

Joseph Bryennios and eschatological theology in Late Byzantium

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The Last Judgment, the extraordinary conclusion to Christ's parousia, played a consequential role in Byzantine religious culture. However, the scarcity of biblical information and the lack of an official council-sanctioned theology of the afterlife resulted in the creation of varying and sometimes contradictory narratives. The most systematic treatment of questions pertaining to the Last Judgment is by Joseph Bryennios (d. c. 1430/1), a theologian and court preacher, in a series of two sermons. This paper offers a detailed investigation of Bryennios' eschatological thought and discusses its sources and its importance as 'official' theology in the last decades of the empire.

Keywords: Joseph Bryennios; Last Judgment in Byzantium; afterlife; hell; eschatological theology

I. Introduction

The Last Judgment, the extraordinary conclusion to Christ's *parousia*, played a consequential role in early Christian and Byzantine religious culture. It served as the focus of liturgical poetry,¹ a source for theological reflections,² the topic of monastic sermons,³ the core of a very important feast day (Meatfare Sunday),⁴ and the primary

1 See the *kontakion* (sermon in verse) 'On the Second Coming' by Romanos the Melode (fl. 6th c.) in P. Maas and C. A. Trypanis (eds), *Sancti Romani Melodi cantica: cantica genuina* (Oxford 1963) 266–75.

2 See, for example, PG 35: 944–5 (Gregory the Theologian); PG 58: 717–18 (John Chrysostom). For an overview, see B. E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Peabody, MA 2010).

3 See, for example, the several sermons attributed pseudonymously to Ephraim the Syrian in K. Phrantzolas (ed. and trans.), *Όσιον Έφραιμ τοῦ Σύρου, Έργα*, 6 vols. (Salonica 1988) 4:9–232. For these texts and the difficulties of dating them, see D. Hemmerdinger-Iliadou, 'Les données archéologiques dans la version grecque des sermons de St. Ephrem le Syrien', *Cahiers archéologiques* 13 (1962) 29–37; eadem, 'Éphrem', *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique*, 17 vols. (Paris 1937–1995) 4: 788–819, esp. 800–15.

4 *Τριώδιον* (Athens 1960) 27–34.

material for grand hagiographical visions.⁵ As early as the tenth century, monumental renderings of the Last Judgment decorated church buildings⁶; in the eleventh century, we find examples in manuscript illumination and panel icons,⁷ and later in patriarchal vestments.⁸ These literary and artistic creations elaborate upon what is admittedly sparse information in the New Testament.⁹ Their main message is invariably cautionary and penitential. Readers, hearers, and viewers are encouraged to contemplate the fierce Judge, the accounting of good and bad deeds, the terrible punishments of hell, and the immeasurable rewards of paradise. They are encouraged, furthermore, to change their ways, repent, and in all ways prepare for the end of their lives. However, the function and focus of each work, as well as the number of details regarding the Last Judgment, vary considerably – a likely result of the aforementioned sparsity of biblical information and the lack of an official council-sanctioned theology of the afterlife in Byzantium. For example, in the two major hagiographical visions, one in the *Life of Basil the Younger*, the other in the *Life of Nephon*, both dating to the tenth century, the post-judgment existence of the saved differs dramatically. Whereas *Basil* speaks of a heavenly city, complete with walls and an extraordinary church in the middle, in *Nephon* the elect, together with Christ, enter a bridal chamber protected by orbiting angelic powers, where they lead a life of continuous praise in song. Furthermore, the material that would have been accessible to most people, such as Romanos' *kontakion* and the hymnic material of Meatfare Sunday, remains rather vague and lacks specificity.

It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that people still had questions, both practical and theological, about an event that constituted the culmination of world history. The

5 Such as in the tenth-century *Life of Basil the Younger* in D. F. Sullivan, A.-M. Talbot, and S. McGrath, *The Life of Saint Basil the Younger: Critical Edition and Annotated Translation of the Moscow Version* (Washington, DC 2014), 344–698; and also in the tenth-century *Life of Nephon* in A. V. Rystencko (ed.), *Materiialy z istorii vizantijs'ko-slov'ians'koj literatury ta movy* (Leipzig 1982) 82–104; and V. Marinis, 'The Vision of the Last Judgment in the Vita of Saint Niphon (BHG 1371z)', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 71 (2017) 193–227.

6 As, for example, in the church of Saint Stephen in Kastoria, Greece, for which see N. Siomkos, *L'église Saint-Étienne à Kastoria : étude des différentes phases du décor peint (Xe–XIVe siècles)* (Salonica 2005) 91–9. For early Cappadocian examples, see C. Jolivet-Lévy, 'Premières représentations du jugement dernier en cappadoce byzantine (Xe s.)', in V. Pace and M. Angheben (eds), *Le Jugement dernier entre orient et occident* (Paris 2007) 47–52.

7 For a succinct overview, see N. P. Ševčenko, 'Images of the Second Coming and the fate of the soul in Middle Byzantine art', in R. J. Daly (ed.), *Apocalyptic Thought in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids 2009) 250–72.

8 Such as the Vatican Sakkos, see H. C. Evans, *Byzantium Faith and Power (1261–1557)* (New York 2004) 300–1; W. T. Woodfin, *The Embodied Icon: Liturgical Vestments and Sacramental Power in Byzantium* (Oxford 2012) 214–15.

