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Tradition and Innovation in Metropolitan Ilarion

The debt of the Christianity of Rus' to its Byzantine models is obvious, and has been widely explored in areas such as art, architecture and spirituality. The debt to literary sources, however, remains a field where there is much virgin soil. I write myself as an English researcher in patristics, interested to explore how the patristic inheritance was adopted and adapted in medieval cultures, and in particular in Rus', where the linguistic factor made both the desire to preserve the old and the stimulus to create the new all the more strong.[1]

Simply to note that themes recur through the centuries is not itself of great interest, and it is natural to look out for originality. Where this is to be found (and we shall find it in Ilarion), it can be welcomed, but there is a danger of imposing our own preference for originality on cultures which attached more value to the faithful transmission of tradition. Often, too, the mere context produced novelty: themes familiar from the Greek Fathers could take on a new meaning simply by being transported into the novel world of Rus'. An example is a passage in Vladimir Monomakh's *Pouchenie* where he quotes from one of the ascetical writings of St Basil the Great*:*

> As St Basil taught, when he had gathered the young:... 'Eat and drink without making a great noise, keep silence in the presence of the old, listen to the wise, be submissive to your elders, preserve love with those of your own age or younger than you. Do not talk deceitfully, but ponder much; do not speak either fiercely or abusively. Do not laugh a lot, be modest in the company of your elders, do not talk foolishly to women; keep your eyes down but your soul erect, to avoid them.'[2]

To apply instructions intended for Cappadocian novices to the junior princes of Rus' changes their meaning.

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1 Publication of this essay is due to Professor Andrzej Poppe, who overcame my scruples and put me in touch with this journal. My piece is but a preliminary study, intended to invite scholars better equipped than I to carry the subject further.

2 *ПВЛ*: 99. This passage is taken from St Basil, "Discourse on Ascetical Discipline," Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 31, 648–9.

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The same point can be made about the subject of the present paper — the *Slovo o zakone i blagodati*, a sermon preached, probably in Kiev, in the middle of the eleventh century by Ilarion the first Rus'ian-born metropolitan of the city (though before his elevation to this dignity), and the acknowledged masterpiece of Rus'ian homiletics.[3] The familiar theme of the superiority of the New Covenant to the Old takes on a new meaning when, as throughout this work, Ilarion applies it to the conversion of Rus'. At times he treats biblical history with remarkable freedom: on the first page of the *Slovo* he writes, '[God] did not abandon His creation forever to be oppressed by the darkness of idolatry and perish through service to demons, but He first justified the race of Abraham by the tables and the Law.'[4] The Pentateuch is quite clear, however, that even before Moses the Israelites were not idolaters, but worshippers of the one true God. If Ilarion writes as if they were, it is in order to strengthen the parallel with the conversion of Rus'.[5]

Ilarion on Christ

Before embarking, however, on Ilarion's treatment of the conversion of Rus', I would like to treat that part of his work that is most indebted to a particular Greek source. This is the passage where he develops the antithesis between the human and divine natures of Christ:

> [The Son] was one of the Trinity, in two natures, Godhead and manhood…, and displayed on earth both the divine and the human. As man He grew in His mother's womb, and as God He issued from it without harming her virginity. As man He received His mother's milk, and as God He made the angels sing with the shepherds 'Glory to God in the highest'. As man He was wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and as God He led the Magi by a star.

And so he continues at considerable length.[6] Though the two natures in Christ are contrasted to the same effect in countless patristic texts of the fourth and fifth centuries, the character and length of the treatment of this theme in Ilarion betrays a debt to one particular source — the Sermon on the Transfiguration in the Greek

3 The edition I shall cite is that in Акентьев К.К. «Слово о законе и благодати» Илариона Киевского. Древнейшая версия по списку ГИМ Син. 591, *Византинороссика*. Т. 3. СПб., 2005, 116–52. As well as the chapter and line numbers I shall provide the page number in the manuscript, to enable reference to the publication of the same manuscript in Молдован А.М. *«Слово о законе и благодати» Илариона*. К., 1984, 78–100.

4 *Слово* 1.2–5, 168.

5 An equally unexpected departure from familiar biblical material occurs at 11–12, p. 173a: 'Judaism is justified by the shadow and the law, but not saved; Christians by truth and grace are not justified but saved. Among the Jews is justification, among the Christians salvation, for justification is in this world, but salvation is in the world to come.' How could Ilarion ignore the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith?

