

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*



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

**October 2010**



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**First Treatise**





## Contents

• <i>Apolytikion</i> and Icon of St. John the Theologian	4
• Introductory Reflections	5
• A Prayer of Supplication	8
<b>A. Recent Antichristology and Its Symptomatology</b>	9
▪ <b>A1.</b> Antichristology and Antichristologists	11
▪ <b>A2.</b> The Pathology of Antichristology	12
<b>B. The Eschatology of the American Millenarians</b>	13
▪ <b>B1.</b> Its Indiscriminate Importation [into Greece] and the Tragic Consequences	15
▪ <b>B2.</b> Steps Towards Disengagement	16
<b>C. The Book of Revelation and the “Mark of the Beast”</b>	17
▪ <b>C1.</b> The “Antichrist” Has Not Yet Been Revealed	19
▪ <b>C2.</b> “Blot Out the Marks”	22
▪ <b>C3.</b> The Procedure for Imposing the “Mark”	24
▪ <b>C4.</b> The Symbolic “Mark” and the Spiritual Procedure for Imposing It	26
▪ <b>C5.</b> The “Seal of the Lamb” and the “Mark”	32
▪ <b>C6.</b> The Number 666 Is Neutral	35
▪ <b>C7.</b> The Number 666 Is Not the Symbol of the Antichrist	38
▪ <b>C8.</b> Demystification of the Number 666	40
▪ <b>C9.</b> The Number 666 Is Not, and Does Not Function As, a “Preliminary Mark”	49
▪ <b>C10.</b> A Message of Edification, Consolation, and Hope	55
▪ <b>C11.</b> An Attempt at an “Ecclesiastical Reading” of the Apocalypse	62
• <b>Bibliographical Clarification</b>	68





## They Sing the Song of the Lamb

(Revelation 15:3)



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...)



**T**hou didst fall upon the breast  
of thy Teacher, from Whom thou  
didst draw the Light of Grace, becom-  
ing 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 inef-  
fable mysteries.

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\* 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 (certainly 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” (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.<sup>1</sup>

• 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.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the penetrating analysis published by the Orthodox Theological Think Tank, *Ἐκ Δυσμῶν τὸ Φῶς; Ex 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.





**C**

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





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

### ■ Cl. The “Antichrist” Has Not Yet Been Revealed

**1** The Book of Revelation, within an atmosphere of dense symbolism,<sup>1</sup> mentions the challenge of the “mark of the Beast,”<sup>2</sup> 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”<sup>3</sup> of the “Last Days” (the first “Beast,” who emerges from the sea<sup>4</sup>) and of the “False Prophet,”<sup>5</sup> that is, the “Forerunner” and “Adjutant of the Antichrist”<sup>6</sup> (the second “Beast,” who emerges from the earth<sup>7</sup>).

**2** At that time, the Church will pass through the period of eschatological affliction and tribulation, persecuted by the “Dragon” and the two “Beasts.”<sup>8</sup> This will be preceded by the activity of the two Prophets and Witnesses.<sup>9</sup> The first Beast will be given worldwide dominion<sup>10</sup> lasting

forty-two months.<sup>11</sup> The False Prophet, the second Beast, will already be laboring zealously to promote and consolidate the work and dominion of the Antichrist.

**3** Today, although the “mystery of iniquity”<sup>12</sup> continues to “work”; although “even now are there many antichrists”;<sup>13</sup> although—as has always been the case—there exists the convic-

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

<sup>2</sup> Revelation 13:16, 17; 16:2.

<sup>3</sup> St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Bk. IV, ch. 26, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xciv, col. 1216A.

<sup>4</sup> Revelation 13:1–8.

<sup>5</sup> Revelation 16:13; 19:20; 20:10.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew of Cæsarea, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, ch. 37, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. cvI, cols. 336D, 337AB, 340A.

<sup>7</sup> Revelation 13:11–18.

<sup>8</sup> Revelation 12:1–13:18.

<sup>9</sup> Revelation 11:1–14.

<sup>10</sup> “I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth” (Revelation 3:10).

<sup>11</sup> Revelation 13:5.

• The phrases which define the temporal span of three and half years, that is, “forty-two months” (Revelation 11:2; 13:5), “a thousand two hundred and threescore [sixty] days” (Revelation 11:3; 12:6), “for a time, and times, and half a time” (Revelation 12:14), are synonymous and constitute classical apocalyptic and eschatological expressions, which should not be understood literally, but formulaically and symbolically.

• In Holy Scripture, the sacred number seven symbolizes completeness and plenitude, while three and a half, as half of seven, suggests that the temporal span of the presence and activity of the Antichrist will be determined by God, short and restricted; that is, it will not be possible for him to consummate his “bestial” work against the Church (*cf.* Daniel 7:25; 8:14; 12:7, 8, 11, 12).

• “The Holy City—either the New Jerusalem or the Catholic Church—being trampled upon by the nations for forty-two months means, in my opinion, that those who are faithful and tested will be trampled upon and persecuted at the advent of the Antichrist for three and a half years”; “for three and a half years, indicated by one thousand, two hundred and sixty days, during which the apostasy will prevail” (Andrew, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, chs. 29, 33, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. cvI, cols. 312A, 325A) (on Revelation 11:2 and 12:6).

<sup>12</sup> II Thessalonians 2:7.

<sup>13</sup> I St. John 2:18.

tion that “the Antichrist shall come,”<sup>14</sup> and, at the same time, that “even now already it is in the world,”<sup>15</sup> nonetheless

- none of the “signs”<sup>16</sup> that foretell the “Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”<sup>17</sup> and of the “end of the age”<sup>18</sup> has yet been realized;

- nor has “the man of sin, the son of perdition, been revealed,”<sup>19</sup> “the lawless one,”<sup>20</sup> “the apostate false Christ”<sup>21</sup> and “Antichrist”<sup>22</sup> *par excellence*, whose coming will assuredly be perceptible “after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceit of unrighteousness”;<sup>23</sup>

- nor has the “other Beast,”<sup>24</sup> that is, the “False Prophet,”<sup>25</sup> appeared, who will “do great wonders”<sup>26</sup> “in the sight of the [first] Beast,”<sup>27</sup> in order to “deceive them that dwell on the earth,”<sup>28</sup> so that they will “worship the first Beast”<sup>29</sup> and the “image of the Beast”<sup>30</sup> and receive the mark of the Beast.

**3a** It should especially be emphasized that during the eschatological period, when the Antichrist will commence his public activity, the faithful will not be caught by surprise, since the Lord, in His love for mankind, will send His two Prophets and Witnesses, Sts. Enoch and Elias,<sup>31</sup> to preach repentance, to inform and

strengthen the Christians and to protect them from the deception of the lawless one, and also to draw away from him all those who may have been enticed by his false miracles.

a. “An ancient account from Tradition<sup>32</sup> prevails in the Church: that Enoch will come, together with Elias the Thesbite, as a forerunner of the Second Coming of Christ, when the Antichrist is about to appear; for it is said that they will come forth and testify in advance that the miracles that he is going to perform are a deception and that one should not give credence to the wicked one.”<sup>33</sup>

b. “For since the ‘coming’ of the Antichrist will take place ‘after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders’...and these signs have drawn people to assent and faith [in him], for this reason the two Prophets, who say of him that he is a charlatan and a deceiver, will use all manner of miracles to draw their hearers to faith [in God].”<sup>34</sup>

c. “For [the two Prophets] will bear witness that this present individual is not the Christ, but a deceiver, a charlatan, and a destroyer, insofar as the Son of God, in Whom we must believe as Savior and God, will not come yet.”<sup>35</sup>

d. “Many teachers have understood these [two witnesses] to be Enoch and Elias, who will receive from God a time in which to prophesy at the end of the age for three and a half years ([each year] being reckoned as three

<sup>14</sup> 1 St. John 2:18.