9 The bibliography on this topic is enormous. See the useful overview in J. Clark-Soles, *Death and the Afterlife in the New Testament* (New York 2006). For the Book of Revelation, in particular, see S. Shoemaker, 'The afterlife of the Apocalypse of John in Byzantium', in D. Krueger and R. S. Nelson (eds), *The New Testament in Byzantium* (Washington, DC 2016), 301–16.

most systematic treatment of these questions, which stands at the heart of this paper, is by Joseph Bryennios in a series of two sermons, with supplementary material from some of his other orations. Bryennios was one of the most important theologians of Byzantium's last century.¹⁰ Born in c. 1350 in Constantinople, he became a monk, probably at the Stoudios monastery, and dedicated his life to the service of the Church. He spent twenty years (c. 1381–1401) on the island of Crete as a missionary,¹¹ and from 1405 to 1406 he was sent to Cyprus as a *topoteretes* (legate) to negotiate an ultimately unsuccessful union between the Church of Cyprus and the Patriarchate of Constantinople.¹² He resided both at the monastery of Stoudios and later at that of Charsianeites. From about 1416 onward, he served as a court preacher in Constantinople, where he died in c. 1430/1. Bryennios was a prolific author who left behind a considerable number of dogmatic, pastoral, apologetic, polemic, and eschatological works.¹³

Bryennios outlines his eschatological thought primarily in two sermons, both titled 'On the Future Judgment and the Everlasting Blessedness'. He delivered both in the church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople: the first on Meatfare Sunday,¹⁴ and the second a week later.¹⁵ In these two orations, Bryennios poses and answers thirty-five questions (see the Appendix) that address a variety of topics. Bryennios' questions can be divided approximately into five categories: the intermediate state of the souls, practicalities (such as where and when the Last Judgment will take place), questions pertaining to the process and mechanics of the affair, the state of the saved, and the state of the damned.¹⁶ Although Bryennios begins by addressing the time and location of the Last Judgment, he does not proceed in a continuous way; instead, he

10 The most important study of Bryennios' life and work remains that by N. Ioannides, *Ἡ Ἰωσήφ Βρυέννιος. Βίος, ἔργο, διδασκαλία* (Athens 1985). See also, Ph. Meyer, 'Des Joseph Bryennios Schriften, Leben und Bildung', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 5 (1896) 74–111; N. Tomadakes, *Σύλλαβος βυζαντινῶν μελετῶν καὶ κειμένων* (Athens 1961) 491–611; E. Trapp (ed.), *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit*, 12 vols. (Vienna 1976–96), no. 3257; H. Bazini, 'Une première édition des œuvres de Joseph Bryennios : les Traités adressés aux Crétois', *Revue des Études Byzantines* 62 (2004) 83–132. Bazini notes the popularity of Bryennios' writings: she was able to identify more than 130 manuscripts, dating from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century.

11 N. Tomadakes, *Ἡ Ἰωσήφ Βρυέννιος καὶ ἡ Κρήτη. Μελέτη φιλολογικὴ καὶ ἱστορικὴ* (Athens 1947).

12 V. Katsaros, 'Ἰωσήφ Βρυέννιου τὰ πρακτικὰ τῆς συνόδου τῆς Κύπρου', *Βυζαντινά* 21 (2000) 21–56.

13 E. Voulgares (ed.), *Ἰωσήφ μοναχοῦ τοῦ Βρυέννιου τὰ εὑρεθέντα*, 3 vols. (Leipzig 1768–84; repr. Salonica 1991).

14 'Λόγος Α' περὶ τῆς μελλούσης κρίσεως καὶ τῆς αἰδίου μακαριότητος,' in Voulgares, *Ἰωσήφ μοναχοῦ τοῦ Βρυέννιου τὰ εὑρεθέντα*, 2: 361–84.

15 'Λόγος Β' περὶ τῆς μελλούσης κρίσεως καὶ τῆς αἰδίου μακαριότητος,' in Voulgares, *Ἰωσήφ μοναχοῦ τοῦ Βρυέννιου τὰ εὑρεθέντα*, 2: 385–404. Some supplementary material is found in two other sermons both titled 'On the Consummation [of the World]', "Λόγος Α' περὶ συντελείας" and "Λόγος Β' περὶ συντελείας," in Voulgares, *Ἰωσήφ μοναχοῦ τοῦ Βρυέννιου τὰ εὑρεθέντα*, 2: 190–207 and 208–26.

16 The division between the two latter categories is often blurred as Bryennios sometimes addresses both in an answer.

often juxtaposes one aspect of the Judgment with another, without an obviously logical reason. For the purposes of clarity, I restructure the sequence of his questions here in order to create a more cogent and coherent progression.

II. The intermediate state

Let us then start at the beginning. Bryennios explains the present, pre-Judgment existence of the souls of both righteous and saints in Q28.¹⁷ The souls of those who have already departed exist in two places: saints live in the heavens, and sinners live in the middle of the earth, that is to say, in Hades.¹⁸ Whereas the saints are free to move, even within our world, those in Hades stay there until the Day of Judgment. Saints do not receive the eternal spiritual blessings, however, and the damned do not receive punishment before the Last Judgment. The damned are kept in a gloomy prison, guarded by vulgar, cruel, and merciless demons. Here, they see and breathe the fire into which they will eventually be thrown.¹⁹ In an aside to Q33, Bryennios explains in more detail the reason for this arrangement. Without the soul, the body cannot enjoy the spiritual benefits on earth or in heaven; likewise, the soul cannot enjoy them without the body. Thus, the resurrection of the dead is a prerequisite for both the final rewards and final punishments.²⁰

III. Practicalities

When will the Last Judgment take place? Bryennios addresses this question in Q1 and Q4, as well as in his two sermons on the Consummation of the World. The exact time is unknown. Even Jesus declared, ‘About that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father’ (Mark 13:32; Q1).²¹ Nevertheless, Bryennios writes, one may make some reasonable speculations. The day will be a Sunday, the first day of the week and the year, and the time will be the first hour of the year. Because of the perfect sevenfold division of time, evident from the seven days of week and the seven days of creation, the hour will be the seventh hour of the night, which is also when Christ was resurrected (Q4).²² Is it possible, however, to be more specific? Bryennios interprets Revelation 18 as describing the end of the ‘realm of the Romans’, that is to say, the Byzantines, at which time all the wickedness of men will have been accomplished. He is aware that the Byzantine Empire is in dire straits –

17 ‘Λόγος Β’, 392–3.

18 A more detailed explanation of Hades, heaven, and earth (which partakes of the nature of both) is given in Voulgares, *Tὰ εἰρηθέντα*, 2:204–5.

