

The Monastic Journey of St. Josaphat Kuntsevych: Byzantine Traditions and Spiritual Parallels with the Saints of the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra

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Summary. The article aims to explore the monastic journey of St. Josaphat Kuntsevych, beginning with his family background and continuing with his monastic life at the Basilian Monastery of the Holy Trinity in Vilnius. The article also explores how the religious literature of that time may have influenced Josaphat's spiritual beliefs and his decision to pursue the monastic path. Special attention is given to the traditions of the Byzantine Church Fathers and the local *Kyiv-Pechersk Paterikon*, which shaped the spiritual practices reflected in Josaphat's life, as analysed through his ascetic and spiritual disciplines.

Keywords: monastic path; monastic life; Eastern Church Fathers; Byzantine tradition; asceticism.

1. Introduction

During the 17th century, St. Josaphat Kuntsevych left a significant mark on the history of the Church, becoming a symbol of the unification of the Ruthenian Byzantine Rite Church and the Roman Catholic Church. His choice to follow the path of an Apostle of Unity was not only a personal spiritual journey but also an important step in bringing the Eastern and Western Churches closer together. After the Union of Brest of 1596, he actively participated in the process of strengthening the Union while maintaining his own liturgical and spiritual traditions. His activities were not limited to spiritual duties as he actively worked to fortify the Uniate Church, while promoting traditions of monastic life and strictly adhering to the principles of personal asceticism.

During his monastic journey, asceticism – one of his most important and formative practices – not only helped him detach himself from worldly pleasures but also shaped his service to the Church by instilling the ideals of faith and unity. This created a balanced path which combined spiritual development with an active life in the community. This lifestyle was not limited solely to physical self-restraint,

as it also emphasised inner renewal, love for one's neighbour, and service; it was thus aimed at living according to Christ's example and calling. Although historiography often emphasises Josaphat's affiliation with the traditions of Eastern Christianity,¹ this issue has not yet been sufficiently explored, thereby creating opportunities for new lines of research which could expand our understanding of Josaphat's spiritual journey and his personality traits.

Thus, the aim of this study is to attempt to reveal the parallels between Josaphat's monastic life and the traditions of Eastern Christianity, highlighting both the spiritual and practical aspects which connect his life with the saints of the Byzantine tradition and the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra. To achieve this aim, Josaphat's monastic journey has been unveiled, beginning with his family background and continuing with his period of monastic life spent at the Vilnius Holy Trinity Basilian Monastery. Special attention has been given to the sources of religious literature of the time which could have shaped Josaphat's spiritual views and monastic path. Furthermore, it is important to reveal how the traditions of the Byzantine Church Fathers and the local *Kyiv-Pechersk Paterikon* were reflected in Josaphat's life.

The study uses a broad and diverse base of sources, which can be divided into two main blocks. The first block consists of the hagiographical works of *Cunceviciana*,² in which not only are historical facts documented, but in which the spiritual values and ideals embodied by Josaphat are also reflected. The study of early historical sources on *Cunceviciana* reveals valuable insights into the essence of Josaphat's monastic asceticism and helps trace the directions of his monastic life and activities.³ This research field has been significantly enriched by a new study focusing on *Relatio* and by the poetry about Blessed Josaphat's martyrdom in the 17th-century book *Rhythmus*.⁴ This study enriches our understanding of an important aspect of the multicultural literature of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania

1 S. Senyk, 1985; L. Timošenka, 2017; M. Krečunas, 2023, p. 46.

2 Wawrzyniec Leon Kreuza-Rzewuski, *Kazanie o świętobliwym żywocie y chwalebney śmierci przewielebnego w Bodze oyca Iosaphata Kuncewicza, arcybiskupa połockiego, witebskiego y mscisławskiego w cerkwi cathedralnej połockiej przy depozyciey ciała iego odprawowane ...* [S. I., 1625]; Jakub Susza, *Cursus vitae, et certamen martyrii, B. Iosaphat Kuncevicii Archiepiscopi Polocen[is] Episcopi Vitepscen[is] et Miscilauien[is] Ord[inis] D[ivi] Basilii Magni, calamo, Iacobi Susza, Episcopi Chelmen[is] et Belzen[is] cum S.R.E. Uniti Ord[inis] eiusdem adumbratum*, Romae: Ex Typographia Varesii, 1665; A. Młodzianovskis, 2015; S. *Josaphat Hieromartyr. Documenta Romana beatificationis et canonizationis*, vol. 1: 1623–1628, ed. Athanasius G. Welykyj, Romae: Sumptibus PP. Basilianorum, 1952.

