reference to Vladimir Lossky and Georgii Florovsky*, Oxford 2011; В. Боровой, *Булгаков и Бердяев: богословие и философия*, Выпуск 16(2015), <https://sfi.ru/science/nauchnyj-zhurnal/vypusk-16-osien-2015.htm> (accessed: 10.09.2025); С. Соколов, *Апокалиптическое время в эсхатологии (Apocalyptic Time in Eschatology)*, Богословская конференция Русской Православной Церкви “Эсхатологическое учение церкви”, Москва 2005, <http://theolcom.ru/doc/day2.sect2.08.Sokolov.pdf> (accessed: 10.09.2025); P. Valliere, *The Interpretation of The Apocalypse of John in Modern Russian Theology*, <https://theolcom.ru/doc/day2.sect3.06.Valier.ENG.pdf> (accessed: 10.11.2025).

<sup>3</sup> С. Булгаков, *Апокалипсис Иоанна (Apocalypse of John)*, Paris 1948. Sergius Bulgakov wrote a commentary on the book *Apocalypse of John* with the same title as the last book of the New Testament, namely “Апокалипсис Иоанна” – *Apocalypse of John*. To avoid confusion between the two works sharing the same title, the first will be italicized, while the second will appear in plain text. The latter is also going to be referred to using synonyms, such as St. John’s book or Revelation.

the introductions of B. Hallensleben and R.M. Zwahlen to the newly reprinted 2019 edition of Bulgakov's analysed book<sup>4</sup>.

Sergius Bulgakov is one of the few Orthodox theologians who commented on the entire book of the Apocalypse of John from a scientific point of view. A very similar commentary was written several decades later, by another prominent theologian, the priest of the Russian Orthodox Church Alexander Men, who was killed in Moscow in 1991<sup>5</sup>. Father Alexander Men relied on Sergius Bulgakov's book to argue his theological truths. "Father Alexander Men was in many ways a latter-day exponent of the theophilosophical school and also interested in apocalyptic tradition and eschatology"<sup>6</sup>. And other thinkers of the Orthodox Church, who represented Neopatristic theology, such as Georges Florovsky (1893-1979), Vladimir Lossky (1903-1958), John Meyendorff (1926-1992) showed little interest in the interpretation of the Apocalypse or in apocalyptic theology<sup>7</sup>.

It is necessary to emphasize that in the Orthodox tradition, which is closely connected with the Patristic tradition, where eschatological themes were very close and important, the Holy Scripture is never studied only in a purely rationalistic way: that is, the autocephalous Orthodox Churches generally avoid purely scientific methods of exegesis or a solely rational scientific study of the Bible. There is always a deep spiritual aspect, connected with liturgical life and a specific historical era. For example, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> c., one can look at the famous book *Studies on the Apocalypse*<sup>8</sup> by Archimandrite Fedor, a lecturer at the Moscow Theological Academy at the time. According to the author, the entire history of mankind can be opened to an eschatological-apocalyptic idea, in which the Church plays a central role. The Church is not an abstract idea, but a concrete Orthodox Church. Recognizing the following, his commentary can be read as a reflection on the historical fate of the Orthodox and their role in world civilization. Thus, the events described in the Apocalypse of John are interpreted

<sup>4</sup> Cf. B. Hallensleben, R.M. Zwahlen, *Editors Introduction*, in: S. Bulgakov, *The Apocalypse of John. An Essay in Dogmatic Interpretation*, Munster 2019, I-XV. Also theological reviews, for example G. McGeoch, *Sergij Bulgakov, The Apocalypse of John. An Essay in Dogmatic Interpretation*, [https://www.unifr.ch/sergij-bulgakov/de/assets/public/files/Publikationen/4\\_Apocalypse/McGeoch\\_2591-8613-1-PB.pdf](https://www.unifr.ch/sergij-bulgakov/de/assets/public/files/Publikationen/4_Apocalypse/McGeoch_2591-8613-1-PB.pdf) (accessed: 4.12.2025); J. van Kessel, *Sergij Bulgakov, The Apocalypse of John. An Essay in Dogmatic Interpretation*, [https://www.unifr.ch/sergij-bulgakov/de/assets/public/files/Publikationen/4\\_Apocalypse/VanKessel\\_Reviews%20Sergij%20Bulgakov%20in%20JECS.pdf](https://www.unifr.ch/sergij-bulgakov/de/assets/public/files/Publikationen/4_Apocalypse/VanKessel_Reviews%20Sergij%20Bulgakov%20in%20JECS.pdf) (accessed: 4.12.2025); J. Behr, *The Apocalypse of John: An Essay in Dogmatic Interpretation by Sergii Bulgakov (review)*, [https://www.unifr.ch/sergij-bulgakov/de/assets/public/files/Publikationen/4\\_Apocalypse.pdf](https://www.unifr.ch/sergij-bulgakov/de/assets/public/files/Publikationen/4_Apocalypse.pdf) (accessed: 5.12.2025).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. A. Мень, *Читая Апокалипсис. Беседы об Откровении св. Иоанна Богослова (Reading the Apocalypse: Conversations on the Revelation of St. John the Theologian)*, Москва 2000, [https://www.lib.ru/HRISTIAN/MEN/apokal.txt\\_with-big-pictures.html](https://www.lib.ru/HRISTIAN/MEN/apokal.txt_with-big-pictures.html) (accessed: 1.12.2025).

<sup>6</sup> P. Valliere, *The Interpretation of The Apocalypse of John in Modern Russian Theology*, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Ibid*, p. 3

<sup>8</sup> Cf. A. Bucharev (Archimandrit Fedor), *Исследование Апокалипсиса (Research of the Apocalypse)*, Sergev Posad 1916.

in light of the specific historical events of their time, imbuing them with a spiritual-metaphysical meaning that was highly characteristic of the Orthodox Church<sup>9</sup>. According to Sergius Bulgakov, the political and cultural upheavals of early 20<sup>th</sup> c. Russia (the October Revolution, World War I, etc.) were also upheavals for the Church itself<sup>10</sup>. Other 20<sup>th</sup> c. Russian theologians also believed that humanity was involved in those apocalyptic rapid events, which tend towards the eschatological times described in the Apocalypse of John. “The thinkers of the theophilosophical school were able to deal with apocalyptic themes because they recognized the limits of tradition. On the other hand, the fact that apocalyptic theology forces theologians to go beyond the limits of tradition is one more reason why Neopatristic theologians kept their distance from apocalyptic and tended to a spiritualized eschatologism. The latter was, after all, the more traditional solution to the eschatological problem”<sup>11</sup>.