19 Hades is a temporary site; after the Last Judgment, sinners will move to hell, see section VI.

20 ‘Λόγος Β’, 396.

21 ‘Λόγος Α’, 369–70. Translations of excerpts from the New Testament are from the *New Revised Standard Version*.

22 ‘Λόγος Α’, 371–72.

politically, physically, and morally – and argues that one need only to take a look around them to realize that this has been accomplished and that the end is indeed near.²³ Paul's admonitions to Timothy have come to pass.²⁴ Moreover, Bryennios believes that the *parousia* will happen at the end of the seventh millennium, although he concedes that this also depends upon when the required number of just souls reaches heaven.²⁵ He supports his belief in the sevenfold division of time and human history by giving a rather tedious account of instances in which the number seven appears, ranging from biblical stories to the parts of the human body and occurrences in the world.²⁶

According to the standard Byzantine calculation, the world was created in 5508 BCE. This means that Bryennios and his contemporaries believed that they lived toward the end of the seventh millennium.²⁷ The Last Judgment, Bryennios contends, will not take place, as some say, in the sky, or even in a new world created for the purpose of judgment. Instead, it will take place in Jerusalem, in the House of David,

23 'Λόγος Α' περι συντελείας', 191. Bryennios preached these sermons sometime between 1416 and 1430. The memory of Bayezid I's blockade of Constantinople (1394–1402) must have still been vivid. Musa Çelebi, Bayezid I's son, assaulted Constantinople in 1411–12, as did Murad II in 1422. As the result of the treaty between the Byzantines and Ottomans in 1424, 'the Empire was now reduced almost to the suburbs of its capital, and its Emperor was now reduced to renting his throne from the Sultan for a tribute of 100,000 ducats a year', D. M. Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium, 1261–1453*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge 1993), 318–38, quote at 334. See also P. Gounarides, 'Ιωσήφ Βρυέννιος, προφήτης της καταστροφής', in T. Kiousopoulou (ed.), 1453. *Η άλωση της Κωνσταντινούπολης και η μετάβαση από τους μεσαιωνικούς στους νεότερους χρόνους* (Herakleion 2005) 133–45. Other contemporary authors express similar sentiments, see S. Kourousis, 'Αι ἀντιλήψεις περι τῶν ἐσχάτων τοῦ κόσμου καὶ ἡ κατὰ τὸ ἔτος 1346 πτώσις τοῦ τροῦλλου τῆς Ἁγίας Σοφίας', *Ἐπετηρὶς Ἐταιρείας Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν* 37 (1969–70) 211–50, here at 217–28. For what Bryennios considers the moral failures of his contemporaries, see L. Oeconomus, 'L'état intellectuel et moral des Byzantins vers le milieu du XIV^e siècle d'après une page de Joseph Bryennios', in *Mélanges Charles Diehl*, 2 vols. (Paris 1930) 1: 225–33.

24 'You must understand this, that in the last days distressing times will come. For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, brutes, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power. Avoid them!' 2 Timothy 3:1–5; 'Λόγος Β' περι συντελείας', 218.

25 On the idea of the completion of the ranks of the just as a requirement for the *parousia*, see P. Magdalino, 'The end of time in Byzantium', in W. Brandes and F. Schmieder (eds), *Endzeiten: Eschatologie in den monotheistischen Weltreligionen* (Berlin 2008) 119–33, here at 130–3.

26 'Λόγος Α' περι συντελείας', 191–202.

27 On this point, see A. Rigo, 'L'anno 7000, la fine del mondo e l'Imperio cristiano. Nota su alcuni passi di Giuseppe Briennio, Simeone di Tessalonica e Gennadio Scolario', in G. Ruggieri (ed.), *La Cattura della fine: variazioni dell'eschatologia in regime di cristianità* (Genoa 1992) 151–85, here at 154–62. See also Kourousis, 'Αι ἀντιλήψεις περι τῶν ἐσχάτων', 217–23; P. Magdalino, 'The history of the future and its uses: Prophecy, policy, and propaganda', in R. Beaton and C. Roueché (eds), *The Making of Byzantine History* (Aldershot 1993) 3–34, and esp. 27–8; Magdalino, 'End of time', 130–3; A. Pertusi, *Fine di Bisanzio e fine del mondo. Significato e ruolo storico delle profezie sulla caduta di Costantinopoli in Oriente e in Occidente* (Rome 1988).

near the Valley of Josaphat, through which the river of fire will run.²⁸ The Valley of Josaphat, traditionally identified with the Kidron Valley, is mentioned in Joel 3:2 and 12, and has long been considered by Christians, Jews, and Muslims to be the site of the Last Judgment. According to a Greek description of the Holy Land that survives in a fifteenth-century manuscript, the House of David is near the tomb of David, located just north of the valley, on Mount Zion, directly below the so-called Upper Room where the Last Supper allegedly took place.²⁹ To support his claims, Bryennios cites Psalm 121 (122):3, 5 ‘Ierousalem – being built as a city ... there thrones for judgment sat, thrones for David’s house’.³⁰ He also invokes the tradition of the Church, as expressed in a hymn from the *Oktoechos*, which mentions the thrones of judgment set up in the house of David,³¹ as well as in another hymn from the *Triodion* (Q2).³²

The Judgment will unfold, according to Bryennios, as Christ and the apostles have described it.³³ Jesus says, ‘For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man’ (Matthew 24:27). Paul claims that at the last trumpet the dead will be raised, and that both living and dead will be changed (1 Corinthians 15:51–52). Then Bryennios describes the beginning of the Judgment in yet more detail: The Archangel will sound the last trumpet,³⁴ the sky will be rolled up like a scroll,³⁵ the powers of heaven will be shaken,³⁶ the elements will be thrown into disorder,³⁷ the earth and the sea will be shaken,³⁸ the abyss will break, the tombs will open,³⁹ the dead will rise,⁴⁰ the living will change from corruption to incorruptibility,⁴¹ every mob of demons will shudder,⁴² the sun will darken, the moon will be erased, and the stars will be hidden (Q3).⁴³

28 ‘Λόγος Α’, 370.