3 O. Daukšienė, 2011; M. Čiurinskas, 2011; M. Čiurinskas, 2015.

4 *Pirmasis Juozapato Kuncevičiaus gyvenimo aprašymas*, 2023.

specifically related to the commemoration and establishment of the cult of a new saint in the cultural tradition. In the most recent historiography, an increasing attention has been devoted to the representation of Josaphat Kuntsevych's sanctity in seventeenth-century hagiographic texts, where scholars discern parallels with the typology of saints and canonisation narratives of the *Paterikon of Kyiv-Pechersk*.⁵

The second block includes biographies of the great Church Fathers of the Byzantine tradition (Basil the Great, John Chrysostom, Anthony the Great) and a convolute from the *Kyiv-Pechersk Paterikon* which contains the lives of monks.⁶ These texts help reveal how Josaphat's monastic path was influenced by the Byzantine tradition and the spiritual experiences of local saints. They also provide insight into the spiritual ideals which shaped his life, and their significance for his work.

2. What Shaped the Journey to Monasticism?

First, two essential factors or aspects should be considered: Josaphat's place of origin, and his family environment. Josaphat spent his childhood in the city of Volodymyr, one of the oldest administrative, trade, and cultural centres in Volhynia. It was a multi-ethnic and multiconfessional city which held Magdeburg rights and had both land and city courts. In the city stood a cathedral as well as numerous churches.⁷ In the 16th century, six Orthodox monasteries also operated in Volodymyr.⁸ These facts suggest that the city had profound Eastern traditions, and these could have shaped Josaphat's spiritual path. The city's religious and cultural characteristics enabled Josaphat to become acquainted with knowledge about various religions and theological issues, which he later applied to his life. The favour shown by the bishop of the city of Volodymyr and his solemn liturgies, provided Josaphat with the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the practices of faith.⁹ The

5 N. Sinkevych, 2024.

6 Книга сѣд ПАТЕРИКЪ Печерскій: сієсть, ОТЕЧНИКЪ, [Київ]: во С[вя]той Кієвопечерской Лаврѣ, 1783, in: Vilniaus universiteto biblioteka, Retų spaudinių skyrius [Vilnius University Library, Rare Books Division], Rk 371. I sincerely thank Ina Kažuro for the reference to this source. Also, see: *Києво-Печерські патерики з колекції Музею книги і друкарства України*, упоряд. Василь Гончарук, заг. ред. Микола Гламазда, Олена Погонєць, Київ: ВАТ УкрНДІСВД, 2003.

7 М. М. Соловій et al., 1967, с. 65.

8 U. A. Pawluczuk, 2007, s. 24.

9 М. М. Соловій et al., 1967, с. 72–73.

Orthodox services, characterised by their strictness and abundant symbolism, may have become an important stage in the boy's spiritual education. His participation in these services not only allowed him to become closely acquainted with religious rituals, but also likely helped him learn to respect and nurture cultural traditions, as well as to adhere to ethical and religious norms. These experiences probably had a significant impact on the formation of Josaphat's worldview, providing a solid foundation for his spiritual and moral growth.

Another important factor which may have influenced Josaphat's choice of monasticism was his schooling. Although we do not have direct sources relating to Josaphat's school, we know from witnesses to his beatification and his biographers that he was studying at a city school where Church Slavonic and Polish were being taught. Josaphat had a talent for learning and demonstrated great diligence.¹⁰

His family environment also played a significant role. Mother had a particularly special role, as Josaphat often visited the city's sanctuaries with her to admire the icons, listen to the church chant, and pray.¹¹ Childhood impressions are often strong and remain in memory for a long time. This is confirmed by an event, recorded in the hagiographical sources, which Josaphat experienced during his childhood. At the age of five, while visiting the Church of St. Martyr Paraskeva with his mother, he saw the image of the Saviour on the cross and felt as if "a spark had sprung from the side of the Crucified and penetrated the very depths of the watching child's heart".¹² This event was a profound spiritual experience, likely leaving a lasting impression on Josaphat's memory for the rest of his life, serving not only as a strong impression but also as a foundation for his spiritual vocation. Later, Josaphat shared this experience with his friend Gennady Chmielnicki, who testified during the beatification process that Josaphat had told him the following: "At that moment, I physically felt how a fiery spark pierced me inside; because of that, all church services became a pleasure for me. I began to study them, and for nearly thirty years of my life, I do not remember ever missing divine services".¹³ This experience became a turning point in Josaphat's life; it awakened a deep inner interest in religion and encouraged him to immerse himself in spiritual pursuits.

In summary, it can be stated that the spiritual environment of both his family and the city had a fundamental influence on the formation of Josaphat's person-

10 Cf. *S. Josaphat Hieromartyr*, 1952, p. 120–121; M. Krečun, 2023, p. 30.

11 M. Krečunas, 2023, p. 36.

12 For more on this 'Baroque-like' image by Młodzianowski, see M. Čiurinskas, 2015, p. 192.

13 Cf. S. Senyk, 1985, p. 426.

ality and monastic path. The interaction of these environments created a synergy which allowed him to develop a deeper spirituality and paved the way for a higher level of faith.