<sup>15</sup> 1 St. John 4:3.

<sup>16</sup> St. Matthew 24:3ff; St. Mark 13:4ff; St. Luke 21:7ff.

<sup>17</sup> II Thessalonians 2:1.

<sup>18</sup> St. Matthew 24:3.

<sup>19</sup> II Thessalonians 2:3.

<sup>20</sup> II Thessalonians 2:8.

<sup>21</sup> Andrew, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, ch. 33, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 337B.

<sup>22</sup> 1 St. John 2:18.

<sup>23</sup> II Thessalonians 2:9–10.

<sup>24</sup> Revelation 13:11.

<sup>25</sup> Andrew, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, ch. 33, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, cols. 336D, 337A.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Revelation 13:13.

<sup>27</sup> Revelation 13:14.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Revelation 13:14.

<sup>29</sup> Revelation 13:12.

<sup>30</sup> Revelation 13:15.

<sup>31</sup> • “Concerning these two witnesses...there is much disagreement among commentators.... According to the an-

cient and many of the more recent commentators, they are Elias and Enoch, ...but according to a more plausible interpretation, on the basis of verse 6, they are Elias and Moses” (Panagiotes Bratsiotis, *Ἡ Ἀποκάλυψις τοῦ Ἰωάννου* [The Apocalypse of John], 2nd ed. [Athens: 1992], p. 180).

<sup>32</sup> See St. Irenæus of Lyons, *Scrutiny and Refutation of Knowledge Falsely So-Called (Against Heresies)*, Bk. v, ch. 5, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. VII(B), cols. 1134–1136; St. Hippolytus of Rome, *Demonstration Concerning Christ and the Antichrist*, §43, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. X, col. 761A; *idem*, *On Daniel*, ch. 32, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. X, col. 656D.

<sup>33</sup> *The Complete Commentary of Oecumenius on the Apocalypse*, Discourse VI, ed. H.C. Hoskier (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1928), p. 128.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 129–130.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

hundred and sixty days), showing through their vesture of sackcloth a sad countenance and one worthy of mourning over those being deluded, and leading away from the deception of the Antichrist those then existing [on earth].”<sup>36</sup>

e. “God will arm these Saints with the power of true signs and miracles in order to confute falsehood and darkness by the juxtaposition of truth and light and to convert those led astray...and to expose the impostor, without suffering anything from him or from anyone else until the conclusion of their preaching.”<sup>37</sup>

f. “After they have attested to the need to avoid deception, Scripture says, the Beast, that is, the Antichrist, will slay them by Divine permission.”<sup>38</sup>

g. “For [the two Prophets] will both come to give advance warning to those then in existence not to be led astray by the fraudulent miracles of the Antichrist, ...for they will resort to mighty wonders, Scripture says, refuting through their truth what is done in accordance with error and deception”; “Oh, the wonder of Divine goodness in establishing truth to counteract error.”<sup>39</sup>

4 Consequently, the dilemma of the mark of the Beast, as the eschatological reality *par excellence*, does not exist today in any way, shape, or form, since neither the two Beasts nor the two Witnesses have appeared on the stage of history.



<sup>36</sup> Andrew, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, ch. 30, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 312BC.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, cols. 312D–313A.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 313B.

<sup>39</sup> Arethas of Cæsarea, *Collection of Interpretations of the Apocalypse*, ch. 30, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 649A, C.

## ■ C2. “Blot Out the Marks”

**5** However, until the advent of the “lawless one,”<sup>1</sup> we ought to abide in constant vigilance and striving for our sanctification, that is, for unceasing communion<sup>2</sup> with our Lord, so as to avert or blot out the various “marks” that the evil spirits endeavor to imprint on our hearts by means of sin in its sundry forms, with the intent of “extinguishing” all that Divine Grace inscribes “on the tablets of our hearts”<sup>3</sup> and of “alienating us from the life of God.”<sup>4</sup>

• Our Lord has entered into a “New Covenant” with the Israel of Grace, and His laws are inscribed on the hearts of the faithful through Holy Chrism and are constantly being renewed and reinscribed through the new life in Christ.

For this is My covenant which I will make with the house of Israel: after those days, saith the Lord, I will surely put My laws into their mind, and write them on their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people.<sup>5</sup>

**6** Patristic Tradition unceasingly and persistently speaks “in many and various ways” about “marks” of this kind and about the concomitant processes of “engraving” them or “blotting” them “out.”

a. The Divine Chrysostomos says in this regard:

[B]lot out the letters, or rather the marks, which the Devil has imprinted on your soul.... Then, when we have blotted them out, and have written those which are of the Spirit, you go away and, giving your hearts over to the works of the Devil, provide Him with the opportunity to inscribe

his own letters in you anew.<sup>6</sup>

b. Elsewhere too St. Chrysostomos says, indicating to the faithful the process by which the pious Christian is transformed into a temple:

Let us inscribe on our hearts not only that gridiron [an iron frame on which Martyrs were placed, with burning coals strewn beneath], but also the other tortures suffered by the Martyrs. And, just as those who wish to beautify their houses decorate them on all sides with floral designs, so also let us portray the torments of the Martyrs on the walls of our minds. Now, the former kind of decoration is unprofitable, whereas the latter brings gain. For this kind of decoration does not require money, expenditure, or any skill; instead of all that, it is sufficient to employ eagerness and a valiant and wakeful mind.... Let us therefore depict in our souls those placed on red-hot chairs...in order that by the variety of this adornment we might make our house resplendent and render it a suitable dwelling-place for the King of Heaven. For if He sees such depictions in our minds, He will come with the Father and make His abode in us with the Holy Spirit, and our mind will thenceforth be a royal palace, and no unseemly thought will be able to enter, ...and God, the King of all, will reside in us without ceasing.<sup>7</sup>

c. Clement of Alexandria says also in this vein:

Each of the passions is like a letter, a mark, or an impression for us. The Lord now stamps another mark on us, and other names and letters, faith instead of unbe-

<sup>1</sup> II Thessalonians 2:8.

<sup>2</sup> I St. John 1:3, 6 (communion with the Father); I Corinthians 1:9 (communion with the Son); II Corinthians 13:14 (communion with the Spirit).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Proverbs 7:3; 22:20.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Ephesians 4:18.

<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah 38:33.

<sup>6</sup> “Homily XI on St. Matthew,” §7, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. LVII, col. 200.

<sup>7</sup> “Encomium on All the Saints Who Have Suffered Martyrdom Throughout the World,” §3, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. I, col. 712.

lief, and so on.<sup>8</sup>

- d. St. Gregory the Theologian, describing the duties of a pastor, and in particular his obligation to put into practice the commandment of “departing from evil and doing good,”<sup>9</sup> writes that the Priest

must not only blot out the traces of vice from his soul, but also inscribe better ones, so as to be more eminent in virtue than he is superior in dignity.<sup>10</sup>

- e. St. Gregory of Nyssa teaches us that the pure heart

becomes a tablet of the Divine law of those who, as the Apostle says, show the work of the law written in their hearts, not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God,

Who engraves such letters in the soul, not on tablets of stone, as the Apostle says, but on the tablet of the heart, which is pure, smooth, and shining. For the ruling faculty of the soul should be in such a state that the recollection of the Divine Scriptures is impressed upon it clearly and unconfusedly, articulated as it were by conspicuous letters.<sup>11</sup>

7 Consequently, unless we take pains to blot them out carefully, then these diabolic marks are sufficient to alienate us from purifying, illuminating, and deifying communion with our Lord, with the result that we very easily accept the eschatological mark of the Beast.<sup>12</sup>



<sup>8</sup> *Selections from the Prophetic Books*, §24, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. IX, col. 709A.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Psalm 36:27.