29 A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Ὀκτὼ ἐλληνικαὶ περιγραφαὶ τῶν ἁγίων τόπων* (St. Petersburg 1903) 6–7. See also 28, and 124. For the tomb of David, see O. Limor, ‘The origins of a tradition: King David’s tomb on Mount Zion’, *Traditio* 44 (1988) 453–62.

30 Translations of excerpts from the Septuagint are from A. Pietersma and B. Wright, *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (Oxford 2007).

31 *Ὀκτώηχος, εἰτ’ οὖν ἡ ἀναστάσιμος ἀκολουθία τῆς Κυριακῆς* (Athens 1960) 28.

32 *Τριώδιον*, 29.

33 ‘Λόγος Α’, 370–71.

34 Revelation 11:15–19; Matthew 24:31; Isaiah 27:13; 1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16.

35 Revelation 6:13–14; Isaiah 34:4.

36 Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:25; Luke 21:26; Haggai 2:6, 21; Joel 3:3–4.

37 Cf. 2 Peter 3:10, 12.

38 Haggai 2:6, 21.

39 Matthew 27:53.

40 Daniel 12:2–3; 1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16.

41 1 Corinthians 15:50–4.

42 James 2:19.

43 Revelation 6:12–14; Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:24–25; Luke 21:25; Isaiah 13:10, 24:23; Joel 2:10; Ezekiel 32:7.

After these events, Christ will come. Just as an emperor who enters a city is preceded by a standard, Christ's coming will be signaled by his cross.⁴⁴ This will terrify both Jews and the infidels (Q6).⁴⁵ The saints will meet Christ in the appropriate order: first, the forefathers, with Adam as their head; then apostles, martyrs, prophets, hierarchs, holy monks, and holy women. They will all sing songs of praise (Q8).⁴⁶

But how will this enormous crowd of resurrected people fit in one place? Resurrected bodies, Bryennios maintains, are incorruptible and exceedingly immaterial. One incorruptible body does not hinder the passage of another. The bodies will be able to pass through solid material because of their immateriality, just as the body of the Lord was able to pass through the sealed doors of his tomb (Q11).⁴⁷

IV. The process of judgment

Bryennios devotes several questions to the process of judgment. Q5 addresses how long the whole affair will last.⁴⁸ On this subject, Bryennios cites Basil of Caesarea, who, in his homily on Psalm 33, proposes that at the Last Judgment each soul will be judged individually.⁴⁹ Considering the number of people who live and have lived on the earth, the judgment will take an infinitely long time.

After the resurrection, all people, including the sinners, will recognize one another and the angels.⁵⁰ The righteous will recognize the righteous just like Abraham recognized Lazaros. Sinners will recognize sinners, just as the rich man recognized his brothers. Moreover, the righteous will also recognize the sinners, as it is written in the Wisdom of Solomon 5:1;⁵¹ likewise, sinners will recognize the righteous (Q10).⁵²

The judgment itself will be the prerogative of Christ alone. The Lord's assertion to the apostles that 'you ... will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel',⁵³ the words of Daniel and David,⁵⁴ and the painters' depictions of the twelve apostles seated in judgment with Christ, should all be taken metaphorically and to indicate the firmness and permanence and steadfastness of their glory. No man or any

44 As alluded to in Matthew 24:30.

45 See also *The Life of Nephon* 84, Marinis, 'The Vision', 210–11. The *Life of Saint Basil the Younger* IV:30–38 also describes the terror of Muslims, Jews, and idolaters at seeing the cross.

46 'Λόγος Α', 373–4.

47 'Λόγος Α', 375–6.

48 'Λόγος Α', 372.

49 PG 29: 372.

50 'Λόγος Α', 375.

51 'Then the righteous will stand with great confidence in the presence of those who have afflicted them and those who make light of their labors'.

52 Wisdom of Solomon 5:4: 'These are they whom we once held in derision and as a byword of reproach – we fools!'

53 Matthew 19:28. See also Luke 22:30.

54 Daniel 7:9; Psalm 121 (122):5.

other created nature can sit in council with Christ (Q7).⁵⁵ Furthermore, in the presence of the Judge, the tollhouses, in which demons examine the sinners, will be superfluous.⁵⁶ Though scenes of angels and demons weighing the deeds of a soul are often included in images of the Last Judgment, this is not strange, Bryennios argues, because painters often incorporate imagery for the sake of zeal or to demonstrate something emphatically (Q22).⁵⁷

Everyone, including heretics, sinners, and demons, will stand before Christ to be judged (Q9). As Christ said, ‘all the nations will be gathered before him’⁵⁸ and ‘all the tribes of the earth will mourn’.⁵⁹ According to Paul, ‘at the name of Jesus, every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father’.⁶⁰ The Jews will face judgment as well.⁶¹ Psalm 1:5 (‘the impious will not rise up in judgment’) does not indicate that the wicked will not be resurrected, but rather that they will not have *parrhesia*.⁶² Furthermore, although everyone will see Christ in person, he will appear differently to different people. The righteous will see Christ’s face as cheerful and gentle; the sinners will see it as awe-inspiring (Q34).⁶³

Then the opening of the books shall take place. These represent each person’s consciousness (συνειδός) and contain not only one’s sins but also the spiritual gifts one received from above. Each person will be held accountable for both sins and gifts. A person’s deeds, words, thoughts, and memories, both manifest and secret, will be examined in the presence of both the soul’s guardian angel and of those who were injured by their sin (Q12).⁶⁴

After the examination of deeds, all sinners will receive the Judge’s decision together.⁶⁵ Subsequently, however, each sinner will receive individual condemnation by someone whose virtue was the opposite of his or her sin. In this way, the righteous

55 ‘Λόγος Α’, 373.