3. The Possible Religious Readings of Josaphat

Along Josaphat's monastic path, it is particularly important to consider what religious literature he might have read and what sources were available to him. Research shows that, in the Ruthenian lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and later, in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, four different languages were being used simultaneously in local Church literature. Two of these were widely used written languages, notably, Church Slavonic and Ruthenian, each serving different functions. For Orthodox Christians, Church Slavonic functioned as the liturgical language, while Ruthenian was being used in a Church context as a homiletic language, which means that it was based on interpretations of religious texts and was aimed at making them more understandable to ordinary people.¹⁴ According to Sergejus Temčinas, Orthodox Church writings in the Ruthenian language had existed since the Christianisation of Lithuania, and, from that time onward, various Church texts had been translated into Ruthenian, including the Gospels, the books of the Old Testament, and hagiographies, as well as other religious works.¹⁵

Josaphat was proficient in Church Slavonic, spoken Ruthenian, and Polish. He also mastered written Ruthenian, as evidenced by his signature in Ruthenian on a case from Vilnius Castle Court and Vilnius Magistrate Court. The case involved the Uniate Metropolitan of Kyiv, Ipatii Potii, and the Archimandrite of Vilnius, Yosyf Veliamyn Rutsky, who were engaged in a legal dispute with the former Archimandrite Samuil Sencila, the Brotherhood of the Holy Trinity Church in Vilnius, the Orthodox clergy, and the townspeople of Vilnius, over their resistance in transferring Orthodox churches in Vilnius and their associated property to Uniate control.¹⁶

14 S. Temčinas, 2008, p. 155–156.

15 Ibid., p. 155.

16 Documents from the case of Vilnius Archimandrite Yosyf Veliamyn Rutsky regarding opposition to the transfer of Vilnius City Orthodox churches to the Uniates, 1608–1609, can be found in Vilniaus universiteto biblioteka, Rankraščių skyrius [Vilnius University Library, Manuscripts Division], f. F5-A83-12199.

We do not have direct evidence of the books which Josaphat read during his time at Volodymyr school. However, his biographers claim that he read religious works written in Church Slavonic. Moreover, it is known that he became familiar with the writings of the Church Fathers, as well as texts describing the lives of martyrs and other “individuals filled with the Spirit of God”.¹⁷ Sophia Senyk’s research reveals that Josaphat possessed a collection of saints’ lives from the *Chetya-Minya for the Month of March*, at the end of which he included a text dedicated to the feast for the beheading of Saint John the Baptist.¹⁸

To better understand the access to religious literature which Josaphat had, it is worth considering the context of the time. After the Tridentine Church reforms (1545–1563), the idea of Church unions was revived.¹⁹ One of the reforms was the declaration in 1568 which made the Eastern Church Fathers – notably, Saints Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, Athanasius of Alexandria, and Cyril of Alexandria – Doctors of the Western Church. This reflected an important turning point in the history of Christianity²⁰ and had a significant impact on the unity of the Church and the spread of fellowship among the different Christian communities for whom the doctrine of Church union was important. By declaring the Church Fathers to be doctors, their teachings and liturgical practices became the foundation of this fellowship, and of unity. To support this idea, one can mention the *Missal* (Služebnik), printed in 1617 at Vilnius Mamonicz Press with funds from Lew Sapieha, which includes the liturgies of three blessed bishops: John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, and Gregory of Nazianzus.²¹ From this, it can be inferred that the theological contribution of these three Eastern Church Fathers – recognised as Doctors of the Church – was significant in preserving their teachings and the model of Christian life they embodied for the Christian community, as well as in promoting their study and interpretation within Uniate communities.

During the post-Tridentine period, a Jesuit initiative drew attention to the lack of religious literature in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which created a need to translate hagiographic works into the local language. In 1579, a polemical theological work by the famous Jesuit, preacher, hagiographer, and first rector of Vilnius University, Piotr Skarga, was published in Vilnius. The work, written in

17 M. M. Соловій et al., 1967, c. 90.

18 S. Senyk, 1985, p. 432–435.

19 T. Kempa, 2007.

20 *The Oxford Dictionary*, 2005.

21 See Л. Л. Сенченко, 2020.

Polish, is titled *Żywoty świętych* (*Lives of the Saints*). It includes descriptions of the lives of various saints, with a particular focus on those from the Western Church tradition.²² However, Skarga also sought to emphasise the universal ideal of holiness and unity of the Church. In his first theological work, *O jedności Kościoła Bożego* (*On the Unity of the Church*, 1577), he summarised the concepts of a united Christianity. The theological ideas presented in the work were based on the authority of the Holy Scriptures and the Church Fathers.²³ Thus, through these works, Skarga helped address the shortage of religious literature, strengthen the authority of the Church in the region, and promote cultural unity.