<sup>10</sup> “Oration II, ‘In Defense of His Flight to Pontos,’” §14, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XXXV, col. 424A.

<sup>11</sup> *Exact Exegesis of the Song of Songs*, Hom. XIV, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XLIV, col. 1076AB. Cf. Romans 2:15; II Corinthians 3:3.

<sup>12</sup> Revelation 13:16, 17; 16:2.

### ■ C3. The Procedure for Imposing the “Mark”

**8** The eschatological mark will be received only by those who worship the Antichrist as God and venerate his image by way of the propaganda of the False Prophet, who will “deceive them that dwell on the earth by means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the Beast.”<sup>1</sup>

- a. The Antichrist will be he “who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.”<sup>2</sup>
- b. “And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him [the Antichrist].... And...[the False Prophet] causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first Beast.”<sup>3</sup>
- c. “And they have no rest day nor night, who worship the Beast and his image.”<sup>4</sup>
- d. The Antichrist “will be a kind of adversary of God, and will abolish all the gods, and will order men to worship him instead of God.”<sup>5</sup>
- e. “The forerunner of the apostate false Christ will accomplish all things through sorcery, in order to deceive people into thinking that the Antichrist is God.”<sup>6</sup>
- f. “[The Jews] will accept the impostor, who calls himself God; for that he will call himself God the Angel teaches Daniel, saying thus: ‘[H]e shall not regard any gods of his fathers.’”<sup>7</sup>

**9** The mark will be directly connected with the following four historical and evident

factors:

- a. the “coming”<sup>8</sup> and “revelation”<sup>9</sup> of the Antichrist;<sup>10</sup>
- b. his desire and ambition to be worshipped and adored as God;<sup>11</sup>
- c. the coming and activity of the False Prophet;<sup>12</sup>
- d. the conscious acceptance of the Antichrist as God on the part of all who will up until then have fellowship with Satan and will wish to continue this.<sup>13</sup>

**10** God will permit the unrepentant, the “carnal,”<sup>14</sup> the earthly-minded, those who have their hearts darkened, and in general “them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved,”<sup>15</sup> to be dominated by a “strong delusion”;<sup>16</sup> because of this they will believe the lie and worship the Antichrist.

- a. “And all...shall worship him [the Antichrist], whose names are not written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”<sup>17</sup>
- b. “He [the first Beast] will hold sway [only] over those whose names are not written in the Book of Life.”<sup>18</sup>
- c. “The [False Prophet] deludes those whose hearts dwell constantly upon the earth; for the perception [of his false signs] does not deceive those who have their citizenship in

<sup>1</sup> Revelation 13:14.

<sup>2</sup> II Thessalonians 2:4.

<sup>3</sup> Revelation 13:8, 12; cf. 13:4; 14:9, 11; 20:4.

<sup>4</sup> Revelation 14:11; cf. 13:15; 14:9; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4.

<sup>5</sup> St. John Chrysostomos, “Homily III on II Thessalonians,” §2, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. LXII, col. 482.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, ch. 37, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. CVI, col. 337B.

<sup>7</sup> St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Bk. IV, ch. 26, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. XCIV, col. 1216BC; Daniel 11:37.

<sup>8</sup> II Thessalonians 2:9.

<sup>9</sup> II Thessalonians 2:3, 6, 8.

<sup>10</sup> Revelation 13:1–8.

<sup>11</sup> See the preceding sections (2–7).

<sup>12</sup> Revelation 13:11–18.

<sup>13</sup> Evidence for this idea is presented in the immediately following section (10).

<sup>14</sup> See Romans 7:14; I Corinthians 3:3, etc.

<sup>15</sup> II Thessalonians 2:10.

<sup>16</sup> II Thessalonians 2:11.

<sup>17</sup> Revelation 13:8.

<sup>18</sup> Andrew, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, ch. 36, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. CVI, col. 336AB.



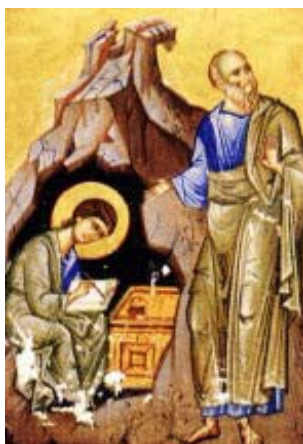
Heaven.”<sup>19</sup>

- d. “But those whose faces are marked with the Divine light will not receive [him].”<sup>20</sup>
- e. “[Isaiah says] ‘those that dwell upon the earth shall fall’; that is, those who have no concern for heavenly things and the glory that is yonder, but are attached to their earthly habitation and its swinish way of life. Wherefore, they have failed to be inscribed in the Book of Life.”<sup>21</sup>
- f. “In this way he will astound [through sham miracles] those whose minds are not human, but earthly.”<sup>22</sup>
- g. “He will astonish those people who [dwell] upon the earth, for whom their habitation is indicative of their predilection: they have none of the loftiness of a Godly and heavenly mind, but give heed [only] to the earth and to crawling on the earth like beasts.”<sup>23</sup>
- h. “The command [to make an image to the Beast] applies most precisely to those dwell-

ing upon the earth.... These, therefore, and not now those whose citizenship is in Heaven, are enjoined to make the image; for those made secure precisely by the prediction of the coming of the Beast are exempt from being deceived.”<sup>24</sup>

- i. “[T]hose that dwell upon the earth shall fall.’ Such are those who have an unstable basis, since they are not founded on the rock that is Christ. They, therefore, shall be astonished even now who have not been written in the Book of the Living because they focus on earthly things.”<sup>25</sup>

**11** Consequently, since such a preëminently eschatological climate does not prevail today, and since direct or indirect worship of the Antichrist as God is not imposed on us by means of the relevant technology, there is no justification for eschatological anxiety or fear of “marks.”



<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 37, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 337C. Cf. Philippians 3:19–20.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 340B.

<sup>21</sup> Arethas, *Collection of Interpretations of the Apocalypse*, ch. 36, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 676B; Isaiah 26:18.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 37, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 677D.

<sup>23</sup> Arethas, *Collection of Interpretations from Various Holy Men of the Apocalypse of John the Evangelist*, ch. 37, in J.A. Cramer (ed.), *Catena Græcorum Patrum in Novum Testamentum* (Oxford: E Typographeo Academico, 1840), Vol. VIII, p. 381.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 382.

<sup>25</sup> Arethas, *Collection of Interpretations of the Apocalypse*, ch. 54, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 721A.

## ■ C4. The Symbolic “Mark” and the Spiritual Procedure for Imposing It

**12** The procedure for imposing the “mark of the Beast”<sup>1</sup> “on the foreheads” and “on the right hand”<sup>2</sup> is profoundly symbolic and intimates the special spiritual relationship that is inaugurated between the Antichrist and man from the moment the Beast is worshipped as God.

**13** This new relationship, to which the mark alludes, is one of ownership, and also one of fellowship:

- the man, that is, who accepts the false god Antichrist, worshipping “the Beast and his image, and receiving the mark of his name,”<sup>3</sup> becomes henceforth his property and is completely under his control;

- likewise, the man who rejects his communion with the living God and receives a kind of anti-baptism through the procedure of imposing the mark, enters thereafter into exclusive fellowship with the “Dragon” (Satan, the Devil),<sup>4</sup> the patron of the Antichrist.