56 For demons as tax collectors, see G. J. M. Bartelink, ‘“ΤΕΛΩΝΑΙ” (Zöllner) als Dämonenbezeichnung’, *Sacris Erudiri* 27 (1984) 5–18; N. Constat, “‘To sleep, perchance to dream’: The middle state of souls in patristic and Byzantine literature’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2001) 91–124, here at 107–9. The most extensive description of this process is in *The Life of Saint Basil the Younger* II:1–56, for which see V. Marinis, *Death and the Afterlife in Byzantium: The Fate of the Soul in Theology, Liturgy, and Art* (Cambridge 2017) 29–35.

57 ‘Λόγος Β’, 389–90. The motif of the weighing of deeds is standard in compositions of the Last Judgment, see Ševčenko, ‘Images of the Second Coming’.

58 Matthew 25:32.

59 Matthew 24:30.

60 Philippians 2:10–11.

61 John 19:37 quoting Zechariah 12:10.

62 ‘Λόγος Α’, 374–5.

63 ‘Λόγος Β’, 396.

64 ‘Λόγος Α’, 376.

65 Matthew 25:41.

will condemn the wicked, the humble will condemn the vainglorious, the twelve apostles will condemn the twelve tribes of Israel and so on (Q21).⁶⁶

V. The state of the saved

Bryennios also addresses the form that the saved will take. Their bodies and garments will be godlike and heavenly, but there will be no distinctions in color, height, or type of clothing. All will be equal (Q14).⁶⁷ They will be able to partake of food as Christ promised,⁶⁸ but it will be noetic and incorruptible – namely, God’s teaching (Q33).⁶⁹ The saints will know all languages, including that of the angels, because they are filled with the Holy Spirit. If the apostles, still enveloped in corrupt bodies, were able to learn the languages of all nations, this will be the case even more so when the saints are dressed in the cloak of incorruptibility. This does not contradict what Paul says,⁷⁰ because when one becomes an adult, one puts an end to childish things.⁷¹ When perfection comes, all the imperfect things, such as ignorance of a language, come to an end. Otherwise, all would remain eternally speechless (Q31).⁷² They will reside in various locations, which have been prepared from the foundation of the world. This indicates, argues Bryennios, that the rewards will be tailored to each person’s achievements. The most special dwelling place is the Heavenly Jerusalem, the whole sky, and what is above it. Just below that is Eden, the earthly paradise, where Adam lived. Then comes the earthly world, which will become incorruptible. In addition, each of the saved will have his own individual plot, as the Lord promised in John 14:2. The visions of many saints confirm this when they describe luxurious residences in heaven (Q15 and Q20).⁷³ The saints will not be envious of one another, however, because there is no ill will or jealousy among them in this life or in the next. Each will be satisfied with whatever they receive (Q29).⁷⁴ Finally, because the places of the righteous are places where ‘distress, sorrow, and sighing are shunned’,⁷⁵ the saints will not grieve when they see some of their kin led to hell. The saints will acknowledge only those of their friends and family who are on Christ’s right side. Others will seem like chaff, thorny plants, and other material for the eternal fire (Q27).⁷⁶

66 ‘Λόγος Β’, 388–89.

67 ‘Λόγος Α’, 377.

68 Luke 22:28–30: ‘You are those who have stood by me in my trials; and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom’.

69 ‘Λόγος Β’, 396.

70 1 Corinthians 13:8, ‘as for the tongues, they will cease’.

71 See also 1 Corinthians 13:11.

72 ‘Λόγος Β’, 395.

73 ‘Λόγος Α’, 377–8; ‘Λόγος Β’, 387–8. Q20 refers also to the sinners, see below.

74 ‘Λόγος Β’, 393.

75 This is a quotation from a prayer in the funeral service, see T. Christodoulou, *Η νεκρόσιμη ακολουθία κατά τούς χειρόγραφους κώδικες 10ου-12ου αιώνας*, 2 vols. (Thera 2005) 2: 477.

76 ‘Λόγος Β’, 392.

The saved will receive immateriality, freedom from care, brightness, untaught knowledge, and clairvoyance. Their immateriality will allow them to be lifted up easily into the air, as Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:17,⁷⁷ to meet the Lord. Their brightness is the result of the Sun of Righteousness shining upon their bodies and faces of the saved, as the Lord foretells in Matthew 13:43.⁷⁸ They will also have absolute knowledge of everything, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:12,⁷⁹ and most manifestly a knowledge of God (Q13).⁸⁰ For the saints, there will be infinite prosperity and everlasting bliss.⁸¹ As Gregory of Nyssa argues, ‘during the entire eternity of the ages, this becomes the case for the person who participates in the Good, since those who participate in it receive increase and growth in that they encounter ever greater and bigger things’ (Q30).⁸² There will be partaking and fellowship, and even exchange of spiritual gifts, although each will enjoy gifts according to his ability. Even on earth, when we invite people for a meal, not everybody eats the same amount, but each partakes of the banquet according to his power (Q32).⁸³

VI. The state of the damned

Hell is different to Hades, where the souls of the damned resided before the Last Judgment. Hell is not anywhere in this world. Instead, as specified by John Chrysostom, it is ‘somewhere outside the inhabited world’ (Q17).⁸⁴ There are different kinds of punishment in hell – the Gehenna, the darkness, the worm, the gnashing of teeth, the Tartaros, the chains, and the wailing⁸⁵ – just as there are different types of sins.⁸⁶ Punishment is tailored to the individual’s age, rank, state of mind, time lived in sin, and any other relevant factors. An impious person is different to a heretic, and an adulterer is different to a thief. Punishments are even different for each of the seven deadly sins⁸⁷ (Q16, Q19, and Q20).⁸⁸

77 ‘We will be caught up in the clouds’.

78 ‘The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father’.

79 ‘Then we will see face to face’.

80 ‘Λόγος Α’, 377.

81 ‘Λόγος Β’, 393–4. Q30 deals with both the righteous and the sinners, see below.