In 1596, Josaphat Kuntsevych arrived in Vilnius to learn the merchant's trade. There, he encountered confessional shifts, with the Brest Church Union at the centre of them. The doctrine of the Union had both a spiritual and practical impact on Josaphat, shaping his identity. It influenced liturgical and spiritual practices, requiring society to adapt to political and social changes.²⁴ Under these circumstances, Josaphat's literary horizons were influenced by his personal acquaintanceship with Peter Arkoudios, a professor at the metropolitan seminary near the Holy Trinity Monastery, and with his student and, later, loyal companion Gennady Chmielnicki,²⁵ as well as his interactions with the Jesuits Valentinus Fabricius and Hrehory Grużewscy, who were of Ruthenian descent, and served as professors at the best educational institution in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, i.e., Vilnius Academy.²⁶ According to testimonies, a person named Fabricius Kowalski gave Josaphat theological books to read.²⁷ Having delved into the polemical ideas of Metropolitan Ipatii Potii; the aforementioned Piotr Skarga; and the founder of the Basilian Order and, later, metropolitan, Veliamyn Rutsky, as well as other like-minded individuals regarding the Church Union,²⁸ Josaphat made his decision.

Recent studies by Sergejus Temčinas have shown that one of the most important sources about the history of the Kyiv-Pechersk Monastery, the *Paterikon*, was translated from Old Church Slavonic into the Ruthenian language between the mid-15th century and the late 16th century. A manuscript written in Cyrillic, currently

22 See I. Vaišvilaitė, 2015; G. Drungilienė, 2016a, p. 106–132; G. Drungilienė, 2016b; D. Baronas, 2013.

23 D. Baronas, 2013, p. 220.

24 Л. Тимошенко, 2020, с. 123–151.

25 P. Krečunas et al., 2017, p. 81.

26 L. Jovaiša, 2012, p. 9.

27 М. М. Соловій et al., 1967, с. 90.

28 Л. Тимошенко, 2002, с. 437–443; Л. Тимошенко, 2020, с. 274–321.

held in St. Petersburg at the Russian Academy of Sciences Library, is particularly noteworthy. It originated from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania where it belonged to Zhyrovichy Monastery. This Ruthenian translation serves as evidence of the active practice of translating and distributing religious literature in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.²⁹ Also of importance are Marina Chistyakova's studies on the legacy of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra monks.³⁰ She discusses the edition *Poetical Synaxarion*, of which there are 15 surviving copies, which date from the 15th to the 17th centuries and originate from various regions of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, places such as Bielsk, Lutsk, Supraśl, and others. This *Synaxarion* contains a cycle of 24 stories about the Kyiv-Pechersk monks and their miracles.³¹

Josaphat is known to have been paying attention to the spiritual heritage of the Metropolis of Kyiv. He was familiar with the *Kyiv-Pechersk Paterikon* and Hilarion's Слово о законѣ и благодѣти (*Sermon on Law and Grace*), and, most importantly, in 1614, he visited the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, where he prayed daily at the tombs of St. Anthony and St. Theodosius.³² The spread of religious literature suggests that the *Kyiv-Pechersk Paterikon* – along with its accounts of the monastery's founding legends, the lives of saints, and miracles – was well known to Josaphat, which is a point we will seek to substantiate in the following chapter.

A review of this chapter indicates that Church Slavonic, as a liturgical language, and Ruthenian, used for sermon commentary, were closely connected. Therefore, Josaphat could draw upon these traditions and integrate them into his spiritual practice. He was well acquainted with the religious literature and hagiography available to him at the time, and particularly with the lives of saints and the fundamentals of the Christian doctrine. It is also known that religious texts were being actively translated and distributed within the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The *Kyiv-Pechersk Paterikon* was a particularly significant source. Josaphat's acquaintance with prominent religious scholars, such as the Jesuits and other spiritual leaders, contributed to his intellectual and spiritual growth.

29 S. Temčinas, 2023, p. 43–55.

30 М. Чистякова, 2012, с. 29–44.

31 Ibid., с. 29–30.

32 М. М. Соловій et al., 1967, с. 174. Cf. P. Krečunas et al., 2017, p. 82; M. Krečunas, 2023, p. 46.

4. The Parallels between Josaphat's Monastic Life and the Lives of the Saints of the Eastern Church

In seeking parallels between Josaphat's monastic life and the saints of the Eastern Church, it is important to focus on the common elements of hagiography and the principles of spiritual life which shaped their ascetic practices. Hagiographical sources which recount the lives of saints often rely on the traditional narrative models formed both by the early Fathers of the Eastern Church and in later hagiographical texts of the Kyiv-Pechersk Monastery. Although these narratives reflect different periods and cultural contexts, they generally share a common structure which highlights the saint's virtues, miracles, divine calling, and contribution to the life of the Church. The most characteristic elements of hagiographical texts can be identified: the saint's early life, episodes of calling, religious practice and an ascetic life, miracles and spiritual achievements, posthumous miracles, canonisation, and cult. Meanwhile, the hagiography of the Baroque era shaped the image of Josaphat and focused on serving as an example for society to cultivate the morality and spiritual life of the faithful, rather than merely portraying an ascetic ideal. Such sources not only document the historical reality but also reflect the spiritual ideals and values embodied in Josaphat, offering insight into his spiritual profile, and analysing his ascetic life, piety, and contribution to the affairs of the Church.