**14** In the theological language of our ecclesiastical Tradition, he who is “sealed” or “marked,” or who is “baptized in the Name,”<sup>5</sup> or who “hath the Name written,”<sup>6</sup> or who “beareth,”<sup>7</sup> “holdeth fast,”<sup>8</sup> “nameth,”<sup>9</sup> or “hath”<sup>10</sup> the “Name” or the “Mark,”<sup>11</sup> or who receives the “mark”<sup>12</sup> or the “mark of the name,”<sup>13</sup> or who

“hath the seal”<sup>14</sup> or the “number of the name,”<sup>15</sup>

- belongs, in terms of dominion, to him in whose name he is sealed or marked; that is, he comes under his control and becomes his “servant”;

- likewise, he partakes of him, is put in communion with him and is united with him, is clothed in him, becomes one with him, is assimilated to him, is his “friend,” and consequently bears within himself (“is imprinted”) with the “hallmarks” of his “lord.”

**15** We will cite several representative passages in support of the foregoing thesis, which constitute at the same time a brief introduction to the theology of the “Name” and the “Seal of the Lamb”:

a. “Now He Which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God, Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.”<sup>16</sup>

b. “And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, in Whom ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.”<sup>17</sup>

c. “Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And, Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.”<sup>18</sup>

d. “Him that overcometh..., ...I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God...: and I will write upon him my new name.”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Revelation 16:2; 19:20.

<sup>2</sup> Revelation 13:16; 14:9; 20:4.

<sup>3</sup> Revelation 14:9, II; 20:4; 19:20.

<sup>4</sup> Revelation 12:9; 20:2.

<sup>5</sup> St. Matthew 28:29.

<sup>6</sup> Revelation 2:17; 3:12; 14:1.

<sup>7</sup> Acts 9:15.

<sup>8</sup> Revelation 2:13.

<sup>9</sup> II St. Timothy 2:19.

<sup>10</sup> Revelation 13:17; 14:1; 16:2.

<sup>11</sup> Revelation 16:2.

<sup>12</sup> Revelation 13:16; 14:9.

<sup>13</sup> Revelation 14:11.

<sup>14</sup> Revelation 7:2; 9:4.

<sup>15</sup> Revelation 13:17.

<sup>16</sup> II Corinthians 1:21–22 (He has sealed us as His own).

<sup>17</sup> Ephesians 4:30 (by Whom you are sealed and branded as His own).

<sup>18</sup> II St. Timothy 2:19. Cf. Numbers 16:5, 26; Isaiah 26:13; 52:11. (The Church has a seal and a title; the Lord knows His own, and it is impossible for someone else to seize them.)

<sup>19</sup> Revelation 3:12 (in order to be eternally His, in order for

- e. “And I saw another Angel...having the seal of the living God, and he cried with a loud voice...saying, Hurt not...till we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads.”<sup>20</sup>
- f. “Thus, too, the believer: he has the Name of God as his superscription through Christ and the Spirit as his image. And irrational animals show whose each is through a seal, and it is on the basis of the seal that they are claimed. Thus, the faithful soul, which receives the seal of truth, bears about the marks of Christ.”<sup>21</sup>
- g. “For those who are illumined assume the features, the image, and the manliness of Christ, the form of the Word according to the likeness being stamped upon them and begotten in them according to genuine knowledge and faith, so that in each one Christ is spiritually born. For this reason, the Church swells and travails until Christ is born and formed in us, so that each of the Saints, by participating in Christ, has been born a Christ.”<sup>22</sup>
- h. “Set Me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thine arm’: the Bridegroom exhorts it [the soul] to form every thought and action in accordance with His image.... Or the Bridegroom says this to it, ‘Set Me as a seal,’ in order to seal your thoughts and your actions.”<sup>23</sup>
- “Therefore, the Bridegroom speaks to pious souls, which Divine Scripture calls a Bride..., calling the heart the contemplative part of the soul and the arm the practical part.... Our Savior therefore wants us to have Him as a seal both when talking and when think-

one’s affinity or identity with Him to be attested).

<sup>20</sup> Revelation 7:2, 3, 4, 5, 8; 9:4. Cf. Ezekiel 9:3–6 (seal: the mark of the servants of God).

<sup>21</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpts from Theodotos*, §86, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. IX, col. 697B. Cf. Galatians 6:17. The text printed in the *Patrologia Græca* erroneously reads “ἀπογραφὴν” for “ἐπιγραφὴν”—TRANS.

<sup>22</sup> St. Methodios, *The Banquet of the Ten Virgins, or Concerning Chastity*, Discourse VIII, §8, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XVIII, col. 149BC.

<sup>23</sup> Origen, *On the Song of Songs* (ch. 8), *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XVII, col. 285B.

ing, and to form both what we say and what we do in accordance with His image; for thus they will be royal coinage, not counterfeit, but bearing the image of the King.”<sup>24</sup>

- i. “The Spirit is called unction and is a seal...; created things are sealed and anointed by this [the Spirit] and taught about all things.... The Spirit is unction and a seal, whereby the Word anoints and seals all things.... The seal bears the form of Christ Who seals, and those who are sealed partake thereof and are formed in accordance therewith, as the Apostle says: ‘My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.’ Thus sealed, we fittingly become partakers of the Divine nature, as Peter said, and in this way all of creation partakes of the Word in the Spirit.”<sup>25</sup>
- j. “Paul too travails over some ‘until Christ be formed in them.’ That is, until the great and sublime marks of His Divinity are gradually formed in their minds.”<sup>26</sup>
- k. “Just as Judas, in admitting the Devil, impressed his wickedness on himself, so he who approaches Divine Grace is illumined by the rays emitted thence; and just as he who sits in darkness becomes dark, whereas he who sits in the Sun becomes sun-like and luminous, so he who cleaves to God receives God-like traits.”<sup>27</sup>
- l. “Let us, therefore, seek first and foremost to have the brand and seal of the Lord on ourselves, for at the time of the Judgment, ...when the Shepherd summons His flock, all those who have the brand will recognize their

<sup>24</sup> Theodoretos of Cyrros, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Discourse IV (ch. 8:6), *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LXXXI, cols. 204D–205A.

<sup>25</sup> St. Athanasios the Great, “Epistle I to Bishop Serapion of Thmuis,” §23, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XXVI, cols. 584C–585B. Galatians 4:19; II St. Peter 1:4.

<sup>26</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Glaphyra on Genesis*, Bk. III, “On Abraham and Isaac,” §2, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LXIX, col. 141A. Cf. Galatians 4:19.

<sup>27</sup> Theodoretos of Cyrros, *Questions on the Octateuch*, Qu. LXIX, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LXXX, col. 296B.

own Shepherd, and the Shepherd, knowing those who bear His own seal, will gather them from among all the nations. For those who are His hear His voice and go behind Him”; “and He will place everyone in two divisions; and those who bear His own sign, that is, the seal of the Spirit, He will call to Himself as His very own and will set them on His right hand.”<sup>28</sup>

**m.** “Learn, brethren, what is the true imprint of the seal of Christ.... The illumination of the Spirit is truly a single seal, even though the forms of its energies are many and the signs of its virtues are many.... The spiritual wolf does not dare to look upon the seal of Christ the Chief Shepherd whereby He seals His own sheep.... All, therefore, who are without this seal, run hither; all who lack this sign, make haste to be signed with the sign of the Spirit.”<sup>29</sup>

**n.** “I beseech Thee, therefore, O forbearing Lord Jesus Christ..., grant me the perfect seal and truly holy gift of Thine All-Holy Spirit in my heart, by Thy power and Thy wisdom.”<sup>30</sup>

**o.** “Yea, O Master God Almighty, show this [Chrism], by the descent of Thy Holy and adorable Spirit, to be the vesture of incorruption and a perfecting seal, imprinting upon those who receive Thy Divine laver Thy Divine Name, and that of Thine Only-Begotten Son and Thy Holy Spirit, that they may be known in Thy sight, as friends and citizens, servants and handmaids, sanctified in soul and body, delivered from all evil and redeemed from all sin, clad in the raiment

of Thine immaculate Glory, be recognized through this holy sign by the Angels and Archangels and all the Heavenly Host, and be fearful to all wicked and unclean demons.”<sup>31</sup>

**16** The foregoing idea, that through being “sealed” or “marked” he who submits to this procedure belongs to the one who seals or marks him and partakes of him in whose name the act is performed, becomes more fully comprehensible when one takes into account the theological significance of the word “name.”

