

The Orthodox Church and Eschatological Frenzy

Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi



CENTER FOR TRADITIONALIST ORTHODOX STUDIES

**The Orthodox Church and
Eschatological Frenzy**

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THE RECENT PROLIFERATION
OF “ANTICHRISTOLOGY” AND
ITS PERILOUS SIDE-EFFECTS

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

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Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Greece*



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Translated from “Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησία καὶ Ἐσχατολογικὲς Ἀνησυχίες· Ἡ πρόσφατος πληθωρική «Ἀντι-χριστολογία» καὶ οἱ ἐπικίνδυνες παρενέργειές της· Προτάσεις θεραπείας τῆς ἐσχατολογικῆς χαραγματο-φοβίας καὶ ἀριθμο-φοβίας”

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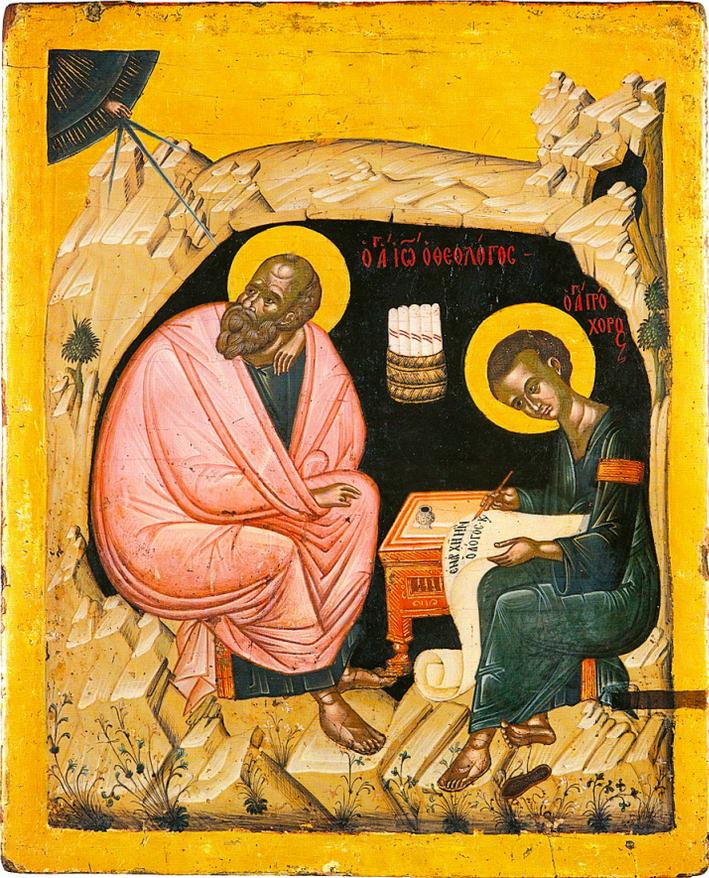
**APOLYTIKION AND ICON OF SAINT
JOHN THE THEOLOGIAN**

*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, September 26*

*Apolytikion—Third Tone, “Τὴν ὠραιότητα”
 (“Awed by the beauty”)*

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 writ-
ings 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 Saints Cyprian and Justina,
Phyle, Attica, Greece,
December 18, 2005*



*Saint John the Theologian dictating his Gospel to
Saint Prochoros on the island of Patmos*



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 (Saints 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, intense 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 Hesychastic 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.”¹

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,”² “lest that which is lame be put out of joint, but rather that it be healed,”³ addressing ourselves in a clear and simple manner to those faithful who are well-disposed.

¹ Revelation 19:9.

² Ephesians 4:12.

³ Hebrews 12:13.

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”⁴ 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 of
the Old Calendar Orthodox
Church of Greece*

⁴ Ephesians 1:17.



**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.”¹



“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.”²

¹ St. Dionysios the Areopagite, *On the Divine Names*, ch. III, §1, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. III, col. 680D.

² 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-ecclesiastical 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*.

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 United States of America, 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

¹ See, for example, the penetrating analysis published by the Orthodox Theological Think Tank, *Ἐκ Δυσμῶν τὸ Φῶς; Ἐκ Occidente Lux?—Ἡ νεοελληνική Λαϊκή Ἐσχατολογική Ἰδεολογία—Δυτικὲς ἀροκλήσεις καὶ ὀρθόδοξες ἀωοκλίσεις* [*Light from the West? Popular Eschatological Ideology in modern Greece: Challenges from the West and Orthodox deviations*] (Thessalonike: 2000–2004).