For a clearer analysis, it is necessary to rely on common denominators connecting the various lives of these saints, which were manifested in different historical and cultural contexts. One such common denominator could be ascetic monasticism, which, in the traditions of the Eastern Church, was the primary path to spiritual perfection. This practice involved, and still does, not only personal sacrifice but also the practices of humility, repentance, and prayer – these are qualities which became essential aspects of each saint's life. These attributes shaped their spiritual profile and were decisive in the matters of their calling and dedication.

Josaphat chose the monastic path through joining the Holy Trinity Monastery in Vilnius, which belonged to the monastic community of St. Basil the Great; it was also called the Basilian Monastery.³³ Thus, from the very beginning of his monastic life, Josaphat encountered the Byzantine tradition, as he had to follow the *Regulae fusius tractatae* and *Regulae brevius tractatae* (*Monastic Rules*) created by St. Basil (c. 330–379); these emphasised the key principles of monastic life, such as com-

33 M. Krečunas, 2023, p. 40–41.

munal living and the importance of prayer, work, and asceticism. These principles are still important in both Eastern and Western Christian traditions today. Basil considered the Gospel to be the rule for his life, and therefore he created the rules and guidelines for the way how monks should live according to the teachings of the Gospel, adhering to established monastic norms. One of his key focuses was that the monastic community should be based on love and service to others. He encouraged monks to help the poor, the sick, and anyone in need of assistance.³⁴ Following the Gospel of Christ, which Basil proposed as giving direction to life, not only reflects a spiritual ideal but also serves as a practical path which shapes the daily lives of monks and helps them achieve complete devotion to God.³⁵

Josaphat's monastic life reflects one of the most ascetic paths in spiritual development, in which a person temporarily separates themselves from the affairs of the world and dedicates themselves solely to spiritual goals. Researchers have described the first years of Josaphat's life (1604–1607) as being a period in which he chose a hermit's life within the monastery.³⁶ Those years were dedicated to solitude and intense spiritual practice, which allowed Josaphat to fully immerse himself in spiritual matters. He “chose a cell, the so-called St. Luke's Chapel, in the Holy Trinity Church where, during his free time, he would either read or reflect on holy matters (vows). There, he engaged in contemplation and spiritual reflection.”³⁷ Such ascetic practices are important in many religious traditions, where it is often emphasised that separation from material reality and social life allows one to achieve a higher spiritual understanding. We can observe such parallels by comparing Josaphat with St. Anthony the Great (c. 251–356) – who is considered to be the father of the monastic tradition in the Byzantine Church – and who became the embodiment of the monastic ideal and a source of inspiration for many of his contemporaries. Beginning with prayer and repentance, his life was based on the inspiration of the words of the Gospel (Mt 19, 21). Having withdrawn into the wilderness, St. Anthony endured spiritual trials, yet he always zealously sought God. His life, as an example, shows that, as a hermit, he received the gift of spiritual fatherhood and became a significant spiritual guide. When he began accepting disciples, he was not only a teacher but also a comforting, reconciling, and healing spiritual father.³⁸ Although it was only for a short period, Josaphat's

34 L. Striokaitė, 2005, p. 229.

35 Ibid., p. 221.

36 M. M. Соловій et al., 1967, c. 95–98; M. Krečunas, 2023, p. 39–42.

37 S. *Josaphat Hieromartyr*, 1952, p. 176.

38 L. Striokaitė, 2005, p. 223–225.

monastic life was also spent in an environment of silence and solitude, based on personal separation from the world.

His decision to become a monk and engage in missionary work among the Orthodox and Catholic communities marked the beginning of his journey on the path of *Theosis* (divinisation); Josaphat sought not only personal growth but also aimed to become more like Christ, demonstrating God's love to others through his life and actions. According to the testimonies of the witnesses in the beatification case, it can be stated that Josaphat's monastic path was very strict: for three years, he lived as a hermit, adhering to a life of silence and prayer. Josaphat's pursuit of divinity may have been rooted in childhood images, as discussed above. As a monk, he sought inner perfection in order to reflect God's presence and love through the way he led his life.³⁹ On the other hand, Josaphat's hermitic life in his cell and his acts of contemplation suggest that his asceticism may have been influenced by various spiritual sources and traditions, including Hesychasm. Hesychasm is a specific and systematic mystical movement within the Orthodox tradition, whose essence is continuous prayer, silence, and, most importantly, spiritual vision – the ability to see 'the light of God'. In this regard, Josaphat's practice, although it included elements of Hesychasm, such as an ascetic lifestyle, silence, and contemplation, was deeply rooted in his affiliation with the Uniate tradition. According to researchers, Josaphat always emphasised his belonging to the Uniate Church and, when preaching to the schismatics with the goal of leading them to union, explained the unity of the Church based on the Holy Scriptures and the writings of the Church Fathers.⁴⁰ The liturgical and theological system of the Uniate Church had its own characteristics, which did not align with the practices of Orthodox Hesychasm.

