

The Orthodox Church and Eschatological Frenzy

The Recent Proliferation of “Antichristology” and Its Perilous Side-Effects

*Proposals for Curing the Eschatological
Fear of Marks (Seals)
and Numbers*



A Memorandum
from the Special Commission
to the Holy Synod in Resistance

October 2010



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First Treatise





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On the commemoration of the Dormition of the Holy and glorious Apostle and Evangelist, Virgin, Bosom Friend, and Beloved Disciple of the Lord,

John the Theologian

26 September

*Another Apolytikion**

Third Tone. Τὴν ὠραιότητα (Awed by the beauty of thy virginity...)



Thou didst fall upon the breast of thy Teacher, from Whom thou didst draw the Light of Grace, becoming a model for theologians, O John; thou didst proclaim the Incarnation of the Word, O Blessed one, and by thy writings thou didst shed abroad the Three-Sunned Light; and now thou guidest unto the Light those who cry: Rejoice, O initiate of ineffable mysteries.

* Composed by the Holy Monastery of Sts. Cyprian and Justina, Phyle, Attica (18 December 2005).



Introductory Reflections

1 Since 1995, the Holy Synod in Resistance has, by way of a special commission, closely followed and studied the contemporary proliferation of “Antichristology” (issues surrounding the “Antichrist”) and its dangerous side-effects. A fruit of this study is the detailed memorandum of some seventy pages that was approved by the Holy Synod in 2000, though, in anticipation of more auspicious circumstances, it was not judged expedient to publish it forthwith.

2 In submitting this memorandum, now, to the judgment of the conscience of the Church, we deem it necessary to offer some introductory thoughts, in order,

- on the one hand, to clarify the reasons for the relatively long delay in presenting our findings;
- and, on the other hand, to promote a fuller awareness of the gravity of contemporary eschatological anxieties and the immediate danger that authentic Orthodox eschatology will be altered, should the reasons for, and mentality underlying, such anxieties gain acceptance.

3 Thus, in the first place, with regard to our delay, we would like to make it clear that the original instructions given to the special commission were to investigate the putative connection between bar codes and the number 666, since the new national identity cards [in Greece, that is] then in the production process were to carry bar codes.

- a. It was, however, very easy to clarify this issue, that is, the existence or non-existence of “666” on bar codes—which is purely technological

in nature—on the basis of scientific specifications regarding the production and operation of bar codes. Therefore, we had good reason to expect that, by announcing the truth that bar codes have absolutely no connection with the number 666, we could provide the faithful with a feeling of relief that would, in turn, diminish the intensity of their agony.

- b. Nevertheless, our investigation helped us to realize very quickly that the disquiet of the faithful did not pertain exclusively to the relationship between bar codes (and, more broadly, identity cards) and the number 666, but that this question was simply the center around which there revolved a series of connected problems and anxieties. If we did not deal with them as a whole, and give a common answer to them, we knew that we would not, in the end, be helping our flock to emerge from the confusion into which it had fallen, or protecting it from similar situations in the future.
- c. Another very serious factor which delayed our work was that, with the passage of time, these related problems, which needed to be addressed in common, were rapidly and continually proliferating and were, furthermore, becoming so bedeviled by arbitrary twists and turns that new horizons for investigation and scrutiny were constantly opening up in our endeavor to arrive at a fuller cognizance and understanding of this truly unprecedented, many-sided, and very complex ecclesiastical and social phenomenon.

4 In the second place, and as a corollary to the foregoing, with true anguish in Christ, and falling down prayerfully before the guiding Grace of the Most Blessed Theotokos, we have come face to face with the great seriousness of contemporary eschatological frenzy and with the soteriological dangers entailed by an uncritical acceptance of all of the misinterpretations, as well as the extra-ecclesiastical factors, that such frenzy entails.

a. Our investigation has made it abundantly clear that, after two millennia of its life, our Most Holy Orthodox Church is passing through a period of what may be called a “Third Wave of Eschatology,” which confirms with particular intensity the many-sided crisis facing the Body of the Church and the distressing realization that It has lost, or is liable to lose, those charismatic criteria that would enable it to diagnose correctly and confront successfully the challenges of history.

b. By way of clarification, the period of the so-called “First Wave of Eschatology” covers the first three centuries of Christianity: at that time, the historical challenges (severe persecutions, the grave danger posed by the many-branched heresy of Gnosticism, the laxity and secularization of Christian morality, and the acceptance of divergent Messianic ideas from Judaism) contributed to an adulteration of Orthodox eschatology.