Sergius Bulgakov believed in that too. “Apocalyptic prophecy concerns that which is to come “after this” (Rev. 1:19, 4:1); it goes beyond the limits of what is already known and mastered, threatening settled arrangements and challenging the old to come to grips with the new. Bulgakov’s commentary is pervaded by a sense of excitement about these confrontations, excitement about the newness of the Gospel. His attitude inspires some enchanting formulations. The Revelation of John is “a kind of fifth Gospel”, “the newest testament in the New Testament”<sup>12</sup>. According to the theologian P. Evdokimov, “The Bible is a verbal icon of Christ. Since then, it has always been the same Chalcedonian dogma, which, teaching the Orthodox the a priori dogma of theandrisim, introduces the correct reading of the Holy Scripture”<sup>13</sup>. On this occasion, it is necessary to note that in the Orthodox Church the Book of the Apocalypse, next to the Song of Songs, is not read during the liturgy<sup>14</sup>. In general, Sergius Bulgakov was one of those authors for whom eschatological-apocalyptic themes, especially the end of the world, were very important. He remains faithful to his Church’s interpretations of the Holy Scripture, though uses modern exegetical-dogmatic methods to reveal the meaning of the text. Bulgakov comments on the text directly, referring to the famous biblical scholars of that time: R. Charles, E. Allo, T. Zahn.

<sup>9</sup> According to an authoritative Russian theologian G. Florovsky, the commentary of this particular author seems too utopian and visionary (Cf. G. Florovsky, *Le vie della teologia russa*, Genova 1987, 274).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. G. Parravicini, *Bulgakov, “profugo” nella Chiesa universale*, Avvenire, Ottobre 10, 2019. A. Niviere notes that “the last years of S. Bulgakov were marked by European totalitarianisms. He experienced the Bolshevik Revolution and his exile as martyrdom for the Russian Orthodox Church and the persecution of believers” (A. Niviere, *Filosofia e teologia della storia in Sergej Bulgakov*, in: Aa. Vv., *L’autunno della santa Russia*, Edizioni Qiqajon 1999, p. 228).

<sup>11</sup> P. Valliere, *The Interpretation of The Apocalypse of John in Modern Russian Theology*, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> P. Evdokimov, *L’Ortodossia*, Roma 1972, p. 271.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. С. Булгаков, *Апокалиптика и социализм. Религиозно философские параллели* (*Apocalypticism and Socialism. Religious and Philosophical Parallels*), Москва 1911, c. 105.

Therefore, it can be asserted that Father Sergius's commentary was a completely new phenomenon in the Orthodox Church at that time<sup>15</sup>.

The Book of Apocalypses seeks to reveal that what on earth seems disastrous to the human eye is essentially salvific in heaven, seen through the eyes of God. It is the chapters 21-22 of the Apocalypse of John that reveal the heavenly destiny of humanity and creation – the junction of two worlds, *transcensus* and *transformatio*. History on earth continues in the dialectical struggle of apocalypticism between good and evil, between Christ and Antichrist, until it reaches the perfect fulfilment of times in the heavenly Jerusalem, described in chapter 21. Sergius Bulgakov was convinced that God himself acts within time and, through various world events, guides history towards salvation – the unification of all things in God. Such a plan of salvation of the Lord, already found in the Old Testament, was inaugurated by the event of Jesus Christ and will be fully realized at the end of the age, in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Object of the article: The last two chapters of Sergius Bulgakov's commentary on the *Apocalypse of John* – 21 and 22. Their theological-biblical analysis.

Research problem: Sergius Bulgakov treats the last chapters (21 and 22) of the Apocalypse of John as the intersection of apocalypticism and eschatology, representing a *transcensus* from earthly reality into the heavenly realm. He views this as the transfiguration of all things – *transformatio* – brought about by the definitive eschatological events.

The methodology of the article: analytical – comparative – synthetic methods.

### **The New Prophecy of Creation – *Apokatastasis***

For our author, human history coincides with the history of the Orthodox Church itself. All that is best is yet to come, and now history is developing in a dialectical apocalyptic struggle between good and evil. The theological gaze expands the perception of history, each fact has its own meaning, it is not a series of coincidences and meaninglessness, as, for example, the philosopher A. Camus thought. From a Christian perspective, even the greatest suffering can be understood as part of a greater plan. Sergius Bulgakov, much like G. Hegel, believed that we see only individual catastrophic events in history, we do not see the full picture, so in the aggregate they reflect a much larger plan of God. Tragic events contribute in the final version to salvation and hope in God is the basis of all Christian life. "Therefore, Bulgakov's last work about The Apocalypse of John must be read as an anthropology, an ecclesiology, and a philosophy of history at the same time. In his view, the book is not primarily about fear of the end of the world, but about hope and joy over the coming end of the world's tragic condition and the resolution of all dissonances "into a universal harmony, theodicy and anthro-podicy, [it is] the divine story of the victory of the Lamb"<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. B. Hallensleben, R.M. Zwahlen, *Editors Introduction*, p. III.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. II.

Sergius Bulgakov claims that chapters 21 and 22 of the book of Revelation are perhaps the most important in the entire book, because they prophetically describe the end of all things – of humanity, of creation, and of the Church alike. The entire book of Revelation to John is moving towards that end. It is an apocalypse of history and an introduction to eschatological times. For Bulgakov, the term “apocalyptic” pertains to history, whereas the term “eschatology” relates to eternity, where time and space no longer exist. In his commentary to *The Apocalypse of John*, he even dedicates a separate introduction to the discussion of these specific chapters. The author writes: “The correct reading of this text would be a direct acceptance of those descriptions. Receiving the events in the sequence they are recorded in the book reveals their dogmatic meaning as well. (...) A direct acceptance of the text also allows for a proper interpretation of the concept of the Millennial Kingdom, described in chapter 20 and which, at first glance, seems to destroy the entire logical chronological sequence of the events of the Apocalypse. (...) The Apocalypse acts as a Christian philosophy of history that sees the same thousand-year Kingdom as a necessary prerequisite for the eschatological transformation”<sup>17</sup>. Therefore, the so-called “millenarianism” (the thousand-year reign of the righteous with Christ) described in chapter 20 is like the culmination of everything that has happened since the very first pages of the Book of Revelation. The still earthly epilogue of history before entering spiritual eternity. It is the event of what follows in chapters 21 and 22 – the final transformation of creation<sup>18</sup>.