The Byzantine tradition, the saints of Kyiv-Pechersk, and Josaphat's own monastic practices were united by the *Jesus Prayer* as the central prayer practice. However, in the Byzantine Church, this prayer was of particular importance to the Hesychasts, who sought constant spiritual and mystical union with God. The saints of Kyiv-Pechersk, although they practiced the Jesus Prayer, based their lives primarily on asceticism, daily work, and communal living. Josaphat, while belonging to the Uniate tradition, also practiced prayer and asceticism, following similar principles in his pursuit of spiritual growth and unity with God. Even though these practices were carried out in different theological and liturgical contexts, their goal remained

39 M. Krečunas, 2023, p. 40–42.

40 T. Kempa, 2005.

the same, namely, to achieve a deep spiritual connection with God through prayer. However, whilst Josaphat's practices share similarities with the prayer traditions of the Byzantine and Kyiv-Pechersk saints, they remain distinct due to the specific theological and liturgical context of the Uniate Church, even despite the fact that the spiritual goals and prayer practices for all three traditions were similar.

Continuing the idea that Josaphat was possibly influenced by the Byzantine tradition, it is worth noting that the doctrine of the Fathers of the Byzantine Church, shaped by figures such as John Chrysostom (c. 347–407), became a key spiritual and theological guide in later Christian traditions. Known for his eloquence, John earned the nickname 'Chrysostom' (Golden Mouth), and was famous as both a master of rhetoric and as a theologian renowned for his sermons which emphasised moral aspects and social justice.⁴¹ He also paid great attention to what we now call the social service of the Church, such as caring for the sick and establishing shelters. His dedication to service and steadfast defence of the faith earned him respect both in the East and in the West.⁴²

By considering the tradition of John Chrysostom, parallels can be drawn with Josaphat's work, especially his ability to spread the word of God through preaching and interpreting the Scriptures in a way which all believers could understand. Both service to the poor and the sick were significant. Josaphat's preaching and teaching activity was aptly described by the Jesuit Fabricius Kowalski, who called it 'apostolic'. Josaphat expressed his thoughts with great exaltation and admiration.⁴³ Very often, the townspeople would say about Josaphat the same things which had been said about Christ, for example, "Where did he get this wisdom from?"⁴⁴ Such descriptions seem to confirm that Josaphat, like John Chrysostom, was an excellent preacher, clearly spreading the Christian Faith and spiritual education.

Thus, the tradition of the Fathers of the Byzantine Church, through dogmatics, theological works, and hagiographies, reached Josaphat, shaping his spiritual and practical ideals, which reflected the core values of this tradition. It can be concluded that Josaphat's practices and the practices of the Fathers of the Byzantine tradition were closely connected through spiritual development, the importance of community, the practice of withdrawal from the world, a life of prayer, the dissemination of the Holy Scriptures, and helping the poor and the sick.

41 T. Buika, 2007.

42 Ibid.

43 Cf. *S. Josaphat Hieromartyr*, 1952, p. 173; M. Krečunas, 2023, p. 48.

44 Cf. *S. Josaphat Hieromartyr*, 1952, p. 177; M. Krečunas, 2023, p. 49.

5. The Local Tradition of Eastern Christianity

Another source of inspiration for Josaphat's choice of monastic path and spirituality was the local Eastern Christian tradition, which was directly connected to the history of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra. During the first half of the 13th century, an exceptional collection of monastic lives, called the *Kyiv-Pechersk Paterikon*, was created at the monastery.⁴⁵ It was compiled by the monk Polikarp, who recorded the lives, experiences, prayers, and various trials of the first monks of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra.⁴⁶ The stories in the *Paterikon* were used as moral lessons and spiritual examples to encourage monks to practice asceticism, self-sacrifice, and spiritual development. The *Paterikon* describes the lives of 24 saints.⁴⁷

In this context, it is important to note that, in the first half of the 18th century, the Polish-born theologian and historian Ignacy Kulczyński, in his work *Specimen Ecclesiae ruthenicæ* (1733), presented the following index: 'Index sanctorum Ruthenis propriorum' ('List of Ruthenian Saints'). This list includes 16 monks from Pechersk Monastery (in the *cryptensis*) who are described in the *Paterikon*. It is of interest that, among them, Josaphat Kuntsevych is mentioned, referred to as "St. Josaphat, Archbishop of Polatsk, martyr".⁴⁸ Of the saints mentioned in the *Paterikon*, the most famous and highly regarded was St. Theodosius, who, as the founder of the Kyiv-Pechersk Monastery, became a central figure in the local Eastern Church tradition.⁴⁹ His ascetic life and spiritual wisdom shaped not only the daily life of the monastic community but also influenced broader practices of spiritual development. St. Theodosius, as well as being an example of personal spiritual life, was also an excellent embodiment of ascetic practice, emphasising the importance of asceticism for both the body and the soul. It is worth analysing in more detail the possible connections between Josaphat's monastic practices and the life of St. Theodosius, by using ascetic practice as a common denominator.