• In our ecclesiastical Tradition, the word “name” is used in place of the person and his attributes; that is, “name” and “person” are identical. This means that, when we say “name,” we mean the person signified thereby and declare the nature of the person; likewise, however, the name of the person (God or Satan) means his energy.

**17** We will cite the following passages as evidence of this:

**a.** “And ye shall be hated of all men for My Name’s sake”<sup>32</sup> (for My sake).

**b.** “And whoso shall receive one such little child in My Name”<sup>33</sup> (for My sake).

**c.** “To manifest,”<sup>34</sup> “to declare,”<sup>35</sup> “to glorify,”<sup>36</sup> “to love,”<sup>37</sup> “to fear,”<sup>38</sup> “to call upon,”<sup>39</sup> “to bless,”<sup>40</sup> etc. the Name of God (God Himself.)

**d.** “Thou hast a few names even in Sardis”<sup>41</sup> (persons, faithful).

**e.** “[T]he number of names together were about

<sup>28</sup> St. Macarios of Egypt, “Homily XII,” §13, “Homily v,” §12, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xxxiv, cols. 564D–565A, 517A.

<sup>29</sup> St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Catecheses*, Discourse II, “Concerning the Avoidance of Pestilential and Pernicious Men,” *Ἐργα* [Works] (Thessalonike: Ekdoseis “Orthodoxos Kypsele,” 1988), Vol. 1, pp. 37, 32–33.

• The Seal of Christ is the energy of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>30</sup> Kallistos Angelikoudes, *Chapters on Prayer*, §58, *Φιλοκαλία* (Athens: Ekdotikos Oikos “Aster,” 1976), Vol. IV, p. 349 (chs. 1–14 are by Kallistos Telikoudes, whereas chs. 15–83 are by Kallistos Angelikoudes).

<sup>31</sup> From the Prayer, “O Lord of mercy and Father of lights,” in the “Order for the Preparation and Sanctification of Holy Chrism.”

<sup>32</sup> St. Matthew 10:22.

<sup>33</sup> St. Matthew 18:5.

<sup>34</sup> St. John 17:6.

<sup>35</sup> St. John 17:26.

<sup>36</sup> St. John 12:28.

<sup>37</sup> Psalm 68:37.

<sup>38</sup> Psalm 60:6.

<sup>39</sup> Psalm 74:2.

<sup>40</sup> Psalm 144:1.

<sup>41</sup> Revelation 3:4.

an hundred and twenty”<sup>42</sup> (there were about one hundred and twenty persons).

- f. “[K]eep [them] through Thine own Name”<sup>43</sup> (keep them in communion with Thee; that they may bear Thine energy; that they may live in Thy Grace).

**18** From all of the foregoing it naturally follows that the man who does not bear the the “Seal of the Lamb,”<sup>44</sup> that is, does not live the Hesychastic and Eucharistic ethos of the Orthodox Church, abides in an inner condition in which both vision (θεωρία) and practice (πρᾶξις), that is, both his mind (νοῦς, the energy of the soul) and his deeds (practical virtue), are predisposed to be fully and decisively enslaved to the Devil through the Antichrist.

- a. “And he [the False Prophet] will strive to impose upon all the mark of the pernicious name of the apostate and deceiver, ‘on their right hand,’ in order to cut off the performance of [right and] good deeds, and ‘on their forehead,’ in order to instruct the deceived to wax bold in deception and darkness. But those signed on their faces with the Divine light will not receive it.”<sup>45</sup>
- b. “If anyone shall submit to the Antichrist, who has turned into a Beast, and pursues the impious way of life that typifies him, and proclaims him either in deed or in word to be God (for this may be signified by the mark placed on his forehead and his hand), he will partake with him [the Antichrist] in the cup filled with the drink of chastisement.”<sup>46</sup>
- c. “‘Night,’ meaning the punishment of the profane, which they will attain who through their actions portray the diabolical deeds and blasphemies against Christ of the apostate Beast, engraving his [dishonorable] name on

their hearts as though it were honorable.”<sup>47</sup>

- d. “And to the rest of the Holy Martyrs who have suffered for Christ and have not received the mark of the spiritual Beast, the Devil, that is, the image of his apostasy, has judgment, namely the authority to judge, been given.”<sup>48</sup>
- e. “The inscription of the ruinous name [of the Antichrist] is antithetical to what is good. ‘On their right hand,’ so that he might cut off the performance of good deeds. ‘On their forehead,’ in order that, having appropriated the part which lies over the eyes, he might induce darkness in the deceived, lest they cleave honorably to piety as in the day. But those who have been signed on their faces with the light of the Divine Countenance will not receive this.”<sup>49</sup>
- f. “The worship of the Beast and the reception of his seal [mean] that one reckons the Antichrist to be God, while devoting oneself submissively to him and either in word or in deed doing and proclaiming what is pleasing to him; for this is what the mark on the forehead and the hand signifies, forehead being understood as speech and hand as deed; the image [of the Beast] he calls the impious way of life.”<sup>50</sup>
- g. “‘And they received not the mark.’ He calls the ‘mark’ a distinguishing characteristic, as it is said with regard to Christ: ‘The light of Thy countenance is signed upon us, O Lord.’ For, just as in that case light on the countenance is understood as a hallmark of those who love God, so, in the case of the impious, shamelessness is inscribed upon their foreheads, showing undisguisedly and frankly what kind of people they are. And in order to emphasize this more, they confirm their distinguishing trait by their unseemly deeds; for

<sup>42</sup> Acts 1:15.

<sup>43</sup> St. John 17:11.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Revelation 7:2; 9:4.

<sup>45</sup> Andrew, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, ch. 37, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 340AB.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 42, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 345C.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 42, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 348A.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 61, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 412A.

<sup>49</sup> Arethas, *Collection of Interpretations of the Apocalypse*, ch. 37, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 680D. Cf. Psalm 4:7—TRANS.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 42, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 689A.

the hand suggests action, just as the foot suggests resolve, as it is said: ‘Let not the foot of pride come against me, and let not the hand of the sinner move me.’ Since, therefore, the former have not been caught, not signed by the Evil One either through shamelessness or through deeds, they naturally live and reign with Christ until the end of the age.”<sup>51</sup>

**h.** “The forehead indicates man’s rational faculty; the right hand indicates his active capacity to accomplish what is good. The sealing of the hand and the forehead with the number of the Beast signifies the disposition of the forehead and the hand to think and act in the service of evil. In other words, the Beast will put pressure on men to serve him with dedication, to do evil with all their being, with body and soul, in thought and deed.... The seal and the selling and buying should not be understood literally, but symbolically, spiritually.”<sup>52</sup>

**19** Consequently:

**a.** The eschatological mark cannot be understood as a mechanical procedure of imposing or receiving an outward sign, which turns us into Antichrists automatically and regardless of our spiritual condition.