82 *Gregorii Nysseni in canticum canticorum (Gregorii Nysseni opera, vol. 6)*, ed. H. Langerbeck (Leiden 1960) 245–7. Trans. R. A. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa, Homilies on the Song of Songs* (Atlanta 2012) 259.

83 ‘Λόγος Β’, 395–6.

84 *PG* 60:673–74; ‘Λόγος Α’, 378.

85 Bryennios makes no effort to connect the sins with the punishments.

86 Bryennios lists eight ways of sinning: folly, deceit/treachery, robbery, oblivion, tyranny, unfaithfulness, contempt, and wicked disposition, ‘Λόγος Β’, 387.

87 ‘Λόγος Α’, 379. The seven deadly sins mentioned by Bryennios are gluttony, fornication, avarice, anger, grief, despair, and vanity. He obviously borrows this concept from the Latin Church. For the history of the seven deadly sins, see M. W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (East Lansing, MI, 1952; repr. 1967); and, more recently, R. G. Newhauser and S. J. Ridyard, *Sin in Medieval and Early Modern Culture: The Tradition of the Seven Deadly Sins* (Woodbridge, Suffolk 2012).

88 ‘Λόγος Α’, 378; ‘Λόγος Β’, 387–8.

Throughout eternity, there will be neither an increase nor a decrease in the punishments for the damned, because of God's love for mankind and his righteous judgment. If punishments increased, they would have to increase eternally; if they slowly decreased, then hell would eventually cease to exist. Both of these ideas, according to Bryennios, should be rejected by the Orthodox (Q30).⁸⁹ The punishment of those who suffered for their transgressions on earth will be more tolerable (as stated by Paul, 'you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord')⁹⁰ although some will not avoid hell (Q23).⁹¹ Furthermore, nobody will be relieved of punishment because of accidental death, such as falling from a precipice, being eaten by animals, shipwreck, or poisoning. The causes of mishaps are various, and thus each person will be judged according to his or her own disposition (Q24).⁹² There will be no relief for those whose sufferings are identical; even if ten thousand people are fervently thirsty in a waterless land, none will be able to console another, because all will equally be burning with thirst (Q25).⁹³

Is it possible, in some way, for those who are justly condemned, to avoid punishment? Angels, saints, and the Mother of God, Bryennios responds, will offer intercession for some, but not for all.⁹⁴ Those who died in sin will be excluded. The saints will intercede for those who repented but did not manage to completely wipe out the stains of their sin. However, after the judgment, when everyone goes to his or her appointed place, there will be no intercession (Q26).⁹⁵

Finally, Bryennios argues, hell will never end, and there is no ultimate salvation for all human beings, or *apokatastasis*. The Fifth Ecumenical Council (553) condemned those who believed that the punishments would cease, but some still believed that when the Son hands over the kingdom to the Father,⁹⁶ hell would be brought to an end because all things would submit to God. In order to explain this, Bryennios quotes extensively from Chrysostom, without actually citing him.⁹⁷ If we assume that the Son will deliver the Kingdom, this means two things: first, that after he hands it over, he will not possess it; and second, since he possesses it now, the Father was not king before. Both of these are absurd! If the latter is the case, why would Daniel say of the

89 'Λόγος Β', 394.

90 1 Corinthians 5:5.

91 'Λόγος Β', 390.

92 'Λόγος Β', 390–1.

93 'Λόγος Β', 391.

94 Bryennios notes that intercession also happens now: through church buildings, offerings, prayers, icons, and holy services, we draw Mary, the angels, and the saints as intercessors. For the theology behind the prayers and charity offered on behalf of the dead, see Marinis, *Death and the Afterlife*, 97–106.

95 'Λόγος Β', 391–2.

96 1 Corinthians 15:24–8.

97 PG 61:337.

Father that ‘His Kingdom is an eternal kingdom⁹⁸ that will never be destroyed’?⁹⁹ What, then, is the sovereignty that Christ will abolish? Not that of the angels (he has no reason for that), nor that of the faithful, but that of the demons, as Paul says in Ephesians 6:12: ‘For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places’ (Q35).¹⁰⁰

Bryennios continues by asking what it means that Christ ‘hands over the kingdom to God the Father’. There are two kinds of kingdoms: that of kinship and that of creation. The latter refers to God’s dominion over pagans, Jews, and demons, while the former refers to God’s rule over the faithful. The former is the one he will deliver. Furthermore, how are we to understand the claim, ‘When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all’ (1 Corinthians 15:28)? This means that when we all submit to the Son and become his (bodily) members, then he will submit together with us to the Father, as his head. Since not all the members have yet submitted, Christ, our head, has not yet submitted to the Father either. Therefore, Paul is talking about the faithful, not the Son. As the Son became man, he adopted man’s properties, and he made our submission his own. To repay us for our virtue, he calls himself ‘not subject’ or ‘unsubmissive’. From all this, it is obvious that the Son will not cede sovereignty, nor will he deliver sinners from the punishments of hell.¹⁰¹

Finally, is it fair for a person to be punished eternally when he has sinned for only a short time? Again, Bryennios cites Chrysostom:

Consider, for example, how long a time, but for one single sin, our race abides in death ... Do you not see those men, who for a single theft or a single act of adultery, committed in a small moment of time, oftentimes have spent their whole life in prisons, and in mines, struggling with continual hunger and every kind of death? ... God Himself, as He is loving unto men, in the same character does He punish sins. *For according to his great mercy, so also is his reproof.*¹⁰² When therefore you say unto me, God is loving unto men, then you tell me of so much the greater reason for punishing: namely, our sinning against such a Being.¹⁰³

VII. Sources and methodologies

Bryennios’ most important source is the Bible, which he often searches for factual information. For example, in Q3, which addresses the preliminaries of the Last

98 Daniel Th 4:3.

99 Daniel Th 2:44.

100 ‘Λόγος Β’, 396–7.

101 ‘Λόγος Β’, 398–9.

102 Sirach 16:12.

103 ‘Λόγος Β’, 399–400; cf. PG 61:77. Translation from NPNF 12:50 (adapted).