6 *Слово* 18–21, 176–177об.

Ephraemic corpus.[7] It is striking what an impact this text had on him. Not only does he follow it at length in a work that otherwise avoids direct borrowings from a single source, but he does so with little concern for relevance: the contrast between the human and divine natures of Christ has nothing to do with the essential themes of the *Slovo*. We may note that this same Ephraemic text is echoed in the other significant text of Ilarion that survives, his 'Profession of Faith'. Here we find echoes of the following phrases of the Greek: 'born without seed and ineffably, while preserving the virginity [of Mary] uncorrupted', 'begotten from the Father without a mother and from the Virgin Mary without a father', 'one Godhead, one power, one kingdom in three persons.'[8]

It is unexpected to find in Ilarion so great a debt to a text that was never celebrated and has been completely forgotten in modern patristic studies. Russian specialists go on attributing it to the famous St. Ephraem the Syrian (who died in 373), but it is obvious to any student of the Early Church that it postdates the Council of Chalcedon (451) and echoes the Chalcedonian Definition, with its teaching of two natures in Christ united in one hypostasis, and also echoes the Tome of Leo the Great (449), which was canonized in the same definition and contains a very similar passage on the relation between the human and the divine in Christ. This sermon on the Transfiguration belongs, in fact, to the corpus known as 'Ephraem Graecus' — texts which survive only in Greek, never existed for the most part in Syriac, and date to the fifth or sixth centuries.[9] The sermon illustrates a Christology which, with its emphasis on the distinction between the two natures and its treatment of them in a symmetrical framework, has been called 'palaeo-Chalcedonian' (or Old Chalcedonian), to distinguish it from the so-called 'Neo-Chalcedonianism' that supplanted it in the mid-sixth century, at the ecumenical council of 553, which reaffirmed the emphasis in Cyril of Alexandria on the union of natures and the subjection of the human nature to the divine hypostasis.[10] As long as winning back the so-called Monophysites was a prime aim of the Byzantine government, the Tome of Leo was looked upon as an embarrassment, as open to a charge of the Nestorian error of separating Christ's manhood from his Godhead, but from the ecumenical council of 680/1, with its definition of two wills and operations in Christ, the authority of the Tome was reaffirmed. Its status in the Rus'ian context

7 For a complete edition of this sermon one has to go back to J.S. Assemani's edition of the works of St Ephraem, vol. 2 (Rome, 1743), 41–9. The part that Ilarion echoes extensively is usefully reprinted in Ludolf Müller, *Des Metropoliten Ilarion Lobrede auf Vladimir den heiligen und Glaubensbekenntnis* (Wiesbaden, 1962), 187–8. Both Müller (*Des Metropoliten Ilarion Lobrede*, 153) and Francis Thomson ("Quotations of Patristic and Byzantine Works by Early Russian Authors," *Slavica Gandensia* 10 (1983), 75 n. 16) cite Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Homilies* IV.9, but the passage is too brief to be comparable to the passages in Pseudo-Ephraem and Leo the Great.

8 Ephraem, ed. Assemani, p. 42D, 49B, 49E, echoed in the Profession of Faith (included in Ludolf Müller, *Des Metropoliten Ilarion Lobrede*, 141-3) at 52.28–9, 53.1–2 and 52.14–15 respectively.

9 See *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. IV.1 (Paris, 1960), 800–15, 'Éphrem grec'.

10 To state things in this way is not to make any assumptions about the intentions of the Fathers of Chalcedon, who combined their 'two natures' formula with great veneration for St Cyril.

may be illustrated from a period later than Ilarion, when the metropolitan Daniil (1521–39), in his *Slovo o voploshchenii*, written in opposition to the prince-monk Vassian Kosoj, attacked Aphthartodocetism — the belief that Christ's flesh was incorruptible — by citing, alongside other texts, the whole of the Tome of Leo, as well as the passages of Ephraem Graecus and Ilarion that we have been examining.[11] Even so, the dominant note in Orthodox Christology remained, and always has remained, a stress on the unity and divine personhood in Christ, whereby the divine and human predicates are distinguished, but always attributed to one and the same divine subject, the divine Son and Word of God.