**b.** We repeat emphatically: to inscribe, receive, or possess a name, a number that indicates a name, the mark of the name, or the mark of the Beast betokens an inward procedure and relationship, which means: to belong to, partake of, receive, be conformed to, and assimilated to Satan.

**c.** All fear and anguish either about a “mark” imposed through the use of identity cards and other technological systems, or in general about some visible “mark” on the human body, are a trick of the Devil to deflect our attention and are wholly unfounded.

- “‘And here is the mind which hath wisdom.’ Since the words that are being interpreted are spiritual, one needs spiritual, not worldly wisdom in order to understand them.”<sup>53</sup>

- “From all of this it is evident that the mark of the Beast is very closely connected with adoration and worship of the Beast and with recognition of the Beast as God. This mark is not simply an external sign, but an inward acceptance and acknowledgment of the Antichrist. Deadness of the *nous* is a mark of the Beast, and those whose *nous* is dead go astray and become servants of the Beast of the Apocalypse, whereas those whose *nous* is illumined do not receive the mark of the Beast.”<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 61, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 752B. Psalm 4:7; 35:12.

- “The hand often symbolizes deeds”; (Origen, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XIV, col. 800D) “the hands are a symbol of action” (St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XXXIII, col. 1109A).

<sup>52</sup> Hieromonk Petronios Prodromites, “Ο ἀριθμὸς ‘666’” [The number “666”], *Ὁρθόδοξος Τύπος*, No. 752 (December 26, 1986), pp. 1, 4; *Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Ἀλήθεια*, No. 437 (November 11, 1997), pp. 6, 7.

<sup>53</sup> Andrew, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, ch. 54, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 380C.

<sup>54</sup> Archimandrite [now Metropolitan] Hierotheos S. Blachos, “Τὸ χάραγμα τοῦ θηρίου καὶ ἡ σφραγίδα τοῦ Ἀρνίου” [The mark of the Beast and the seal of the Lamb], in *Ἀνατολικά*, Vol. I (Lebadeia, Greece: 1989), p. 157.



“My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.’ Now, in what place or part of the body do you suppose he is saying that Christ will be formed? On the face or in the breast? No, it is in our heart that He is formed, and not corporeally, but incorporeally, and as befits God.”

(St. Symeon the New Theologian, “Discourse LVII,” in *Tὰ Εὕρισκόμενα*  
[The extant works] [Syros: 1886], p. 300)

“He who does not experience the Kingdom of God within him will not be capable of recognizing the Antichrist when he comes.”

(St. Ignaty Brianchaninov)



## ■ C5. The “Seal of the Lamb” and the “Mark”

**20** The symbolic character of the “mark” is more readily and quite naturally comprehensible when one becomes fully aware of the historical context of the narrative in the Book of Revelation, within which not only the destructive work of the Beast, the Antichrist, but also the saving work of the Lamb, Christ, is put forth.

**21** Let us remind ourselves that in chapters 12–13 the Church is presented as being in the last times and experiencing the intensity of the final tribulation and persecution. The dramatic struggle throughout the centuries between the Kingdom of God and the opposing forces now comes to a head: the new People of God, prior to their entry into the New City of the *Eschaton*, are going to engage in a confrontation with the forces of evil, from which they will emerge triumphant.

**22** Before the showdown between the Lamb and the Beast in the “Eschatological War,”<sup>1</sup> which will end in the final victo-

<sup>1</sup> The “Eschatological War,” the great and final conflict, is the well-known and much misunderstood battle of Armageddon (the sixth vial): “the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (Revelation 16:14; cf. Joel 2:11; Sophonias 1:14; Zacharias 14:1; II St. Peter 3:12), that is, the obliteration and decisive annihilation by the Lord of the forces of evil on the day of the Second Coming.

• This war is certainly not an actual, literal war, but is—albeit in the phraseology of warfare, in a metaphorical and spiritual sense—a multitude of different images depicting the same reality: the final judgment of God against the forces that oppose Him.

• See Revelation 16:14–16; 14:19–20; 17:14–16; 19:11–21; 20:7–10; Ezekiel 38–39; Zacharias 14; Joel 3.

• This eschatological conflict will apparently occur in many places: Armageddon (Revelation 16:16); Jerusalem (Revelation 14:19–20; 20:9; Zacharias 14:2); Babylon (Revelation 18:2, 9–10, 15–19, 21; 14; 16; 17); Heaven (Revelation 19:11–15); the land of Israel (Ezekiel 38:8); the mountains of Israel (Ezekiel 39:2); the Valley of Josaphat (Joel 3:2). (For more details, see N.I. Soteropoulos, *Ἀντιχρυστικὸν Ἐγχειρίδιον* [Anti-millennialist handbook], 3rd ed. [Athens: Ho Stavros,

ry and the cleansing of history, the “servants of God” will be sealed—to indicate to Whom they belong and of Whom they partake—by the “other Angel.”<sup>2</sup> The “sheep” of the “Good Shepherd”<sup>3</sup> will be sealed with the “seal of the Lamb,”<sup>4</sup> whereas the “goats,”<sup>5</sup> “whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world,”<sup>6</sup> will be sealed by the “other Beast”<sup>7</sup> with the “mark of the Beast.”<sup>8</sup>

a. “And I saw another Angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God, and he cried with a loud voice...saying, Hurt not...till we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads.”<sup>9</sup>

b. “And it was said unto them [the locusts] that they should...hurt...only such men as have not the seal of God upon their foreheads.”<sup>10</sup>

c. “Then I looked, and lo, on Mount Sion stood the Lamb, and with Him a hundred and forty-four thousand who had His Name and His Father’s Name written on their foreheads.”<sup>11</sup>

d. “This [the sealing through an Angel] will assuredly take place at the time of the coming of the Antichrist, when the seal of the Life-giving Cross will separate the faithful, who will bear the sign of Christ before the impious without shame and with boldness, from the unbelievers.”<sup>12</sup>

e. “They will undergo this [death] who are not signed with the Divine seal on their foreheads and do not shine with the illumination

1986], pp. 243–247.)

<sup>2</sup> Revelation 7:2, 3.

<sup>3</sup> St. John 10:1–21.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Revelation 7:2; 9:4.

<sup>5</sup> St. Matthew 25:33.

<sup>6</sup> Revelation 13:8; 17:8.

<sup>7</sup> Revelation 13:11.

<sup>8</sup> Revelation 16:2; 19:20.

<sup>9</sup> Revelation 7:2–3.

<sup>10</sup> Revelation 9:3, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Revelation 14:1.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, ch. 19, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 277c.



of the Life-giving Cross through the Holy Spirit, so that it will not be the case that, as the Master says, their light shines before men unto the glory of the Divine Name.”<sup>13</sup>

- f. “The foreheads of all these are sealed by the light of the Divine countenance, whereby they appear venerable to the destroying angels.”<sup>14</sup>
- g. “At the time of the coming of the Antichrist, the seal of the Life-giving Cross will reveal those bearing the inscription of Holy Baptism more clearly. For these are the inheritance of Christ.”<sup>15</sup>

**23** All of the foregoing citations emphasize the indisputably symbolic and incorporeal nature of the eschatological “sign” of the “sheep” and the “goats,” especially in view of the fact that the names and the name borne on his forehead by the mounted Commander Christ, when he sallies forth into the Eschatological War, are clearly symbolic and not perceptible.