Judgment, Bryennios combines details from Matthew, Luke, 1 Corinthians, and Revelation, among other books. Elsewhere, his answers are based upon the exegesis of pertinent passages. This is the case in Q6, where he interprets ‘the sign of the Son of Man’ (Matthew 24:30) as the cross, and in Q10, where he uses the parable of the rich man and Lazarus and verses from the Wisdom of Solomon to argue that at Christ’s *parousia* everyone will recognize each other. Quite frequently, however, Bryennios’ exegesis seeks to disprove the obvious meanings of the biblical passages because they disagree, in his opinion, with the accepted orthodoxy of faith. For example, he claims that Christ’s assertion to his apostles that they will sit with him in judgment¹⁰⁴ is a metaphor intended to glorify the disciples (Q7). He also claims that the food and drink Christ promised to share at his table in his kingdom¹⁰⁵ will be noetic (Q33). Furthermore, for Bryennios, Paul’s statement that at the *parousia* all tongues will cease¹⁰⁶ actually means that all imperfect things (such as ignorance of a language) will end, but that the saints will in fact know all languages (Q31).

Bryennios’ other important sources are the early Church fathers. Because in Byzantium the fathers had virtually the same stature as scripture, Bryennios considers their opinions authoritative, needing no explanation or justification. He asserts, for example, that hell is outside the inhabited world, because John Chrysostom said so (Q17). He also claims, following Basil of Caesarea, that each person will be judged individually (Q5), even though scriptural evidence does not support such an idea. Authors who lived after the patristic era are virtually absent from Bryennios’ writing, with one notable exception. In Q15, he mentions that many saints saw in visions of heaven lavish residences meant for the saved, a common motif in the saints’ *vitae*.¹⁰⁷

Many of Bryennios’ responses, although not entirely based upon scripture, are in harmony with dominant Byzantine theological opinions. This is the case, for example, in Q28 and Q33, which consider the state of the souls between death and the Last Judgment.¹⁰⁸ In the seventh or early eighth century, pseudo-Athanasios claimed that the souls of the righteous and the saints go to paradise, while those of sinners go to Hades. However, according to pseudo-Athanasios, in both cases they experience only a foretaste of what is to come after the *parousia*.¹⁰⁹ In another instance, Bryennios

104 Matthew 19:28.

105 Luke 22:30.

106 1 Corinthians 13:8.

107 See, for example, *The Life of Saint Basil the Younger* II.43; II.46–48.

108 On this topic, see Conostas, “‘To sleep, perchance to dream’”; Marinis, *Death and the Afterlife*, 24–7, 40–8, 74–81.

109 PG 28:609. For the date of pseudo-Athanasios’ text, see C. Macé, ‘Les *Quaestiones ad Antiochum ducem* d’un Pseudo-Athanase (CPG 2257). Un état de la question’, in M.-P. Bussièrès (ed.), *La littérature des questions et réponses dans l’Antiquité profane et chrétienne : de l’enseignement à l’exégèse* (Turnhout 2012) 121–50. The idea is found in an embryonic form in Irenaeus of Lyons (d. c. 202), see C. E. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids 2001) 9–17. A virtually identical theology is found in the *Kephalaia* of Anastasios of Sinai, a work of the same date

allows for the possibility that sinners may avoid punishment through the prayer of the Theotokos and saints (Q26). The intercessory power of saints is a common motif in Byzantine religious culture. For example, in two medieval apocalypses, that of the *Theotokos*, composed between the ninth and eleventh centuries, and the tenth-century *Anastasia*, the mediatory role of all the saints and angels is an essential part of the narrative.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, the Deisis, that is to say, the image of Mary and John the Baptist praying to Christ, almost always constitutes a central element of Last Judgment images.

Finally, Bryennios answers some questions by making logical inferences. For example, he contends that the multitude of resurrected persons will fit in one place because their bodies will be immaterial (Q11); that, although the sinners will be condemned as a group by Christ, they will also be condemned individually by the saints (Q21); that the saints will not be jealous of one another's inheritance, because there is no jealousy in heaven (Q29); and that the saints will not grieve when they see their relatives in hell because heaven is a place without distress or sorrow (Q27).

VIII. Conclusions

In the tradition of Byzantine Last Judgment descriptions and images, the overall character of Bryennios' sermons is penitential. He encourages his audience at length to visualize the Judgment, repent, and secure a place among the elect through works of charity, which he considers to be the one virtue that can guarantee the avoidance of hell.¹¹¹ The focus of these sermons, however, is quite different from that of previous treatments of the topic. They constitute neither a continuous, triumphant narrative such as we find in hagiography or monastic sermons, nor a vague exposition of the event and its consequences, like those of liturgical poetry. Instead, Bryennios' concerns are mainly pastoral, addressing through scripture and the writings of the great Church Fathers questions that his informed contemporaries would have had about the Last Judgment in all its permutations.

Bryennios' very public reiteration of the Byzantine ideas on the *apokatastasis* and the intermediate state (Q28 and Q33) at a feast day in the church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople certainly had a political dimension. One of the points of disagreement between the Latins and Byzantines, and one indeed that would be discussed at great length at the Council of Ferrara–Florence (1438–1439), pertained to the intermediate condition of the souls. The Byzantines rejected outright the notion of Purgatory, a middle state or place between heaven and hell, where souls needing purification go.

that probably comes from the same milieu as pseudo-Athanasios, see M. Richard and J. A. Munitiz (eds), *Anastasii Sinaitae Quaestiones et Responsiones* (Turnhout 2006) 29–41.

110 For these two texts, see J. Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium: Celestial Journey and Local Community in the Medieval Greek Apocrypha* (Cambridge 2007).

111 'Λόγος Β', 400–4.