- During this period, Chapter 20 of the Apocalypse was interpreted literally, and Christians awaited the thousand-year reign, or interregnum [of Christ], as the redemptive conclusion [of history]. Eminent figures in the Church unwittingly advocated Chiliasm (Millennialism) as a fundamental teaching of the new Faith (Sts. Papias, Justin, Irenæus, Methodios, Hippolytos, Victorinus, *et al.*).

c. The period of the so-called “Second Wave of Eschatology” covers the gloomy centuries of the Turkish Yoke: then, too, historical challenges (the collapse of the Christian empire, slavery, degradation, Islamization, in-

tense Roman Catholic propaganda, and profound theological influence especially from the Protestant West) contributed to a new attempt to distort Orthodox eschatology.

- During this period, attention was focussed on Chapter 13 of the Apocalypse, which was likewise given a literal interpretation. The Pope and Papism and Mohammed and Islam (Latins and Turks) were seen as the two “Beasts,” or even the Antichrist himself. Their destruction and the simultaneous resurrection of the Orthodox Greek Empire were again awaited as a thousand-year reign or interregnum. At a popular level, prominent figures in the Greek nation cultivated these ideas as authentic revelations.

5 Our study of the pathology of the contemporary “Third Wave of Eschatology” lasted for two decades (1980-2000), and has demonstrated its kinship, *mutatis mutandis*, with the two preceding waves: now it is overwhelming historical challenges (a dizzying advance in scientific achievements and their practical applications, the unification of the world by way of globalization at many levels, the free circulation of ideas, the rapid expansion of non-Christian beliefs and morals, polymorphous syncretism, a profound secularization among Christians, the shattering of age-old social norms, and a slavish acceptance of eschatological ideas from Protestantism) that are contributing to a renewed effort to corrupt Orthodox eschatology.

- During this period, Chapter 13 of the Apocalypse has yet again been accorded a literal interpretation. Attention is now directed to the “mark” and the “number” of the Beast, and bar codes and kindred automated electronic systems are seen as inaugurating the era of the Antichrist, in which a moneyless economic system will prevail. In the context of such a system, any card whatsoever will supposedly function as a “mark” and “number of the Beast”; the European Union will become the first “Beast,” and the super-computer in Brussels the second “Beast,” while the Antichrist will be the President of the European Union, etc.

6 It is noteworthy that the following are common characteristics of all three waves of eschatology:

- a. A misunderstanding of the true nature of the Apocalypse; namely, its metaphorical and spiritual meaning.
- b. An unremitting endeavor to interpret the Apocalypse *ad litteram*.
- c. The notion that the Apocalypse constitutes a futuristic text, that is, a codified collection of oracles or a prophetic chronology, disclosing specific historical developments in the Church and in world history.
- d. An attempt at decoding or deciphering the symbols of the Apocalypse by means of historical events in each given period.
- e. The idea that the Apocalypse was written for a specific epoch and pertains exclusively, and is to be identified with, the period of each wave.
- f. An endeavor to interpret the Apocalypse in relation to an historical center: Rome and its idolatrous Empire, Mohammed and the Ottoman Empire, Moscow and Gog or Magog, or Brussels and the European Union.
- g. The influence of non-Christian (certain putatively Jewish) and heterodox (Protestant) eschatological beliefs on the interpretation of the Apocalypse.

7 It is the firm conviction of our Holy Synod that an unchecked process, over the course of many years, involving the dissemination and admixture of non-Orthodox eschatological beliefs (of popular and non-ecclesiastical provenance) has produced a lethal combination, which has had a direct and deep influence on the faithful, has led them into indescribable confusion, and is impelling them to adopt an anti-ecclesiastical and antisocial ethos.

8 Even though the situation is deteriorating on a daily basis, the experience of the two previous waves of eschatology affords Orthodox Shepherds in our time—and especially those who, by God’s mercy, are grounded in the He-

sychnastic and Eucharistic ethos of the Church—a fruitful opportunity to act in a therapeutic spirit and to deliver the faithful from eschatological anxiety through the promotion of Orthodox eschatology, which sheds peace and which is centered on the renewal and preservation of the Seal of the Lamb, the sole precondition for participation “in the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:9).