Chapter 21 begins with a scene that no longer belongs to earthly history. The meta-historical quality is expressed by the word “new” (Greek *kainos*). “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God our of heaven” (Rev. 21:1–2). We read further: “He who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new!” (Rev. 21:5). We find the same idea in Isaiah’s prophecy: “See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, not will they come to mind” (Is 65:17). Also in 2 Peter: “But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a *new heaven and a new earth*, where righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13).

This “newness” expresses a transformation, Latin *transcensus* – a transition from what is earthly to what is heavenly. Bulgakov claims that this is not God’s creation “out of nothing”, but a transfiguration of what was created and is already ripe for a final transformation<sup>19</sup>. Already in his book *The Bride of the Lamb*, Bulgakov argued that in the eschatological event of the end of the world there will be continuity and complete novelty: the world will not be created “ex nihilo”, but will only be newly transformed. The “new earth” means a complete

<sup>17</sup> Cf. С. Булгаков, *Апокалипсис Иоана (Apocalypse of John)*, с. 210.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. А. Мень, *Читая Апокалипсис. Беседы об Откровении св. Иоанна Богослова ...*, op. cit.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. С. Булгаков, *Апокалипсис Иоана (Apocalypse of John)*, с. 211.

renewal of what has already been created. And this is not only the material creation, humanity, but also the entire spiritual invisible world<sup>20</sup>. This is a meta-historical change, transformation, which is associated with the Parousia of Christ. A. Men confirms that according to Sergius Bulgakov's idea, the original creation of God remains, it is not destroyed, but everything is transformed and this is a very close idea to the Orthodox Church's teaching on salvation<sup>21</sup>. Even more – this will be the Sophianization of creation. The following term is very important for Bulgakov and means the permeation of Heavenly Wisdom (Greek *Sophia*) into everything. “New heavens and a new earth” symbolize both the materials and spiritual worlds, both earthly and angelic reality. The reference to “no more sea” does not mean the literal disappearance of the waters, but the disappearance of that which was sinful, polluted, which had arisen due to the fall of the “old man” Adam. Therefore, seas and waters in the Bible symbolized demonic forces, always stubbornly opposing God Himself<sup>22</sup>.

Father Sergius claims that universal salvation – transformation reaches much further than the Lord's righteous judgement, further than heaven and hell, it reaches “forever and ever” when, figuratively speaking, the “lake of fire” will cease to burn and all that is spiritual will be restored in God. That universal restoration (salvation) is as if the very last act of the Lord God in relation to creation – out of love and justice. It is an event of salvation, after which there will be no more. And then there will be nothing that was cursed and that was sinful. History with its various events will reach its completion, its true glory, and the Holy Spirit will permeate all that was evil and sinful, and this is precisely the *apokatastasis*<sup>23</sup>. The Last Judgement, heaven and hell, sinners and saints, the lake of fire and the false prophet will seem like small, secondary things that simply came and went: everything will be transformed and saved. “God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God” (Rev. 21:3). It is necessary to emphasize that Sergius Bulgakov, following Origen and several other theologians, believed in universal salvation for everyone without exception, even Satan should be saved at the end of the ages, because the Evil One will finally understand that it is already pointless to fight against God. According to our author, Satan does not have an ontological existence in himself, he is not “Anti-God”,

<sup>20</sup> Cf. S. Bulgakov, *La Sposa dell'Agnello, La creazione, l'uomo, la Chiesa e la storia*, Bologna 1991, p. 604-608.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. А. Мень, *Читая Апокалипсис. Беседы об Откровении св. Иоанна Богослова*..., op. cit.

<sup>22</sup> С. Булгаков, *Апокалипсис Иоана (Apocalypse of John)*, с. 212-213. The famous Italian Bible scholar, who has written a lot about the Book of Revelation, Ugo Vanni, states in this place that indeed – “the sea symbolizes the power of Satan and in the eschatological times, which the world will enter, that power will no longer exist. The renewed world will be able to directly meet the coming of God. It will be an encounter with the risen Christ, unity with the Lord God” (U. Vanni, *Linguaggio, simboli ed esperienza mistica nel libro dell'Apocalisse II*, “Gregorianum” 79(1998), no. 3, p. 474-475).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. С. Булгаков, *Апокалипсис Иоана (Apocalypse of John)*, с. 213.

but is a creation itself, and therefore cannot create, but only imitate God's creation. Everything must be purified in fire, but that fire will not be eternal<sup>24</sup>. "Bulgakov understands the fires of judgment to be a sort of purgation at which in some later age all shall be saved"<sup>25</sup>. Everyone will understand that it will no longer be possible not to love God, because Christ is "all conquering love, irresistibly attractive and salvific beauty"<sup>26</sup>.

We find a similar idea in the work of St. Augustine *Civitas Dei*. It is written: "With this simultaneous blaze of the world, as I said, the properties of the elements undergoing transformation, which were appropriate to our bodies undergoing transformation, will completely cease in the fire. Subsisting being itself will acquire those properties that, through a marvellous transformation, are appropriate to bodies not undergoing transformation, so that the world, transformed for the better, will adapt itself to men transformed for the better also in their physical being"<sup>27</sup>. So the world will pass through fire to be transformed, not to cease to exist. The new world will be a continuity, not a radical break.

We read further: "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev. 21:4). These are words concerning universal salvation. In Revelation 20:14, we read that death and hell were cast into the lake of fire, which was the second death – the lake of fire, so here it is already stated that death will cease to exist entirely: neither the first nor the second death shall remain. According to Bulgakov, this verse recalls the prophecy of Isaiah 25:8: "he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken!"<sup>28</sup>. Thus, this passage of the Revelation to John (21:1-5) refers to the heavenly salvation of all things – *transformatio*, the unification of all things in God<sup>29</sup>. It is necessary to clarify that this eschatological doctrine literally follows the thought

<sup>24</sup> Cf. А. Мень, *Читая Апокалипсис. Беседы об Откровении св. Иоанна Богослова...*, op. cit.