Bryennios here, in his authoritative position as a court preacher, asserts without any doubt that for the Orthodox a third place – Purgatory – does not exist. As a fervent supporter of the anti-Latin party and a friend and acquaintance of many important Byzantine theologians of the period, Bryennios certainly influenced the thinking of the anti-Union faction. He himself was familiar with Catholic theology and was intimately involved in the dialogue with the Latins on both practical and theological levels.¹¹² He composed a ‘Consultative Speech about the Union of Churches’, in which he proposed several means to facilitate the negotiations.¹¹³ Additionally, we have records of his public discussions with Latin theologians in both Crete and Constantinople, the so-called ‘*Dialexeis* on the Procession of the Holy Spirit’.¹¹⁴ It is in the context of the dialogue – or, rather, antagonism – with the Latins that we should understand Bryennios’ somewhat peculiar insistence in refuting *apokatastasis*, a notion most prominently associated in Christianity with Origen (c. 185–c. 254).¹¹⁵ Adherents of the *apokatastasis* believed that hell had a corrective function (namely, to purify); at then end, all beings, perhaps even Satan, will be redeemed by Christ and will be reunified with God. Byzantines used these superficial similarities with purgatory to accuse the Latins of Origenism.¹¹⁶

Despite their pronounced theological agenda, the importance of Bryennios’ sermons for our understanding of Byzantine eschatology, at least in its Late Byzantine incarnation, cannot be stressed enough. With Bryennios, we leave the fanciful, imaginary world of monastic sermons and hagiographical fiction and enter the realm of official church theology. As a court preacher who was often heard by the emperor himself, the patriarchal clergy, and the people of Constantinople, Bryennios’ opinions comprise as official a theology as possible. All in all, Bryennios’ sermons constitute the most detailed reflection on the Last Judgment in Byzantium.

112 On Bryennios’ knowledge of Latin theology, see S. G. Papadopoulos, *Ἑλληνικαὶ μεταφράσεις Θεωμιστικῶν ἔργων. Φιλοθωμιστὰ καὶ ἀντιθωμιστὰ στὸ Βυζάντιο* (Athens 1967) 139–43; A. Argyriou, *Macaire Makrès et la polémique contre l’Islam: édition princeps de l’Éloge de Macaire Makrès et de ses deux oeuvres anti-islamiques, précédée d’une étude critique* (Vatican City 1986) 86–92; M. Plested, *Orthodox Readings of Aquinas* (Oxford 2012) 120–2. Both Plested and M. Jugie, ‘Démétrius Cydonès et la théologie latine à Byzance aux XIVe et XVe siècles’, *Échos d’Orient* (1928) 397, have suggested that Bryennios adopts the *questio* format in his two sermons. However, there is a long tradition of *erotapokriseis* in Byzantine theological writing. For Bryennios’ participation in debates with the Latins, see Ioannides, *Ὁ Ἰωσήφ Βρυέννιος*, 83–8. Bryennios’ belief that his opinions would have brought about the union, had he had the opportunity to participate at a council, are recorded in V. Laurent, *Le mémoire du grand ecclésiarque de l’Église de Constantinople Sylvestre Syropoulos sur le Concile de Florence (1438–1439)* (Rome 1971), 408.

113 Voulgares, *Ἰωσήφ μοναχοῦ τοῦ Βρυεννίου τὰ εὐρεθέντα*, 1: 459–600.

114 Voulgares, *Ἰωσήφ μοναχοῦ τοῦ Βρυεννίου τὰ εὐρεθέντα*, 1: 407–68.

115 For an exhaustive study of the *apokatastasis*, see I. Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena* (Leiden 2013).

116 D. Bathrellos, ‘Love, purification, and forgiveness versus justice, punishment, and satisfaction: The debates on purgatory and the forgiveness of sins at the Council of Ferrara–Florence’, *The Journal of Theological Studies* 65 (2014) 78–121, here at 94 and n. 66.

Appendix: The list of questions

- Q1: When will the judgment day occur?
Q2: Where will the judgment take place?
Q3: How will the examination of deeds happen (what is the process of judgment)?
Q4: What day and what time, in human terms, will it begin?
Q5: Will it last for a long time?
Q6: What will be the first sign of the Lord's (Second) Coming?
Q7: Will somebody else be seated in judgment together with the Lord?
Q8: In what order will the saints come to meet the Lord?
Q9: Will both the pious and the wicked stand in front of the Judge?
Q10: Will all recognize each other, or just the righteous?
Q11: How will this enormous crowd of people fit in one place?
Q12: What are the books that will be opened to control each person's transgressions?
Q13: What spiritual benefits will the resurrected righteous receive from God?
Q14: What sort of forms and garments will the (resurrected) bodies have?
Q15: How many places for the repose of the righteous are there?
Q16: Are there different kinds of punishments? What are they?
Q17: Where is the place of hell?
Q18: Is the punishment for the seven deadly sins the same for everyone?
Q19: Are all those who commit the same sin punished in the same way?
Q20: Is the enjoyment the same for those who pursue the same virtues?
Q21: Will one common judgment be applicable to all those worthy of condemnation?
Q22: Will there be at that time demonic tollhouses in the air that examine the souls?
Q23: For those who were able to suffer punishment for their transgressions here, will they have to pay a penalty there as well?
Q24: All those who fell from a precipice, or suffered from a shipwreck, or were poisoned, or eaten by animals – will they be relieved of punishment because of these events?
Q25: Will there be some relief to those being punished because their sufferings are identical?
Q26: Will it be possible, in some way, for those who were justly condemned to avoid punishment?
Q27: Will some of the saints grieve when they see some of their kin led to hell?
Q28: Where do the souls of the saints (and the sinners) live now?
Q29: Will some of those on the right side be envious of one another, because of their divine inheritance?
Q30: Will there be infinite prosperity for the saints in everlasting bliss?
Q31: Will they use one language there, or many? Which one, or all of them?
Q32: Will there be partaking and fellowship, or even exchange of one's own spiritual goods with another person?
Q33: Will they partake at all of food or drink, or any such thing?

Q34: Will everybody (believers and nonbelievers, sinners and righteous, heretics and Orthodox) see Christ in person?

Q35: Will there be an end for hell?

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