- a. “...[A]nd behold a white horse; and He that sat upon him... had a name written, that no man knew, but He Himself...: and His Name is called The Word of God.”<sup>16</sup>
- b. “The unknowability of the Name signifies the incomprehensibility of His Essence. For though bearing many names with respect to His CEconomies...in His Essence He is unnameable and inaccessible, being known to Himself alone, together with the Father and the Spirit.”<sup>17</sup>

**24** Finally, the fact that the righteous in the New Jerusalem will bear the Name of

the Lamb upon their foreheads—something unquestionably symbolic—fully confirms the incorporeal and imperceptible nature of the eschatological mark.

- a. “And I saw the Holy City, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven. ...[A]nd His [the Lamb’s] servants shall serve Him, and they shall see His face; and His Name shall be on their foreheads.”<sup>18</sup>
- b. “They will have...the Divine Name engraved not only on their foreheads, but also on their hearts, indicating their firm, confident, and immutable love for Him; for the inscription on the forehead alludes to an adornment of boldness.”<sup>19</sup>
- c. “Unless the soul has the image of the Heavenly Spirit in ineffable light, Christ imprinted on it, ...for this is the mark and sign of the Lord imprinted on souls, being the Spirit of ineffable light..., it is not fit for the treasures on high and is discarded.”<sup>20</sup>

**25** Consequently:

- a. If we suppose that we find ourselves today before the End and that the process of imposing the “mark” on the “goats” has begun, then the related process of “sealing” the “sheep” must also have commenced.
- b. In such a case, if the “mark of the Beast” is outward and visible, then the “seal of the Lamb” must likewise be outward and visible.
- c. Now, do we actually see around us any pious Christian who has “the Name of Him [the Lamb] and the Name of His Father” inscribed on his forehead? Can it be that such a process has even begun?

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 26, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. CVI, col. 297AB.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 39, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. CVI, col. 341B.

<sup>15</sup> Arethas, *Collection of Interpretations of the Apocalypse*, ch. 18, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. CVI, col. 604C.

<sup>16</sup> Revelation 19:11–13.

<sup>17</sup> Andrew, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, ch. 58, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. CVI, col. 401B.

<sup>18</sup> Revelation 21:2; 22:3–4. Cf. Revelation 3:12.

<sup>19</sup> Andrew, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, ch. 68, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. CVI, col. 444D.

<sup>20</sup> St. Macarios of Egypt, “Homily xxx,” §5, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. XXXIV, col. 724CD.



“Have you not heard the Divine Chrysostomos saying that the Devil fears him who studies the Divine Scriptures and has inscribed the Divine law on his heart, and that he flees far from him? Do you wish to hear His own words? Hear them: ‘For when the Devil sees the law of God written in the soul, and the heart become tablets whereon to write it, he [the Devil] will not approach thenceforth. For wherever the king’s writing is, not engraved on a pillar of brass, but stamped by the Holy Spirit on a mind that loves God and gleams with much Grace, he [the Devil] will not be able even to look at it, but will turn his back on us from afar. For nothing is so terrible to him and to the thoughts suggested by him as a mind that meditates on the things of God and a soul which ever cleaves to this fountain.’ Hence, why do you fear him who, rather, fears you?”

(St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite, *Νέα Κλίμαξ* [New Ladder] [Volos: Ekdotis Soteriou N. Schoina, 1956], p. 92; St. John Chrysostomos, “Homily III on St. John,” §1, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LIX, col. 38)

## ■ C6. The Number 666 Is Neutral

**26** Numbers are concepts, which are denoted either through mathematical symbols (Arabic: 1, 2, 3...), or through letters (Greek: α', β', γ'...). or through words (one, two, three...).

- Numbers do not have any other meaning than that which human beings give them in order to use them in their worldly needs (counting or indicating quantities and sizes) or, secondarily, for the “symbolization” of a person or thing (*Gematria*: the arithmetical value of the letters of a word corresponds to a number; every word translates into a number).

a. “The sixth day betokens the inner principle [λόγος] of the being of existing things. The seventh day signifies the mode of the well-being of existing things. The eighth day denotes the ineffable mystery of the eternal well-being of existing things”; “for it has been said that the number six signifies practical philosophy.”<sup>1</sup>

b. “For, transferring the name Jesus, which belongs to another language [Hebrew], to the numeration of the Greeks, they [the heretical Gnostics] call it symbolic, at times as having six letters, and at other times as containing ‘the Plenitude of the Ogdoad,’ that is, the number 888. However, His [corresponding] Greek name, which is ‘Soter,’ that is, *Salvator* [Savior], because it does not fit in with their contrived system, either with respect to numerical value or as regards its letters, they pass over in silence.... [F]or it is a word of five letters, and its numerical value is 1408.”<sup>2</sup>

c. “Those who hold the number seven in honor

<sup>1</sup> St. Maximos the Confessor, “First Century of Texts on Theology and the Incarnate Economy of the Son of God,” §56, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 1104C; “Third Century of Various Texts on Theology, the Divine Economy, and Virtue and Vice,” §53, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 1284A.

<sup>2</sup> St. Irenæus of Lyons, *Scrutiny and Refutation of Knowledge Falsely So-Called (Against Heresies)*, Bk. II, ch. 24, §1, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. VII(A), col. 788AB.

• Among the inscriptions at Pompeii (79 A.D.) the following is very typical: “I love her whose number is 545.”

out of such considerations unwittingly dignify not only that number but every number in general, since each of them naturally possesses such positive attributes. For since numbers were created by God along with all other existing things, and everything created by God is good and very good, as the Creator Himself bore witness through Moses, whatever aspect of numbers one selects and scrutinizes he will find good and very good, wondrously proportioned within itself and in relation to others.”<sup>3</sup>

**27** Thus, just like all numbers, without any distinction whatsoever, the number 666, too, is neutral in and of itself: that is, it is not objectionable, does not have any essential power, does not contain any supernatural energy, has nothing mysterious about it, and is not Satanic.

- The Orthodox Church has never taught that the number 666 is “dangerous” and consequently that it should be treated with “caution,” since it is, supposedly, the “name” of the Antichrist, represents him, stands for him, or functions as his emblem or symbol.

- The holy expositors, when speaking about the “name” of the Antichrist, have never drawn to our attention the alleged danger of the number 666, let alone that such a danger should arise in the course of history (and before the coming of the Antichrist). On the contrary: in pointing out that it corresponds to many names, they clearly refute the notion that 666 is the “identity of the Antichrist,” as though an identifying number is univocal, that is, singular and unique for each person.

a. “For a number consisting of six or sixes, whether it is composed of units, tens, or hun-

<sup>3</sup> St. Gregory Palamas, “Homily xvii, Explaining the Mystery of the Sabbath and of the Lord’s Day, and on the Gospel appointed for the Sunday of Renewal,” *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CLI, cols. 224D–225A.

dreds, or of some other number, denotes the habit which produces virtue and vice, and which, in proportion to the multiplication of its composition, brings the former or the latter disposition to fulfillment, presenting it to those who reflect on numbers with knowledge...such that that the number might be blameworthy or praiseworthy, according to the passage of Scripture under scrutiny.”<sup>4</sup>

b. “The same number can be found to apply to many names; for if there are many names found possessing the same number, it will be asked which of them the one who is to come shall bear.”<sup>5</sup>

c. “For we find many names that correspond to this number: such as, for instance, the word ‘Titan,’ an ancient and notable name, or ‘Evanthas,’ for it too makes up the same number; and many others could be found.”<sup>6</sup>

d. “As though by way of a verbal exercise, it is possible, according to the Blessed Hippolytos and others, to find many names, both common and proper, which correspond to this number.”<sup>7</sup>

**28** Pious servants of God have never feared the number 666; they have never deleted the page numbered 666 from the books of Holy Scripture or from Patristic texts; they have never refused to read *Synaxaria* in which the number 666 is mentioned in the Lives of the Saints; they have never been scandalized by narratives in the Old Testament which employ the

<sup>4</sup> St. Maximos the Confessor, *Responses to Thalassios Concerning Various Difficulties in Divine Scripture*, XLIX, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XC, col. 456C–457A.