<sup>25</sup> W. Graham, *Review of Sergii Bulgakov's The Apocalypse of John*, <https://www.wyattgraham.com/p/review-of-sergii-bulgakovs-the-apocalypse-of-john> (accessed: 8.12.2025).

<sup>26</sup> R.J. De La Noval, *We Shall See Him as He Is: Bulgakov on Eschatological Conversation*, <https://afkimel.wordpress.com/2021/10/24/we-shall-see-him-as-he-is-bulgakov-on-eschatological-conversion/> (accessed: 6.02.2026).

<sup>27</sup> Agostino, *La Citta di Dio*, Roma 2006, p. 1119.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. С. Булгаков, *Апокалипсис Иоана (Apocalypse of John)*, с. 223-224.

<sup>29</sup> From a human perspective, the idea of apocatastasis may seem attractive. In modern times, it has been argued that it is impossible for a person to sin so gravely on earth as to merit eternal, horrific torment for an action, or even an entire sinful life, that may not have been fully understood. Such critical thoughts were expressed by several thinkers, including J.J. Rousseau, N. Berdyaev, and Baron d'Holbach. Later, the Catholic theologian H.U. von Balthasar also expressed the hope that "hell may be empty." H. de Lubac, M. Blondel, P. Claudel, G. Greshake, K. Barth also thought similarly. The latter argued that the power of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection was so great that it has overcome the eternity of hell once and for all (Plg. B. Lang, *Inferno*, in: *I concetti fondamentali della teologia*, vol. 2, ed. P. Eicher, Brescia 2008, p. 505-506).

of the Apostle Paul that “God may be all in all” (1 Corinthians 15: 28). This is, according to Bulgakov, God’s prophecy to the Church of Christ, what awaits her in eschatological times<sup>30</sup>.

The final salvation of all is especially reflected in the idea of the “New Jerusalem” in Rev. 22:3-5. There will be no more condemnation, the Throne of God will be among people, the face of the Lord will be directly visible, and his light will shine constantly. It is interesting to emphasize that even in hell, according to Sergius Bulgakov, there is still the possibility of seeing supernatural reality, choosing good, just as Satan can be saved, in which only evil will burn out and be destroyed, not so much the devil himself as the creation. “For Bulgakov, the triumph of God’s will mean that in the resurrection rational creatures would no longer be able to choose between good and evil, but only between different kinds of good”<sup>31</sup>. According to Bulgakov, the expression that “[t]hey will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads” (22:4) symbolizes ontologically mature humanity; this feature is characteristic only of eschatological times. The name of God on people’s foreheads expresses the Lord’s revelation to them and the perfect meeting with the Creator. This is the beginning of eternity (Latin *aeternitas*) without time and space<sup>32</sup>. Father Sergius claims that “there can be no more beautiful promise, no more solid joy, than the closeness of God expressed in this short formula. These last words of the Bible are therefore the last words of the Most High Himself, full of the hope of eternal salvation”<sup>33</sup>. This is perfect communion with the Lord (Latin *communio*), perfect vision of him (Latin *visio Dei*) and perfect eternal life with him (Latin *vita aeterna*). Therefore, Rev. 22:3-5 expresses not a simple triumph and glorification of creation, but its true deification, a transition across the threshold of eternity<sup>34</sup>. In his book *The Bride of the Lamb*, Bulgakov writes: “The Holy Spirit, by His power, accomplishes the transformation of the old world, which was inclined to sin and imperfection. He creates a new world and renews all creation”<sup>35</sup>.

The phrase “what must soon take place” (21:6) is not related to earthly history, but crosses the threshold of eternity and describes the course of eschatological ages. In God, everything has already been fulfilled, regardless of earthly empirical history, which is still taking place in time and space. This is

<sup>30</sup> Cf. B. Hallensleben, R.M. Zwahlen, *Editors Introduction*, p. III.

<sup>31</sup> P.L. Gavriluyuk, *Divine Judgment in Pavel Florensky and Sergius Bulgakov*, “International Journal of Orthodox Theology” 9(2018), no. 3, p. 25.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. C. Булгаков, *Апокалипсис Иоана (Apocalypse of John)*, c. 248-251.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 252.

<sup>34</sup> The idea of apokatastasis is also found in Rev. 5:9-11. The term itself is found only once in the New Testament, in Acts 3:21: “Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything” (Greek *Apokatastasis panton*). The following theme is associated with the universal eschatological salvation that comes from God himself (Plg. R. Penna, *Prospettiva universale e individuale dell’escatologia nel linguaggio del Nuovo Testamento*, in: Aa. Vv., *Escatologia contemporanea*, Padova 1995, p. 262-263).

<sup>35</sup> S. Bulgakov, *La Sposa dell’Agnello*, p. 610.

a phrase that comes from the mouth of the One who sits on the throne – the Lamb. Such a phrase from the one who sits on the throne also becomes evident in Revelation 16:17 upon the pouring of the “seventh bowl of wrath”, but there it is still intended for the earthly reality, and here it has already passed into heavenly reality. A similar transition is found in the Gospel of John 19:30: “Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” Jesus dies on the cross and brings universal salvation to all. In the suffering and death of the Christ there was a personal *transcendence* of the earthly Jesus into his heavenly state. With the seventh verse of chapter 21, the pericope of the Book of Revelation dedicated to the heavenly Jerusalem and the doctrine of *apokatastasis* concludes. These themes will be further developed in 22:3-5<sup>36</sup>.