None of this, however, contributes to an understanding of the purposes, or theological acumen, of Ilarion. There is no reason to suppose that he was even aware of the particular theological tendency in this Ephraemic sermon. In his Profession of Faith mentioned above he makes use of Ephraem Graecus in a context that otherwise follows the very different Christological model favoured by St Cyril of Alexandria, where the incarnation is described not in terms of two symmetrical natures, but of a history undergone by the Second Person of the Trinity. For example, Ilarion writes, 'He did not lay down what He had been but assumed what He had not been... The immortal one died, so that He might bring me, who was dead, to life'[12] — an attribution of suffering to the Godhead that was avoided by the palaeo-Chalcedonians. Ilarion's enthusiasm for the passage on the two natures of Christ in the Ephraemic sermon must have arisen from admiration of its rhetorical verve rather than an appreciation of its theological implications.

We may with confidence exclude the possibility that in the *Slovo* Ilarion was intending to correct or alter the Byzantine doctrine of Christ. The suggestion by the Soviet scholar Zamaleev that Ilarion preferred Arianism to Nicene Orthodoxy is based not merely on mistaking echoes of St Paul as proof of Arianism,[13] but also on a false conception of the mentality of Rus'ian churchmen: with their desire to make Byzantine Christianity their own, they would have been horrified at the suggestion that their theology departed from Byzantine norms. The search for originality in Rus'ian texts can falsify the aims of the writers, who were concerned to preserve the culture they had adopted without change. They did not share the conventional wisdom of our own age, with its love of cultural diversity and rejection of the notion that some cultures are simply better than others. Having said this, I would like to proceed to a theme of the *Slovo* that is not only much more central to the text but arguably innovative, and this is its treatment of the conversion of Rus'. I intend to argue that Ilarion treats the conversion as a climactic moment not just in Rus'ian history but in salvation history as a whole, and that in doing so he was strikingly original.

11 Макарий. *История Русской Церкви*. Т. 4. М., 1996, 375–6.
12 Ludolf Müller, *Des Metropoliten Ilarion Lobrede*, 142, 53.5–9.
13 Замалеев А.Ф. *Философская мысль в средневековой Руси*. Л., 1987, 114–5.

Evangelization in earlier tradition

Simon Franklin in the introduction to his English translation of the *Slovo* describes Ilarion as presenting the Christianization of Rus' as 'an integral and necessary part of the sacred history, of the divine plan for mankind'.[14] What he means is that Ilarion does not merely say that the conversion of Rus' was in accordance with the divine will active in all places at all times, but that the conversion belonged to sacred history. By sacred history we mean the sequence of biblical narrative and prophecy, and the fulfilment of prophecy, that constitutes God's revelation to his people and the work of redemption. This sacred history is not to be confused with world history as a whole, where individuals work out their salvation (with God's aid) but the historical events are not themselves salvific.

This distinction received attention in a classic work for English students of late antiquity, *Saeculum* by the late Robert Markus.[15] This work contrasted the disenchantment with the Roman state expressed in St Augustine's *City of God* to the celebration of the Christian empire as the fulfilment of Scripture that we find in a group of texts written in around 400, in response to the apparent triumph of the Christian Empire after the defeat of a pagan-led revolt of Eugenius (in 394), the enforcement of the anti-pagan laws of Theodosius the Great, and almost a century of steady evangelization. Of the view of Christian history expressed in these texts Markus writes, 'The establishment of the Christian Empire and the repression of paganism have entered the sacred history. They have become part of God's saving work and are described in the categories of the biblical prophecies. The *tempora christiana* have become a distinct phase in the history not only of the Roman Empire, but of salvation.'[16]

But how convincing, in truth, is the evidence for the strength of this view at the end of the fourth century? That Christian orators liked to describe the victory of the faith under Constantine and Theodosius as a fulfilment of biblical prophecy is certainly true, but it is less obvious how seriously they intended their language. How much was implied when, for example, Eusebius of Caesarea in his accounts of the victory of the newly converted Constantine over his pagan rival Maxentius in AD 312 interprets the event in terms of the destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea, according to the Book of Exodus?[17] Was this meant to imply that Constantine's victory fulfilled Scripture in a way that made it part of the very meaning of Scripture, as the consummation of the victory of Christ over the powers of darkness, or simply that a biblical type could be borrowed as a literary motif for rhetorical effect? The distinction is not clear-cut. But we need to attempt it when