It is worth considering several aspects in order to understand why this saint may have been significant in Josaphat's spiritual journey. First, the life of St. Theo-

45 Книга сѣа ПАТЕРИКЪ Печерскій, 1783.

46 Києво-Печерські патерики, 2003.

47 Ibid.

48 SPECIMEN ECCLESIAE RUTHENICÆ: Ab origine susceptæ Fidei ad nostra usque tempora in suis Capitibus seu Primatibus Russiæ CUM S. SEDE APOSTOLICA ROMANA SEMPER UNITÆ, per Ignatium Kulczynski, Romæ: Typis Hieronymi Mainardi, 1733, in: Vilniaus universiteto biblioteka, Retų spaudinių skyrius [Vilnius University Library, Rare Books Division], IV 25771.

49 О. Творогов.

dosius, which was characterised by self-sacrifice, asceticism, and spiritual wisdom, could serve as an excellent example for Josaphat, and demonstrate how a close relationship with God and personal ascetic practices could lead to the pursuit of spiritual fulfilment.⁵⁰ St. Theodosius was renowned for his deep prayer and meditation practices. It is therefore likely that Josaphat, in his pursuit of deeper spiritual understanding, drew inspiration from the example of this saint's life.

One of the most popular ascetic practices, fasting, was characteristically adopted by all the monks at the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, not only Josaphat, and served as an important part of his spiritual practice. He was an exemplary model for novices: "[H]e was the best mirror (reflection) for his novices in all matters, and an example of virtue. From the moment he entered the Order until his death, even while serving as an archbishop, he never ate meat".⁵¹ He complemented his prayer with penance, so he "tested his innocent body by mortifying it with hunger and cold; and for the sake of this mission of penance, he did not take any drink into his mouth except for cool water".⁵² From this, it follows that Josaphat's refusal to consume any beverages other than cool water was a deliberate choice for living an ascetic and self-sacrificing lifestyle, thus aiming to deepen his spiritual connection with God and to practice penance. Instances of fasting are abundant in the lives of the saints recorded in the *Kyiv-Pechersk Paterikon*. For example, "St. Theodosius would mostly eat only dry bread and boiled herbs without oil. He spent his nights in prayer without sleep, as the brothers often observed, though God's chosen one tried to conceal his ascetic deeds from others".⁵³

To highlight Josaphat's exceptional asceticism, it is important to note his practices of mortification and flagellation: "[H]e would flog his body with various types of whips, not only within the walls of his cell but also in the monastery garden or anywhere else, cruelly whipping himself, sometimes until innocent blood would flow. Very often, in the middle of the night, and just as frequently while fasting. In all seasons, even during the winter's frost, he would be seen barefoot and with his head uncovered, dressed only in rough wool, leaving his cell and freezing in the high snowdrifts of the monastery cemetery".⁵⁴ In the lives of monks, the practices of mortification and flagellation were common in early Christian asceticism,

50 C. Сеник, 1993, с. 22–47.

51 S. *Josaphat Hieromartyr*, 1952, p. 179.

52 Ibid., p. 177.

53 Киево-Печерский патерик.

54 M. Čiurinskas, 2015, p. 438.

symbolising spiritual purification and detachment from innate desires.⁵⁵ Josaphat, adopting these practices to such extreme limits, clearly demonstrated his commitment to deep asceticism and devotion. His asceticism is further highlighted by the stories of the miraculous stone,⁵⁶ which, according to researchers, were repeated in different forms in various sources: “Sometimes he would be seen in the middle of winter, barefoot and dressed only in rough wool, standing on a stone near the Holy Trinity Church, on the altar side, contemplating divine matters”.⁵⁷ Later, this vision was used as symbolic evidence for Josaphat’s sanctity, and thus played an important role in his beatification process. Josaphat’s strict asceticism and eremitic lifestyle are emphasised through a metaphorical comparison, depicting him as “competing with the ancient stylites” – barefoot, standing on a stone beneath a downpipe.⁵⁸ St. Theodosius also practiced physical suffering, as testified by the following episode: “Sometimes, when there were many gnats and mosquitoes, he would go out of his cave at night, naked to the waist, sitting while spinning wool and singing David’s psalms. His entire body would be covered with swarms of gnats and mosquitoes, which would bite him and drink his blood. Our father Theodosius did not move or rise from that spot until it was time for Matins, and he was in the church before the others. He stood there steadfastly, unwavering in his mind, celebrating the glory of God”.⁵⁹

Josaphat used a very poor bed, while being content with only a blanket and a pillow, and that only for the sake of appearances. More often, he would sleep on bare ground, never wearing an outer tunic, but only a coarse hair shirt. He bound his body tightly with belts.⁶⁰ One can see parallels here with the practice adopted by St. Theodosius, as his clothes were made of rough wool, and worn directly on the body. In the historiography, it is noted that Josaphat may have learned to wear iron chains from St. Theodosius as well.⁶¹

Another manifestation of the ascetic practice is a disciplined and virtuous life, in which, monks adhere to strict rules and regulations. In Josaphat’s case, “[b]eing a zealous guardian of angelic purity, when he could not drive away a woman with words of holy severity, who had cunningly entered his small room to tempt his

55 L. Striokaitė, 2005, p. 227.

56 M. Čiurinskas, 2015, p. 435–441.

57 Ibid., p. 440.

58 Ibid., p. 194.

59 *Киево-Печерский патерик*.