At this point it is necessary to add that the Orthodox Church does not recognize the doctrine of purgatory, nor does it accept the doctrine of *apokatastasis*, literally; therefore, Sergei Bulgakov was condemned in 1935 by the Karlov Vary Synod of the Orthodox Church, which resided abroad, for these theological ideas of his: for the teaching of *apokatastasis* and for the doctrine of *sophiology*<sup>37</sup>. Today it is believed that Bulgakov (and many modern historians) noted that the “15 Anathematisms” against Origen were likely not part of the Council’s official acts but were added later or approved by a local synod before the council opened. He argued that what the Church condemned was “Origenism” – a specific Platonic package that included the pre-existence of souls and a “spherical” return to a non-material state. Bulgakov’s universalism was Christocentric and Sophiological, not Platonic, thus (in his view) avoiding the specific heresy of the 6th century<sup>38</sup>. Bulgakov’s universalism isn’t just about God being “nice”. It is rooted in his *Sophiology* – the idea that the world was created through the Divine Wisdom (Greek *Sophia*). Even if a person rejects God, they cannot destroy the image of God within themselves. Therefore, hell is a real, agonizing state of “self-burning” where the soul resists its own nature, but eventually, the sheer reality of God’s love must overwhelm this resistance<sup>39</sup>. In Orthodox, there is a term *theologoumenon* – a personal opinion of a theologian, which does not contradict dogmas, but is not binding on everyone. Bulgakov considered his point of view to be precisely such an opinion, and in 1937 the commission of the St. Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris defended it. A. Kimel notes that “hence the proposal of universal salvation remains open for Orthodox Christianity. Bulgakov’s judgment has been supported by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware and

<sup>36</sup> Cf. C. Булгаков, *Апокалипсис Иоана (Apocalypse of John)*, c. 224.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. A.M. Ammann, *Storia della Chiesa russa*, Torino 1948, p. 547-551.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. A. Kimel, *Sergius Bulgakov: Eschatology and Orthodoxy*, <https://afkimel.wordpress.com/2014/07/02/sergius-bulgakov-eschatology-and-orthodoxy/> (accessed: 1.05.2026).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. N. Metz, *Open Processing: An Over-Simplified Explanation of Sergei Bulgakov’s Sophiology*, <https://nathaniel-metz.writeas.com/open-processing-an-over-simplified-explanation-of-sergei-bulgakovs-sophiology> (accessed: 1.05.2026).

Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev<sup>40</sup>. They treated Bulgakov's universalism as an expression of Christian hope, not as an absolute dogma.

### Heavenly Jerusalem – A Vision of a Glorified and Transformed World

Next, the seer observes a vision of the heavenly Jerusalem. Bulgakov emphasizes that this vision is not a vision of the “material” Jerusalem, but rather an intuition of how the “new earth and the new heaven” are realized. Father Sergius distinguishes two different “coming downs of Jerusalem” described in chapter 21. The first “coming down” found in 21:2-7 is distinguished by the fact that it is “new”, this eschatological descent is personally seen by the apostle John. The second “coming down” found in 21:9-27 is related to the “seven bowls of God's wrath” and is more historical, related the millennial era and the description of the holy city found in Ezekiel 40-48 and Zechariah 14:1-21<sup>41</sup>. According to Sergius Bulgakov, these are not two absolutely different visions of this city, but rather two different events that are little connected with each other. The second vision is actually, from a historical point of view, the first, and therefore earlier than the one described in the book as the first. Meanwhile, the “New Jerusalem” (Rev. 21:2) although presented in this book as the first, is actually the second. This opinion is also confirmed by modern biblical scholars, for example, the Italian theologian U. Vanni. He claims that these are not two completely different visions of the “Heavenly Jerusalem”, but the first vision is like an introduction to the second<sup>42</sup>. According to the author, this is a prophecy of a glorified world, an exalted Church. The Church is the sacrament of the relationship between God and man, so it is at the same time both the earthly “old Jerusalem” and the heavenly “new Jerusalem”<sup>43</sup>.

The author of the Revelation to John uses the image of a city to describe all the blessings of the messianic future era. It is like the fulfilment of the Jewish messianic hope, like the triumph of earthly Israel. Hopes placed in the heavenly Jerusalem represent everything that was holy to the Jews, such hopes were strengthened after the destruction of the first and second temples in Jerusalem. As it can be read in 2 Chronicles 6:6 – “I have chosen Jerusalem, that my name might be there”. Or for example Psalm 87:2: “The Lord loves the gates of Zion

<sup>40</sup> Cf. A. Kimel, *Sergius Bulgakov: Eschatology and Orthodoxy*, op. cit.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. С. Булгаков, *Апокалипсис Иоана (Apocalypse of John)*, с. 215; 228-230; 233-244.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. U. Vanni, *Linguaggio, simboli ed esperienza mistica nel libro dell'Apocalisse II*, p. 474. Another famous specialist on the Revelation to John, P. Prigent, also claims that there is already a unanimous opinion that these are not two different visions of Jerusalem and quotes the contemporary biblical scholar Charles, whom Sergius Bulgakov also refers to, as being the first in the history of biblical studies to try to combine these visions into one. According to him, the author of the Book of Revelation probably tried to present the earthly Jerusalem in the original text (21: 9-27) and then the heavenly one – 21:2-7. However, in the final editorial version of the Book of Revelation, they were left inverted (Cf. P. Prigent, *L'Apocalisse di Giovanni*, Roma 1985, p. 635-643).

<sup>43</sup> Cf. С. Булгаков, *Апокалипсис Иоана (Apocalypse of John)*, с. 219.

more than all the dwellings of Jacob”. The prophet Isaiah proclaimed that “Jerusalem is the holy city” (Isaiah 52:1). According to Sergius Bulgakov, the term “Jerusalem” in apocalyptic language expresses the coming of the messianic kingdom<sup>44</sup>. This Jerusalem “coming down” from heaven should not be seen as the Church coming from above or the company of saints, but as the manifestation of the whole new humanity and the whole new world. God will henceforth be among them and then, according to the apostle Paul, finally “God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28). This will be the perfect deification of creation and the culmination of the transformation of all things<sup>45</sup>. Father Alexander Men argues on this issue that the “new Jerusalem” is a symbol of the kingdom of God, the abundance of God’s gifts. In Rev. 21:5, for the first time, the One seated on the throne speaks “I am making everything new!” A. Men mentions that some modern theologians understand the verb “make,” “create” (Hebrew *bara*) literally as a completely new creation of God, while he himself follows Bulgakov’s idea that the new creation of God is a continuation, a transformation of what has already been created, because the thought of God has already been introduced into the present world, wisdom and love have been put together, and all this will only be perfected and glorified, but not destroyed<sup>46</sup>. Individuals in Heavenly Jerusalem will not be destroyed, expelled from the City, but all will pass through the cleansing fire and “it,” the evil that is in everything, in all beings, from demonic forces to human ones, will be expelled<sup>47</sup>.