14 *Sermons and Rhetoric of Kievan Rus*, transl. and with an introd. by Simon Franklin (Cambridge, MA, 1991) [Harvard Library of Early Ukrainian Literature, vol. 5], xxxii.
15 Robert Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine* (Cambridge, 1970).
16 Robert Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine*, 31.
17 Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* IX.9, and *Life of Constantine* I.38.

we come to consider texts that, in the context of successful evangelization, quote the great biblical passages that foretell, or enjoin, the conversion of the nations — Ilarion's *Slovo* being, of course, a prime example. In such texts biblical quotations could be mere decoration, to add a note of piety or elevation to the narration of a recent event; but they could mean much more than that: they could imply that the event in question is part of the meaning of Scripture and makes Scripture true. We need to ask: did churchmen in the centuries before Ilarion look at the biblical prophecies of the conversion of the nations as relating to their own age?

Martin Goodman, in his Wilde lectures of 1992 on Jewish proselytism (or rather the lack of it) in the first century AD,[18] brings out the novelty in the ancient world of the Christian endeavour, initiated by St Paul, to convert outsiders to the Christian faith. He comments, 'Only familiarity makes us fail to appreciate the extraordinary ambition of the single apostle who invented the whole idea of a systematic conversion of the world, area by geographical area'[19] — though this statement needs to be qualified in view of the lack of any expectation on St Paul's part that whole populations would be converted to the faith: he saw his task as communicating the gospel to the elect few scattered around the Mediterranean. But he did not downplay the importance of this task. Far from it: he saw it as an essential prelude to the return of Christ in glory.[20] The Christian Church is founded on the Pauline version of the gospel, and contains in its sacred books such resonant statements as the commission of the risen Jesus to his disciples at the end of the gospel of Matthew (28.19), 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'

Modern western Christians take for granted that Christianity is a proselytizing religion, always in search of new converts. But the post-Pauline Church very quickly abandoned this priority, and mission only came to the fore in a sustained way in the early modern period, with the work of Roman Catholic missionaries in the Americas and the Far East. On the same page that I have already cited Goodman continues:

> It is a separate question how many Christians believed a proselytizing mission to be desirable after the eschatological fervour of the first generations. Against any view that such a mission was generally seen by Christians as applicable in later times is the treatment of the texts of Jesus' commission to the apostles (Matt. 28.19–20; Mark 16.15-16) in patristic writings of the second to fourth centuries. By most of the Church Fathers these texts were treated historically (for example, Euseb. *Hist. Eccl*. 3.5.2): the gospels recorded the teaching given at that time to the apostles, and by implication the injunction to spread the gospel and baptize the world was not understood to apply to

18 Martin Goodman, *Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1994).

19 Martin Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 106.

20 See J. Cristian Beker, *Paul the Apostle. The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Edinburgh, 1980), 135–81.

> later generations. So far as I can discover, when these texts were interpreted to apply to their own day, the religious messages which early Christian writers derived from them did not include an injunction to missionary activity. Thus Eusebius (*Dem. Ev*. 1.6.74–5) cited Matthew 28.19–20 to show that 'Christianity' was what Christ told the apostles to teach. Epiphanius (*Ancoratus*, 7.1; 8.7) quoted the same text to illustrate the concept of the Trinity. Tertullian (*De Bapt*. 13.3) and Cyprian (*Ep*. 27.3) used the commission text as an example of the desirability of obeying Christ's commands (*Ep*. 63.18).

One further patristic text is worth citing, because it is fuller and less incidental than these examples, and by a writer who was far more read in later centuries than the ones Goodman cites, and that is the passage in St John Chrysostom's *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew* where he treats the key injunction by Jesus, 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the end of the age' (Matt 28.19–20).[21] In his treatment of these verses Chrysostom distinguishes between the injunction to make disciples of all nations, which he interprets as addressed specifically to the original Apostles, and the moral injunctions, summed up in the phrase 'all that I have commanded you', which he sees as addressed to all Christians. This interpretation goes out of its way to limit the call to convert the nations to the Apostles themselves. It is obvious that this lack of interest in converting the nations excluded any notion that ongoing evangelization belonged to sacred history.