C

**The Book of Revelation and
the “Mark of the Beast”**



THE BOOK OF REVELATION AND
THE “MARK OF THE BEAST”

C1

The “Antichrist” Has Not Yet Been Revealed

1 The Book of Revelation, within an atmosphere of dense symbolism,¹ mentions the challenge of the “mark of the Beast,”² which the faithful will, however, confront during the period of the appearance and activity of “him who is in a distinctive and special sense the Antichrist”³ of the “Last Days” (the first “Beast,” who emerges from the sea⁴) and of the “False Prophet,”⁵ that is, the “Forerunner” and “Adjutant of the Antichrist”⁶ (the second “Beast,” who emerges from the earth⁷).

2 At that time, the Church will pass through the period of eschatological affliction and tribulation, persecuted by the “Dragon” and the two “Beasts.”⁸ This will be preceded by the activity of the two Prophets and Witnesses.⁹

¹ “The Apocalypse of John is the great allegory” (Elias B. Oikonomou, “Ἐξουσίαι εἰς τὴν «Ἀποκάλυψιν»” [“Authorities in the ‘Apocalypse’”], *Ἑστία*, № 176 [October 4, 1995], p. 1).

² Revelation 13:16, 17; 16:2.

³ St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Bk. IV, ch. 26, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XCIV, col. 1216A.

⁴ Revelation 13:1–8.

⁵ Revelation 16:13; 19:20; 20:10.

⁶ Andrew of Cæsarea, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, ch. 37, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, cols. 336D, 337AB, 340A.

⁷ Revelation 13:11–18.

⁸ Revelation 12:1–13:18.

⁹ Revelation 11:1–14.



BIBLIOGRAPHICAL CLARIFICATION

For our present hermeneutical work, especially for the third chapter, “The Book of Revelation and the ‘Mark of the Beast’” (C1–C10), we have had in front of us the commentaries of the holy expositors Oikoumenios, Andrew of Cæsarea, and Arethas of Cæsarea, on the basis of the following editions:

a Oikoumenios:

- H. C. Hoskier. *The Complete Commentary of Oecumenius on the Apocalypse*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan, 1928.
→ Not a completely satisfactory edition.
- Marc de Groote. *Oecumenii Commentarius in Apocalypsin*. Leuven: In Aedibus Peeters, 1999.
→ A critical text and a monument of industry.

b Andrew of Cæsarea:

- Jacques-Paul Migne. *Patrologia Græca*. Volume CVI, columns 207–458.
→ A problematic text.
- Josef Schmid. *Der Apokalypse-Kommentar des Andreas von Kaisereia*. Munich: Karl Zink Verlag, 1956.
→ A critical text and a monument of industry.

c Arethas of Cæsarea

- Jacques-Paul Migne. *Patrologia Græca*. Volume CVI, columns 487–786.
 - ➔ A problematic text.
- J. A. Cramer. *Catenæ Græcorum Patrum in Novum Testamentum*. Oxford: E Typographeo Academico, 1840. Volume VIII, pages 171–496.
 - ➔ The best edition, though not a critical one.



The End
And to God
Be Glory and Thanksgiving



November 21, 2000 (Old Style)
† Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos



“Enjoying thy gifts, O All-Pure One, we chant a hymn of thanksgiving, knowing thee to be the Mother of God.”

Small Paraklesis to the Theotokos,
Ode 4, Troparion 3

ON THE FRONT COVER: This Icon of the Vision of the Revelation is found in the Cave of the Revelation—now the Chapel of Saint John the Theologian within the precincts of the Orthodox Monastery of Saint John the Theologian—on the island of Patmos, where the exiled Saint John dictated the Book of Revelation to his disciple, Saint Prochoros. The Icon is located on the *Templon* of the Chapel, as seen in the photograph below. Images of apocalyptic themes are a rarity in Orthodox iconography; this one was painted by Thomas Bathas (†1599), a Cretan who worked on Kerkyra and in Venice, on commission by the monastery. The central figure is that of the Lord Jesus Christ in the guise of the Ancient of Days (“His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow” [Revelation 1:14]), Who declares, “I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last” (Revelation 1:11). Saint John is the reclining figure at the bottom (“I fell at His feet as dead” [Revelation 1:11]). Christ holds “in His right hand seven stars” (Revelation 1:16), and in His left hand “the keys of hell and of death” (Revelation 1:18). Above His left hand is the “sharp twoedged sword” that went “out of His mouth” (Revelation 1:16). “The seven stars are the Angels of the seven Churches,” seen here encircling the Lord, “and the seven candlesticks” at His feet “are the seven Churches” (Revelation 1:20). Although the Icon exhibits some non-traditional, Western influence, it is nonetheless noteworthy for its historical appetiteness in the Cave of the Revelation.