9 These introductory thoughts already refer to a rather broad set of issues that certainly cannot be dealt with fully or in detail by such a concise report as this. We aim merely to provide a preliminary pastoral approach to these matters.

- a. For the time being, we will dwell on crucial matters and undertake “a work of ministry” (Ephesians 4:12), “lest that which is lame be put out of joint, but rather that it be healed” (Hebrews 12:13), addressing ourselves in a clear and simple manner to those faithful who are well-disposed.
- b. Two other pertinent works, both very complex and lengthy, which constitute the operational basis and the theoretical foundation of the present memorandum, will be submitted to the conscience of the Church after the publication of this introductory report.

10 Since prayer, as the Holy Fathers have taught us, is the path to Divine knowledge, and insofar as it is only in “a spirit of wisdom and revelation” (Ephesians 1:17) that matters of our Holy Faith, and especially those pertaining to the Apocalypse, can be approached and understood, we have composed a prayer of supplication, so that the faithful may commence and continue their study of the Apocalypse, beseeching and seeking the Divine illumination of the Comforter.

Least among Bishops in the Lord,

† *Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi,*
Acting President of the
Holy Synod in Resistance



A Prayer of Supplication for the Correct Understanding of What Is To Happen in the Last Times

O Lord, our God and Savior, Who, in Thine ineffable goodness, didst humble Thyself and by the Economy of Thine Incarnation didst return that which was lost to the bosom of Thy Father; Who didst command us that we should be vigilant in prayer and in expectation of Thy glorious Second Coming, wherein Thou shalt come to judge the living and the dead and to transform all things, so that in a new Heaven and earth Thy servants may enjoy Thine unending Kingdom in the Holy Spirit: Do Thou Thyself, O Master, accept even now the supplication of us, Thy humble and unworthy servants, enlighten our minds and hearts, that we may correctly understand and unerringly interpret what is to happen in the last times according to Thy good pleasure, that, by Thy Grace that bringeth peace, there may not be schisms in Thine immaculate Bride, the Orthodox Church, but unity and sanctification in harmony and love, and deem us worthy of that portion of the virgins who were wise in vigilance and sobriety.

By the intercessions of Thy Most Blessed Mother and Ever-Virgin Mary, and of all Thy Saints. Amen.



❖ “For this reason, before we undertake anything, and all the more so before we theologize, it behooves us to begin with prayer, not in order to attract Divine Power, which is present everywhere and yet nowhere, but in order to entrust ourselves to It and be united with It through Divine reminders and invocations” (St. Dionysios the Areopagite, *On the Divine Names*, Ch. III, §I, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. III, col. 680D).

❖ “May the Spirit lift the veil from our eyes, that we may thereby on the one hand understand the wonders and behold the Mystery of Christ through the mirror of the letter, and on the other hand see the beauty of virtue that is manifested by the Prophets and which summons us to enhance our moral life therewith” (St. Theophylact of Ohrid, “Preface to the Exegesis of the Holy Prophets,” *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CXXVI, col. 576A).



A

**Recent Antichristology and
Its Symptomatology**





Recent Antichristology and Its Symptomatology

■ A1. Antichristology and Antichristologists

1 For the sake of the present work, we characterize as “Antichristology” that spiritual disease which assails the pious Christian and arouses in him an almost monomaniacal tendency to constant preoccupation with issues pertaining to the Antichrist. For example:

- “The Antichrist is at the doors.... The prophecies concerning the Antichrist are being fulfilled in our days.... We must discern the signs of the forerunner of the Antichrist.... It is necessary for us to study informative books, booklets, and pamphlets that deal with the *modus operandi* of the Antichrist, so that we may be on our guard....”

2 Those who espouse the spirit and ethos of Antichristology, that is, Antichristologists, live in an unhealthy spiritual atmosphere dominated by eschatological beliefs that do not constitute the official teaching of our Church, but which either distort it, are derived from non-eclesiastical sources, or are, as a whole, arbitrary and/or demonic fantasies.

- One result of the Antichristological ethos is that people discover evidence of the Antichrist everywhere, which ultimately deflects their attention from a radiant, hopeful, and charismatic *Christology* to a gloomy, pessimistic, and demonic *Antichristology*.