There are, of course, examples of notable missionary endeavour in the Early Church after the age of the Apostles. But for our purposes we must exclude what are best be called 'home' missions to convert the inhabitants of the Roman Empire; even the mission of St Augustine of Canterbury to England, directed by Pope Gregory the Great, falls into this category, since Gregory viewed England (or Britain) as still part of the Roman world. Once we place these missions to one side, what remains is curiously isolated and accidental. Frumentius in Ethiopia, Ulfilas among the Goths, and Patrick in Ireland, the three great early missionaries outside the borders of the empire, had all spent significant periods outside the empire (or, in the case of Ulfilas, were born there) and lost the sense of an exclusively Roman identity; these missions won the approval of the mainstream Church, but remained private initiatives that the main body of the Church did little to assist and did not greatly value.

St Patrick probably needs an introduction for non-British and non-Irish readers. Brought up on the north-west British coast at the turn of the fourth century, he was carried off in adolescence to slavery in Ireland. Though he escaped back to Britain, he later returned to Ireland as a missionary, the first Christian missionary in that country.[22] Criticisms of his mission by bishops in Britain, who had no wish to see

21 John Chrysostom, "Homilies on Matthew" 90.2–3, Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 58, 789–91.

22 We know of one earlier bishop in Ireland — Palladius, but he ministered to those Irish who (through

their Irish enemies enjoying the benefits of the gospel, led him to write an apologia (his *Confessio*), in which he defends his mission on the basis of a very personal appropriation of the teaching of the Apostles and prophets. He is, in fact, the first Christian writer to apply the Matthaean injunction and related texts to ongoing Christian evangelization:

> I am a great debtor to God, who granted me such grace that through me many peoples should be reborn in God and afterwards be confirmed and that clergy should everywhere be ordained for them, to serve a people just now coming to the faith, and which the Lord took from the ends of the earth, as He had promised of old through His prophets, 'The nations will come to Thee from the ends of the earth' (Jeremiah 16.19b)... And I wish to wait for His promise in the gospel, 'They will come from the east and from the west and will recline with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob' (Matt 8.11), as we believe that believers will surely come from the whole world... He urges and teaches in the gospel, saying, 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (Matt 28.19).[23]

St Patrick proudly identifies his mission to the Irish as the expansion of the gospel to 'the ends of the earth' prophesied in Scripture. A phrase that in its original context is scarcely more than an expression of God's sovereignty over the whole earth is interpreted as a precise pointer to the regions most on the margin of the known world. Their evangelization becomes the climax of sacred history, the final event that will usher in the end of time. Patrick himself had no doubt but that the end was near, and would have been startled to know that he was initiating two thousand years of Irish Christianity.

If the Church of the Later Roman Empire took singularly little interest in evangelization beyond the borders of the empire, the same cannot be said of its successor (or continuation), the Byzantine Empire. The military weakness of the Byzantine state, which even in its initial period of glory under Justinian perilously overstretched its resources, led it to develop a sophisticated diplomacy; and one of the tools of this diplomacy was evangelization.[24] The goal of evangelization was to reconcile and civilize potential enemies of the Byzantine state, and make them clients of the empire. This did not exclude a spiritual dimension, since the empire and the emperors viewed themselves as essential for the divine governance of the world. From the time of Basil I (867–86) the responsibility of the emperor to spread the faith was linked to his status as one 'equal to the Apostles'. This ideology was centred not on the notion of a sacred history continuous with biblical history, but an a sacralization of the Byzantine state. The Church played its role as the ally

contact with Britain) had already become Christian. He was not a missionary.

23 Confessio 38–40. Saint Patrick, "Confession et Lettre à Coroticus," *Sources Chrétiennes* 249 (Paris, 1978), 110–4.

24 See Иванов С.А. Византийская религиозная миссия VIII–XI вв. с точки зрения византийцев. *Христианство в странах восточной, юго-восточной и центральной Европы на пороге второго тысячелетия*. Под ред. Б.Н. Флори. М., 2002, 9–34.

of the state, but did not adopt evangelization as essential to its own mission. It is significant that a missionary hagiography did not develop: lives of missionary saints, of which there are notable western examples, particularly in the Frankish kingdoms, are absent from Byzantine hagiography.[25]