Orthodox Church theologian G. Fast states that the Apostle John “saw Holy Jerusalem as new; newness is a sign of a change to greater radiance, which the Jerusalem above will receive, descending to men from the highest incorporeal Powers, since the common head of both is Christ our God. The city itself is composed of saints, of whom it is written: “Like stones in a crown, they shall shine upon His land” (Zechariah 9:16), with Christ as the cornerstone. It is called a city as the abode of the Royal Trinity, for She dwells and walks within it, according to the promise (1 Corinthians 6:16). It is called a Bride because She cleaves to the Lord and is united to Him by a supreme and indissoluble union. It is called Adorned because, according to the Psalmist (Psalm 45:10), She possesses within herself glory and beauty in the diversity of virtues”<sup>48</sup>.

According to Sergius Bulgakov, the difference between the “new” and “old” Church here is that the “new Jerusalem” loses its historical character and becomes the abode of God, his direct manifestation. The very first vision of the Church – Jerusalem was in the Garden of Eden, there was no temple made by hands and God dwelt among people. Thus, that Church, in a broad sense, has

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *Ibid*, c. 217.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. *Ibid*, c. 218.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. А. Мень, *Читая Апокалипсис. Беседы об Откровении св. Иоанна Богослова...*, op. cit.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *Ibid*.

<sup>48</sup> Г. Фаст, *Видение нового Иерусалима (Vision of the New Jerusalem)*, [https://azbyka.ru/apokalipsis/protoierej-gennadij-fast-videnie-novogo-ierusalima/#ch\\_0\\_1](https://azbyka.ru/apokalipsis/protoierej-gennadij-fast-videnie-novogo-ierusalima/#ch_0_1) (accessed: 3.01.2026).

always been among humanity. The last vision is realized precisely in the “heavenly Jerusalem”, where not only Adam and Eve, but humanity of all ages sees its Lord<sup>49</sup>. This is a vision of a transformed world. All this is similar to St. Augustine’s idea of two cities – *Civitas Dei* and *Civitas Terrena*. The whole history of humanity is the struggle of these two cities and their interaction, where *Civitas Dei* always strives for victory and the kingdom of God. Angels, saints and all believers who carry out the will of God live there. It is a symbol of eternal bliss. Thus, there are similarities – Heavenly Jerusalem is mainly oriented towards a future reality, while the city of God, for Augustine, already exists in the Church now, although not yet perfect. It will reach its perfect fulfilment in eschatological times. It can be said that Heavenly Jerusalem is a biblical image, and the city of God is its theological interpretation and expansion.

This vision is like a wedding between the Bridegroom – Christ and his Bride, the Church – the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2). The term “Bride” here expresses the Church’s full and perfect preparation for the wedding with Christ – the Lamb. Thus, the coming down of the heavenly Jerusalem is part of the same process of transition and transformation of everything from earthly to heavenly reality. Just like the Parousia of Christ. For those who were waiting for Christ, it will be a day of joy, and for those who were not – the hour of judgment. It is worth noting that in eschatological events, time no longer exists, so everything seems to happen synchronously: the end of the world, the universal judgment, the second coming of Christ, the coming down of the heavenly Jerusalem, the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven, etc. It is theologically difficult to say whether these events all occur simultaneously. For example, in the book *The Lamb of God*, Bulgakov says that the “Universal Judgment will take place at the same time as the Parousia of Christ”<sup>50</sup>. However, in many places Bulgakov emphasizes that history matures in an apocalyptic struggle between good and evil, and when the end of time comes, there will be a “new age” – the reign of God, then there will be no more history and time<sup>51</sup>. Then there will be the resurrection of the dead, followed by an “intermediate” state after the resurrection of the wicked. This is a state of purifying fire, when the human soul with its transformed body is forced to reconcile with the resurrected Christ, and finally the *apokatastasis* will occur. The sequence of events is more necessary for our minds to understand this than for the eschatological events to be accurately narrated. These processes remain a mystery, it is impossible to “close” into a rational framework what goes beyond the limits of the human mind. Commenting on the Apocalypse,

<sup>49</sup> Cf. С. Булгаков, *Апокалипсис Иоана (Apocalypse of John)*, с. 220.

<sup>50</sup> S. Bulgakov, *L’Agnello di Dio*, Roma 1990, p. 510.

<sup>51</sup> In the book *The Bride of the Lamb*, S. Bulgakov writes about death: “In death and immediately after it, a person sees the entire synthesis of his past life as a whole. This is already a judgment, because in it all correspondences with the truth or differences, all content and meaning appear. This is finally not only a synthesis, but also a vision of truth in the spiritual world, which is free from corporeality and illuminated by the justice of God” (S. Bulgakov, *La Sposa dell’Agnello*, p. 526).

theologian A. Men says that “On that side of our being, a new eon is already beginning, in which God will be “everything and in everything”. And the bearers of evil must pass through the fire”<sup>52</sup>. In addition to all the eschatological events, there will also be *Dies Irae*, Judgment Day, day of reckoning, day of justice. A day that some dread, while others await as the longed-for moment when evil will be repaid, when the bitter seeds sown will sprout and then bear fruit<sup>53</sup>. However, it is necessary not to forget that in the final version, in essence, Lord does not come to judge the world, but to save it<sup>54</sup>. Love conquers all.

### Waiting for Christ as the Final Victory of Christian Faith

According to Sergius Bulgakov, the Apocalypse of John is a book for the Church about “what must soon happen”<sup>55</sup>. At the same time, it is a prophecy intended for all people; this is a time of intense waiting for Christ, or rather, vigilance in anticipation of his second coming. In recent years, Bulgakov notes, attempts have been made to study this book using various scientific methods, while neglecting its fundamental theological aspect. It is as if there was a desire to seek protection from these very prophecies<sup>56</sup>. Father A. Men says that “The Apocalypse isn’t just some puzzle or hieroglyph that someone will decipher in a million years. As you can see while reading, much of it is clearly and directly addressed to us”<sup>57</sup>.