60 Ibid.

61 S. Senyk, 1985, p. 430.

chastity, he expelled her with blows from a stick”.⁶² This shows that Josaphat, even when faced with challenges, was determined to uphold his ascetic commitments.

Compassion and charitable work are indeed powerful testimonies of the Christian community; these not only foster personal spiritual growth but also inspire effective service to others. Both saints – Theodosius and Josaphat – emphasised social justice and responsibility through their example. Both were active in helping the poor and the suffering. Josaphat took care of the faithful, especially those who were socially vulnerable, and encouraged caring for the less privileged. Theodosius, when “he saw a beggar or a cripple, someone sad or poorly dressed, would feel compassion [...]. For this, he established a courtyard near his monastery and built a church in honour of the holy first martyr Stephen. He housed beggars, the blind, the lame, and the sick there. From the monastery, he provided them with everything they needed, giving a tenth of all that was in the monastery. Moreover, every Saturday, he sent a cart of bread to those who were in prison and to the prisoners”.⁶³ Thus, just as Theodosius had cared for the poor and the sick while leading the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, Josaphat, too, showed compassion and provided Christian assistance to the less fortunate. He visited the homes of the non-Uniates, supported them in matters of faith, and prepared them for confession. He often served the sick in the hospice, kissing their feet, washing them, and feeding them;⁶⁴ he also supported the poor and the disabled ‘from his modest savings,’ regardless of their origin or faith.⁶⁵ It is said that Josaphat would unhesitatingly decide in favour of the poor, praying, “Give to the poor, and God will give to us”. He fed everyone from alms, and when asked multiple times where he got the food and clothing, he would reply, “I do not know, the Lord God provided”.⁶⁶

Interestingly, one of the participants in the beatification process, a member of Volodymyr’s city council, testified that Josaphat had a talent for drawing. As a boy, he tried to grasp the secrets of the icon painters and secretly attempted to paint icons at home.⁶⁷ In the *Paterikon*, Saint Alypius is mentioned as a renowned Kyiv mosaicist, icon painter, and jeweller, as well as a disciple of the Greek masters. This raises the question as to whether Josaphat, while studying at school, was aware of the lives of the *Paterikon*’s saints and aspired to develop similar skills.

62 M. Čiurinskas, 2015, p. 194

63 *Киево-Печерский патерик*.

64 P. Krečunas et al., 2017, p. 82.

65 A. Mlodzianovskis, 2015, p. 284–286.

66 M. M. Соловій et al., 1967, c. 170.

67 Cf. S. *Josaphat Hieromartyr*, 1952, p. 121.

By analysing the descriptions of the saints' lives in the *Paterikon*, we can observe that the monastic lives of Saint Josaphat and Saint Theodosius share many common traits. Both were wholly devoted to God and to service, striving to attain lofty spiritual ideals. Through strict ascetic practices, they viewed their spiritual journey as a profound process which demanded constant dedication and inner struggle. They cultivated humility, obedience, and prayer as the main tools to help them overcome suffering and achieve holiness. Throughout their lives, and by their example, both revealed true monastic spirituality grounded in monastic spiritual principles, which can serve as inspiration to all faithful.

6. Conclusions

The deep impressions Josaphat experienced in his childhood while visiting church and looking at the image of 'the Crucified', combined with the influence of his religious family and the spiritual environment of the city, created a synergy which profoundly shaped his personality and monastic path.

Along his monastic path, Josaphat made use of various religious texts, including those written in Church Slavonic, Ruthenian, and Polish; reading the Bible, descriptions of saints' lives, hagiography, and polemical works. The *Kyiv-Pechersk Paterikon* and other translations of religious texts in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania contributed to Josaphat's intellectual and spiritual maturity, thus shaping his monastic journey. The tradition of the Fathers of the Byzantine Church had a fundamental influence on Josaphat's spiritual and practical ideals, shaping the practices of his monastic life. The values of this tradition, which related to spiritual development, the importance of community, practices of detachment from the world, living in prayer, spreading the Scriptures, and helping the poor and the sick, are clearly reflected in Josaphat's life.

Local traditions, especially the examples of the saints from the *Kyiv-Pechersk Paterikon* and the life of St. Theodosius, reveal essential similarities with Josaphat's ascetic practices and other aspects of the spiritual life which shaped his monastic journey. The path of each believer is unique and personal, but the life and legacy of St. Theodosius may have been a great inspiration for Josaphat, who sought both a deeper connection with God and spiritual maturity.

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