Does the position change when we turn to Slavonic writing before Ilarion? What do we find, for instance, in the tenth-century accounts of the mission of Sts Cyril (Constantine) and Methodius? The early Slavonic Lives of these saints deserve close scrutiny.[26] Here, in the context of the Slav mission, some of the great biblical texts on the conversion of the world are indeed cited. For example, 1 Timothy 2.4 (the Saviour 'desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth') occurs in a letter written by the emperor Leo to the newly converted Ratislav of Moravia (Life of Constantine 14) and in the account early in the Life of Methodius of the raising up of the saint (ch. 2). Such citation may seem to anticipate Ilarion, but the one just mentioned is the last of its kind in the Life of Methodius, while in the Life of Constantine the great texts are cited in the very specific context of a defence of the saint's use of the Slavonic language, where they are listed together with such passages as 1 Corinthians 14 on speaking with tongues. In fact, the emphasis in these Lives is not on mission at all, but on the creation of Slavonic Christian culture; these texts are not used to interpret the mission of Sts Cyril and Methodius as a fulfilment of Scripture, to locate it (that is) in salvation history. The most revealing passage is the opening of the Life of Methodius, which offers a compendium of salvation history. The text does not lead immediately into a treatment of Methodius' work, thereby linking it to salvation history: instead we are offered, before we come to that, a history of the first six ecumenical councils. Methodius' mission is given an honoured place in ecclesiastical history, but not in the sacred history treated in Scripture.

Ilarion and his heirs on the conversion of Rus'

What do we find when we proceed to Ilarion's *Slovo o zakone i blagodati*? The theme of the contrast between law and grace, with which the work begins and from which it derives its title, leads on to an account of the history of salvation, whose climax is a citation of the injunction by Christ to his disciples to preach the gospel to the whole world (Matt 28.19). 'Meet it was,' Ilarion continues, 'for grace and truth to shine forth upon new people'.[27] And this provides him with an immediate

25 It is significant that in Byzantium the city of Constantinople was seen as central to Christianity, and Holy Land pilgrimage was never of prime importance. It is most striking that Rus' very soon developed a devotion to the Holy Land and Jerusalem that far surpassed that of its Byzantine teachers; see Richard Price, "The Holy Land in Old Russian Culture," *The Holy Land, Holy Lands, and Christian History*, ed. by R.N. Swanson [Studies in Church History 36] (Woodbridge, 2000), 250–62.

26 I have used the translations in Francis Dvornik, *Les Légendes de Constantin et de Méthode vues de Byzance* (Prague, 1933), 349–93.

27 *Слово* 27.1, 180.

transition to the conversion of his own people: 'And so indeed it is: the grace of faith has spread over the whole world, and reached our nation of Rus'.'[28]

He proceeds to cite twenty-one biblical prophecies fulfilled by the conversion of Rus' (not to mention echoes of many more). He begins with two of the most striking, 'From the east and from the west My name is glorified among the gentiles' (Malachi 1.11), and 'Thy name is wonderful in all the earth' (Psalm 8.2).[29] It is the conversion of Rus' that has made this true. A few pages later he declares, 'There has been fulfilled what had been spoken about us, the nations, «The Lord shall reveal His holy arm before all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation that comes from our God».'[30] It is *now*, Ilarion is saying, that the gospel has reached the ends of the earth and the prophecies have been fulfilled.

In the same passage he deplores the pagan past of Rus'. But the contrast between Christian present and pagan past is soon replaced by one between the faithful people of Rus' and the faithless Jews: 'We do not insult Him like the Jews, but bless Him as Christians. We do not take counsel to crucify Him, but worship Him as crucified… We are not faithless, but like Peter say to Him, «Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God», and with Thomas, «Thou art my Lord and God».'[31] The implication is that the Christians of Rus' stand shoulder to shoulder with the original Apostles, as witnesses to Christ before Jews and Gentiles. And this forms the resonant conclusion of the properly theological part of the *Slovo*, followed immediately by the encomium of Prince Vladimir and a closing prayer.

In all, we can indeed say that Ilarion treats the conversion of Rus' as immediately and integrally connected to the sacred, biblical history of salvation, and virtually as constituting the climax of the whole story. In so doing, he gave evangelization an importance it had not received in Byzantine Christianity, nor before Ilarion in its Slavonic offshoots. We may therefore say that his glorification of the conversion of Rus' as part of the history of salvation was original. We have seen that he had been anticipated by St Patrick; but since the latter's *Confessio* was unknown in the Orthodox east, this does not reduce his originality or the novelty of his message in the context of the Byzantine tradition.