In Rev. 22:10 it is stated that the “time is near”. This is not about chronological time, it is not a date on a human calendar, but rather the ontological proximity of everything that must soon be fulfilled. After all the tragedies and horrors, blessing must come. This is intended to give meaning to present life and history. According to our author, the eschatological longing for heaven and the expectation of Christ are like a person’s first love. This is how the “first love” of the Church of Ephesus and the Church of Laodicea being “neither cold nor hot” can be interpreted. That time before this expectation of Christ is like the entire New Testament era, from the first coming of Christ to his second coming. Jesus, having accomplished the work of salvation and now sitting at the right hand of God the Father, has the power of the Risen One and can come to the world at any time, with the same power of the resurrection, and even more so – with the new power of the Parousia. He is even now spiritually and sacramentally present in the world, in the Church, because he is “Alpha and the Omega, [...] the Beginning and the End” (Apr 22:13)<sup>58</sup>.

<sup>52</sup> А. Мень, *Читая Апокалипсис. Беседы об Откровении св. Иоанна Богослова...*, op. cit.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Cf. M. Bardyn, *Apocalyptic Reflections in The Studies of The Russian Orthodox Priest Alexander Men*, SKHID 163(2019), no. 5, p. 69.

<sup>55</sup> С. Булгаков, *Апокалипсис Иоана (Apocalypse of John)*, с. 255.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, с. 256.

<sup>57</sup> А. Мень, *Читая Апокалипсис. Беседы об Откровении св. Иоанна Богослова...*, op. cit.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. С. Булгаков, *Апокалипсис Иоана (Apocalypse of John)*, с. 256.

Rev. 22:17 says: “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’”. The subject of the call here is the Holy Spirit, and the bride is the Church. Both words express the divine life of the “Body of Christ” – the Church in love, already described in the Song of Songs. “Now, in the fullness of time, this invitation to meet the Bridegroom is heard for all time. This is the loving expectation of Christ by all the Churches, heavenly and earthly”<sup>59</sup>. In Rev. 22:20 it is stated again: “He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus”. According to our author, this is the most sincere and impatient prayer of Christianity. Jesus had learned the “Our Father” prayer, in which the Kingdom of God is expected, but in this place this Kingdom comes in the person of Jesus. It will be a blessing to those who wait for it and a curse to those who hate it. Perhaps it is because of the theme of the inevitable final judgment for sinners that the Revelation to John is disliked, notes Sergius Bulgakov<sup>60</sup>. Alexander Men adds: “They say “come”, because the Parousia is the most longed-for moment in history. Even if a person dies, experiencing death as the greatest joy, and discovering endless, sparkling worlds on the other side of life, this is still not complete; it is a flawed existence. After all, we await something greater, immeasurably greater: rebirth, the real existence of creation, the existence of each person, as stated in the Creed: “I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come”<sup>61</sup>.

The expression “I am coming soon” (Greek *Erxomai taxi*) is like a confirmation and promise of Christ’s final victory over evil. This term is repeated three times in the chapter. What are these words for? In the first centuries, these words strengthened the primitive Church, calmed the martyrs, comforted the persecuted, and gave hope to confessors<sup>62</sup>. But in essence, these words are intended not only for Christians of the first centuries, who quickly realized that this “end time” was unlikely to come soon, that the Church already has all the gifts of God and is, as it were, the fullness of everything now. That is why the Book of Revelation was relegated to a kind of theological margin, as no longer relevant. The words “I am coming soon”, according to Father Sergius, must be understood not so much chronologically as ontologically – as a state, a vigilance, a constant expectation of the coming age. This is also written about in the Letter to the Hebrews: “For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come” (Heb 13:14). Without this expectation, without a constant forward movement, Christianity loses its strength. There is no Christian faith if it is not apocalyptic and at the same time eschatological<sup>63</sup>. Apocalyptic because it confronts the fierce struggle between good and evil, and eschatological because it transcends from this world to the next. The glorious Parousia of Christ will

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, c. 260.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. *Ibid*, c. 264.

<sup>61</sup> А. Мень, *Читая Апокалипсис. Беседы об Откровении св. Иоанна Богослова...*, op. cit.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. С. Булгаков, *Апокалипсис Иоана (Apocalypse of John)*, c. 262.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. *Ibid*, c. 263.

bring with it the universal resurrection of the dead, the last judgment, and the inauguration of the Kingdom of Heaven, which will be the final *transcensus* and *transformatio*.

It is worth noting, as stated by Ch. Stroop, “Still, the Church’s victory would be achieved through endurance, and “the whole terrible path of human history” would “crown itself” with “apocalyptic joy”. As a man who overcame great adversity to leave a powerful legacy, and as a Christian who clearly did take great comfort in praying *Maranatha*, Bulgakov embodies this “apocalyptic joy” as much as he embodies apocalyptic tragedy. It is surely no coincidence that the tragic leitmotif disappears from his Apocalypse near the end of his chapter-by-chapter commentary, and that the terms “tragic” and “tragedy” do not appear at all in the four ensuing theological excurses”<sup>64</sup>. Therefore, the entire content of the Revelation to John, all the tragedies and horrors, is a depiction of the path to the all-transforming *apokatastasis*, as claimed by Bulgakov<sup>65</sup>. And indeed, in the author’s four appendices added to the book *Apocalypse of John (Even so, Come; The Eucharistic Parousia; Eschatology in the Gospels and in Revelation; The Appearances of Christ in the Apocalypse)*, these terms are no longer present – only the hope, expectation and bright joy of the future transformation of everything<sup>66</sup>.

## Conclusion

The *Apocalypse of John* was Sergius Bulgakov’s favourite book. Chapters 21 and 22 of the Book of Revelation speak of the final *transcensus* and *transformatio* of man and all creation in the afterlife. This is also the transformation of the whole Church as the people of God in the final eschatological events. “The Apocalypse of John is the account of what will happen, when God decides to approach and embrace His creation from the other side of the horizon in order to finally accomplish its transfiguration”<sup>67</sup>. Sergius Bulgakov already stated in his book *The Bride of the Lamb* that the world is imperceptibly moving towards its final fulfilment – *transformatio*, the action of the Holy Mother in history prepares that world to receive the glory of God. The second manifestation of the Lord

<sup>64</sup> Ch. Stroop, *Father Sergii’s Apocalypse: Tragic, Exilic, and Eschatological Motifs in Sergei Bulgakov’s Late Theological and Autobiographical Writings*, <https://easternchristianity.org/conferences/2009-conference/> (accessed: 10.01.2026).