■ A2. The Pathology of Antichristology

3 If we are to counteract in a therapeutic spirit the dreadful disease of Antichristology, which in our days has assumed epidemic proportions, it behooves us to enumerate its principal contemporary symptoms, which may be summarized as follows:

- a. There is incessant talk of “identity cards of the Antichrist,” which are regarded as the preliminary mark or token of the final “mark of the Beast.”
- b. It is constantly stated in writing that bar codes are the “mark of the Beast,” either containing or being identified with the number “666,” which is viewed as a symbol of the Antichrist and is characterized as an “ill-omened number.”
- c. It is asserted *dogmatically* that the Antichrist will employ a global moneyless economic system in order to lead us into an impasse and compel us to deny our Faith.
- d. It is said with full assurance that this new monetary system is being consciously promoted by the State and other inter-governmental and international organizations, which function in a conspiratorial fashion as tools of the Antichrist, to the end that we might voluntarily accept the “mark of the Beast.”
- e. It is widely rumored that all of the products of modern technology, which either directly or indirectly involve bar codes, as well as all automated electronic systems for reading, recording, processing, and recognizing data, are suspect and are included in this conspiratorial scheme of the Antichrist to impose his ultimate “mark.”

B

**The Eschatology of
the American Millenarians**





The Eschatology of the American Millenarians

■ B1. Its Indiscriminate Importation [into Greece] and the Tragic Consequences

1 The aforementioned symptoms of Antichristology have their origin in the Protestant eschatology of American millenarians, whose writings on this subject have been profusely and indiscriminately introduced into Greece by Orthodox Antichristologists and widely disseminated among the faithful, especially at a popular level.¹

• It is significant that all of the books by contemporary Greek Antichristologists, without exception, contain texts, views, and photographs taken from the Antichristological writings of the extreme wing of American Protestantism, despite the fact that these works, even in the U.S.A., have been rejected by sober elements among the Protestants as ridiculous and paranoid.

2 The consequences of the unchecked introduction and acceptance of Protestant Antichristological literature in our homeland are truly tragic, since by virtue of this influence:

- a. The Orthodox view of eschatological matters, which is diametrically opposed to the eschatology of the American millenarians and the Orthodox Antichristologists, is obfuscated and distorted.
- b. We have created a nightmarish atmosphere of fear and trembling and suspicion of everything, which is completely foreign to the Orthodox ethos of our Holy Faith, namely, the ethos of hope, freedom, victory, and resurrection.
- c. The achievements of science have been so demonized that Christians and the Gospel message are falling into total disrepute, since the impression is given that our salvation depends on superstitions and unconscious, automatic, and external processes.

¹ See, for example, the penetrating analysis published by the Orthodox Theological Think Tank, *Ἐκ Δυσμῶν τὸ Φῶς; Ἐκ Occidente Lux? – Ἡ νεοελληνικὴ Λαϊκὴ Ἐσχατολογικὴ Ἰδεολογία – Δυτικὲς προκλήσεις καὶ ὀρθόδοξες ἀποκλίσεις* [Light from the West? Popular eschatological ideology in modern Greece: Challenges from the West and Orthodox deviations] (Thessalonike: 2000-2004).

■ B2. Steps Towards Disengagement

3 We have studied in detail the basic symptoms of Antichristology mentioned in the preceding chapter (A2, §3, a-e) and have proved, with thorough documentation, that they are completely antithetical to

- Orthodox eschatology,
- scientific truth, and
- simple logic.

4 Precisely for this reason, and in order to disengage our flock from these unhealthy Protestant influences, we deem it expedient to exhort the faithful with much love, but also in a firm and categorical way, to do the following:

- a. To pay absolutely no attention to these anti-Orthodox, unscientific, and illogical aspects of Antichristology.
- b. To eliminate entirely from their hearts all anxieties about the Antichrist as being wholly without foundation.

c. Not to study books about the Antichrist:

- neither those imported from America,
- nor those by contemporary Orthodox Antichristologists.

d. To increase their vigilant struggle for the purification of the heart by means of humility, love, and purity in Christ, partaking regularly of the Immaculate Mysteries and calling upon the invincible aid of the Mother of God.

e. To study not a plethora of intricate matters, which are cited in the innumerable pamphlets concerning the Antichrist and which cause confusion, but only the most fundamental Orthodox, scientific, and logical ideas, which we discuss in the following chapters and which make known with complete assurance the groundlessness of recent fears concerning the Antichrist.