Once Ilarion had paved the way, other Rus'ian writers followed suit. The Lesson on Boris and Gleb by Nestor gives the following account of the conversion of Rus':

> The land of Rus' remained in its former idolatrous delusion, for it had not heard from anyone the word about our Lord Jesus Christ, for no apostles had come to them and no one had preached to them the words of God. But then the Master Himself, our Lord Jesus Christ, looked in His goodness at His handiwork, for He did not permit them to perish in idolatrous delusion. After many years He took pity on His creation, desiring to

28 *Слово* 27.7–8, 180об.
29 *Слово* 28.2–5, 180об–181.
30 *Слово* 30.37–40, 183, citing Isaiah 52.10.
31 *Слово* 30.25–34, 182об–183, citing Matt 16.16 and John 20.28.

> join them to His Godhead in the last days, even as He Himself declared in the gospel, speaking in parables.[32]

This introduces the parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Mt 20.1–16), where those who are hired only at the end of the day receive the same pay as those who had worked throughout the day. Nestor continues, 'The Lord told the parable in His foresight about these people'[33] — that is, Rus'. And there follows a narration of their conversion.

This passage is manifestly indebted to Ilarion. It in its turn influenced Epifany Premudry when at the turn of the fourteenth century he wrote his account of the missionary labours of St Stephen of Perm.[34] Epifany retells the Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard in a way strongly reminiscent of Nestor. After following the first part of the gospel text closely, he expands the rest of it as follows:

> At the eleventh hour he found others standing idle, and said to them, 'Why do you stand here all day idle, Permians? Has no one hired you?' And they answered, 'No one has hired us — that is, no one has taught us the Christian faith, no one has illuminated us with holy baptism, no one has led us into the rational vineyard, that is, the Law of God.'... But when our Saviour was well-pleased, in the last days, at the end of the years, in the final times, at the close of the seventh millennium, the Lord had pity on them.[35]

This bold application of the parable may be related to a long disquisition in Epifany on why the conversion of the Permians occurred so late in history. Why did the Apostles not come to the land of Perm? In an apology for their neglect of this clearly essential part of their mission, Epifany lists the great missionary journeys that legend attributed to the Apostles, commenting several times, 'But they [*or* he] did not come to the land of Perm'[36] — developing a point made by Nestor in relation to Rus'. The clear implication, startling in its boldness, is that the work of St Stephen completes and indeed redeems the otherwise imperfect labours of the Apostles. When to this theme is added an explicit expectation that the end of the world is near, as in both Nestor and Epifany,[37] the spread of the gospel, first to

32 *Жития святых мучеников Бориса и Глеба и службы им*. Под ред. Д.И. Абрамовича. Пг., 1916, 3, 13–20.

33 *Жития святых мучеников Бориса и Глеба*, 3, 29.

34 For the missionary theology of this work, and its relation to earlier Greek models, see Richard Price, "The Holy Man and Christianization from the Apocryphal Apostles to St Stephen of Perm," *The Expansion of Orthodox Europe: Byzantium, the Balkans and Russia*, ed. by J. Shepard (Aldershot, 2007), 497–520.

35 *Житие св. Стефана епископа Пермского*. Под ред. В. Дружинина. СПб., 1887, 12–13.

36 *Житие св. Стефана*, 10–12.

37 Epifany was writing at a time when the end of the world was widely expected within the century, according to a traditional chronology which, starting from the creation of the world supposedly in 5508 BC and assigning it seven millennia of existence, predicted the end in AD 1492. Epifany refers to this several times, once in the context of critics who actually used it against his mission, saying that it was pointless founding new churches so near the end of time, *Житие св. Стефана*, 70.

Rus' and later to Perm, appears as the veritable climax of salvation history, paving the way for the return of Christ in glory, in fulfilment of the words of Christ, 'This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come' (Matt 24. 14).

Here, however, we are moving beyond the horizons of Ilarion, who lacks the theme of the nearness of the end. He remains the innovator and the decisive influence in this redefinition of sacred history, by means of which the newly converted people of Rus' on the very edge of the known world could feel that the Bible talked about them, and that their conversion was of significance not only for them, but for the whole human race.

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