<sup>65</sup> Cf. С. Булгаков, *Апокалипсис Иоана (Apocalypse of John)*, с. 253.

<sup>66</sup> “Teilhard de Chardin, N. Fedorov, and some others believed that the transition into the future would be smooth. This is somewhat of an illusion, as history is full of cataclysms, and the Kingdom of God also comes through catastrophes. However, the spirit of the Apocalypse is closer to the religious optimism of Teilhard and Fedorov than to the apocalyptic horror more characteristic of pre-Christian apocalypses, the dire prophecies of the Sibyl, pagan expectations of the end of everything, or even the ancient Germanic belief in the destruction of the gods and the death of the universe” (А. Мень, *Читая Апокалипсис. Беседы об Откровении св. Иоанна Богослова...*, op. cit.).

<sup>67</sup> Cf. B. Hallensleben, R.M. Zwahlen, *Editors Introduction*, p. XI.

Jesus in all his glory will be the transformation of this creation<sup>68</sup>. He presents the same theological vision in his commentary on the Apocalypse of John, especially its last chapters.

Our author's Marxist experience shaped his apocalyptic vision of history. Many Russian Orthodox thinkers "have taken a heightened interest in discerning the signs of the end of human history, trying to understand in this apocalyptic clue the developments taking place in the world in general and Russia in particular. They are engrossed in the coming of an Antichrist and in counting the number of the beast"<sup>69</sup>. Accordingly, the history described in the Book of Revelation to John, with the dialectical apocalyptic struggle between good and evil, between God and Satan, moves towards its eschatological fulfilment at the end of the ages. This transition to the Kingdom of God is manifested in several eschatological events at once: the end of the world, the universal judgment, the Parousia of Christ, the manifestation of the glory of the Lord, the final salvation of all things – *apokatastasis*, the coming down of the Heavenly Jerusalem, and so on. These events are what determine the *transformatio* of everything – the glorification of the world and the deification of humanity. This is a vision of a future happy world. The reality described in chapters 21 and 22 of the Apocalypse no longer belongs to earthly reality, but to a transformed one. This is the final triumph of God and the Lamb, the perfect fulfilment of the Messianic times, and at the same time it is the eternal glory of the Church as the Bride of Christ.

Sergius Bulgakov, like Origen, believed in universal salvation – *apokatastasis*. He does not recognize the so-called "second death" in hell. When that *apokatastasis* occurs, the "Heavenly Jerusalem" comes down, which is already like a prologue to the future eternal life, the restoration of all creation, and the final inauguration of the Kingdom of God. This is the last revelation of the Church as the Bride of Christ. The subject of the entire book of Revelation to John (not only the last chapters) is the Church in the broadest sense in the process of preparation to meet Christ, her only Bridegroom, who is the Saviour of all. The transition and transformation of all things will take place exclusively at a time known only to God and only by his power and will. Father Sergius, commenting on Revelation to John 22, calls on every Christian to experience life eschatologically<sup>70</sup>.

This universalism of Bulgakov was not accepted unambiguously by all theologians of the Orthodox Church. For example, such authoritative theologians as G. Florovsky and V. Lossky criticized his deterministic worldview, arguing that Bulgakov turns the Last Judgment not into a real historical event or the final

<sup>68</sup> Cf. S. Bulgakov, *La Sposa dell'Agnello*, p. 607-608.

<sup>69</sup> A. Osipov, *The Eschatological Concept in the Russian Orthodox Theology Today*, [https://alexei-osipov.ru/uploads/publications/reports/12\\_the-eschatological-concept-in-the-russian-orthodox-theology-today.pdf](https://alexei-osipov.ru/uploads/publications/reports/12_the-eschatological-concept-in-the-russian-orthodox-theology-today.pdf) (accessed: 20.08.2025).

<sup>70</sup> Cf. П. Хондзинский, *Персоналистическая эkkлeсиология прот. Сергия Булгакова, прот. Георгия Флоровского и В. Н. Лосского* (*Personalistic Ecclesiology of Archpriest Sergius Bulgakov, Archpriest Georges Florovsky, and V. N. Lossky*), [https://scientific-journals-spbda.ru/f/hch\\_no5\\_2020.pdf](https://scientific-journals-spbda.ru/f/hch_no5_2020.pdf) (accessed: 22.08.2025).

drama of human freedom, but rather a “metaphysical process”. Bulgakov’s theological interpretation loses the drama of human freedom – the possibility for a person to finally say “no” to God<sup>71</sup>. There is not much direct criticism of Bulgakov in V. Lossky’s works, but he defends apophatic theology against overly systematic and speculative metaphysics. He criticized Bulgakov’s view of the end of the world as a natural evolution. Bulgakov interpreted the catastrophe described in the Apocalypse as the penetration of *Sophia* (God’s Wisdom) into creation, and Lossky believed that this belittles God’s transcendence and supernatural intervention. He did not agree that Bulgakov “softens” the concepts of hell and eternal punishment, which are very pronounced in the Revelation to John. Bulgakov also “depersonalizes” evil too much, turning it into just a temporary misunderstanding. “S. Bulgakov’s Sophianism is a lack of true ecclesiology. The idea of the Church is intertwined with the Cosmos, and the idea of the Cosmos ceases to be Christian”<sup>72</sup>. The idea of *apokatastasis* is also rejected by the Protestant Churches.

Nonetheless, the Apocalypse teaches that Christ is present in the history of the Church and in the life of every believer, but at the same time the glorious meeting with him in the Kingdom of Heaven is drawing ever closer. Where indeed “[t]here will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Rev 21:4). This will be God’s new creation – to perfect what was created and to finally defeat the enemies – death, the demon, suffering, sin and evil. This will be the newness of all that was created, and now transformed, as a *continuum* from earthly to heavenly reality. This will be the abundance of the gifts of the Lord God and the perfect feast of the Transfiguration of Mount Tabor.

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. V. Lytvinenko, *Sergey Bulgakov and Georges Florovsky: The Task of Relating God and Creation*, “Theological Reflections” 15(2014), p. 231-233.

<sup>72</sup> V. Lossky, *La teologia mistica della Chiesa D’Oriente*, Bologna 1990, p. 102.

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