<sup>5</sup> St. Irenæus of Lyons, *Scrutiny and Refutation of Knowledge Falsely So-Called (Against Heresies)*, Bk. v, ch. 30, §3, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. VII(B), col. 1206A.

<sup>6</sup> St. Hippolytos of Rome, *Demonstration Concerning Christ and the Antichrist*, §50, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. X, cols. 769C–772A.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, ch. 38, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 340C.

• Cf. Arethas, *Collection of Interpretations of the Apocalypse*, ch. 18, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 681C.

number 666; they have never faced any dilemma when it comes to resting on a seat numbered 666 on a boat, in a train, in an airplane, or in a hall, etc.; they have never hesitated to make mathematical transactions that would yield the number 666.

a. “And the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold.”<sup>8</sup>

b. “And these are the people of the land that went up, of the number of prisoners who were removed, ...and they returned to Jerusalem and Juda, every man to his city, who came with Zorobabel... The children of Adoniam, six hundred and sixty-six.”<sup>9</sup>

c. “One of the notables of the city once took ill. The Saint [Symeon, the fool for Christ] was in the habit of going to him and playing in his house. When he was on the point of death, he saw himself in his sleep playing backgammon with some black person. This was death. It was the sick man’s turn to throw, and if he did not throw three sixes, he would lose. Abba Symeon appeared to him in his sleep and said: ‘What are you doing, stupid? This black man is now going to beat you. But give me your word that you will no longer pollute your wife’s bed, and I will throw for you and he will not beat you.’ After swearing an oath, the one who had this vision said, ‘he took the dice and threw them, and the result was three sixes.’ After the sick man woke up, the Fool immediately went to his house and said: ‘You did well to throw three sixes. Believe me, if you violate your oath, that black man will suffocate you.’ After insulting him and all the members of his household, he took off at a run.”<sup>10</sup>

**29** Finally, Sacred Tradition has never characterized the number 666 as supposed-

<sup>8</sup> III Kings 10:14.

<sup>9</sup> II Esdras 2:1–2, 13 (Ezra 2:1–2, 13).

<sup>10</sup> Leontios of Neapolis, *Life of St. Symeon the Fool for Christ*, §57, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XCIII, cols. 1740C–1741A.

ly “unlucky.”

• St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite, in his explanation of the phrase “the evil-named Iscariot,”<sup>11</sup> declares that

Judas is said to be ‘of evil name,’ not because the name ‘Judas’ is evil...nor because the name ‘Iscariot’ is wicked.... In fact, the name ‘Judas’ is auspicious; for ‘Judas’ is interpreted as ‘confession,’ and confession is not only not inauspicious, but is also the most auspicious of things auspicious.... Therefore, it is not on account of his name that Judas is called ‘evil-named,’ no!... the good name of a man gains an evil reputation from wicked deeds; and conversely, the inauspicious name of a man becomes

auspicious as a result of good deeds.... Thus, Judas is called ‘evil-named’...on account of the great evil of the betrayal that he committed.<sup>12</sup>

**30** Consequently: The recent and widely-disseminated fear of numbers regarding the neutral and irreproachable number 666 is groundless and evinces a superstitious and prejudiced outlook— something inadmissible for those who have died “with Christ from the rudiments of the world,”<sup>13</sup> according to the Divine Apostle Paul.



“Just as wax, if not heated or softened thoroughly, cannot receive the imprint of a seal, so neither can man, unless he is tested through toils and infirmities, receive the seal of God’s virtue.”

(St. Diadochos of Photike, *Ascetic Discourse*, §94, *Φιλοκαλία*, [Athens: Ekdotikos Oikos “Aster,” 1957], Vol. I, pp. 268–269)



“Those who really speak about the end times are those who practice hesychasm, not relaxation. Genuine Orthodox eschatology is hesychasm.”

(Protopresbyter John S. Romanides, *Patristic Theology*, tr. Hieromonk Alexis [Trader] [The Dalles, OR: Uncut Mountain Press, 2008], p. 108)

<sup>11</sup> See the Canon of Great Thursday, Ode 8, *Trop.* 2.

<sup>12</sup> *Ἐορτοδρόμιον* [Commentary on the Great Feasts] (Venice: 1836), p. 347.

<sup>13</sup> Colossians 2:8, 20.

## ■ C7. The Number 666 Is Not the Symbol of the Antichrist

**31** In general terms, whatever is used symbolically to represent something else or is considered by convention to represent or define something else is called a symbol (generally: a sign).

- The symbol of Christianity is the Cross. The symbols of Christ are the Lamb, the Fish, and the Good Shepherd. The symbol of hope is the anchor. The symbol of peace is the dove (with an olive branch). The symbol of addition is the “+” sign. The symbol of sodium is “Na.” The symbol of mass is “m.” The symbol of (royal) authority is the rod or scepter.

**32** A concrete symbol is capable of functioning in a polysemous way, especially when it has the form of a figure, something that is due to the diverse realities (religious, ethical, ideological, scientific, physical, social, aesthetic...) which those who use it wish to express through this symbol: different groups of people use the same symbol, but each one typically understands it to have a different meaning.

- For example, the “+” sign constitutes the Sign of the Cross for the Christian community;<sup>1</sup> it is the addition sign for the mathematical community; it is the sign of positive electric current for electricians; among traffic signs, it signifies an intersection, etc.

**33** Therefore, in order for a symbol to represent or define something exclusively, the following three conditions at least must without fail be fulfilled:

**a.** The symbol must pertain exclusively to a par-

<sup>1</sup> The Cross has always been a sacred symbol, carried by false deities, kings, and other official personages as an emblem of life. The figure of the cross “with different variants was known in the ancient world, the pre-Christian world, and is encountered everywhere in the world” (for more details, see the article by Georgios Gratsias, “Σταυρός” [Cross], in *Θρησκευτική και Ήθική Εγκυκλοπαίδεια*, Vol. XI [Athens: 1967], cols. 411–414).

ticular referent.

- b.** The symbol must be fixed and unchanging in form.
- c.** The symbol must function as such in a specific context.
  - For example, the “+” sign will be the Christian Cross, the sign of Christ:<sup>2</sup>
    - a.** only when it is associated with the Crucifixion of our Savior;
    - b.** only when it is formed by two intersecting lines: one vertical and one horizontal;
    - c.** only when it is connected with Christian worship, witness, and confession.

**34** On the basis of the foregoing principles, the neutral number 666 cannot possibly be regarded as the symbol of the Antichrist, for the following fundamental reasons:

- a.** The Orthodox Church has never stated or proclaimed this or anything related to the symbolization of 666.
- b.** In the controversial passage from the Book of Revelation,<sup>3</sup> the Antichrist is not presented as bearing a visible emblem, that is, 666, which allegedly serves to identify him.
- c.** In the passage in question, the number 666 is not rendered as a figure, that is, as three sixes, “666,” as the cruciform “Tav” (τ or + or X)<sup>4</sup> was rendered in the vision of the Holy Prophet Ezekiel, as a sign of protection of the faithful, but as a common and ordinary number, which results from a mathematical operation: the “Gematric” process of “enumeration,” “calculation,” and “computation.”

<sup>2</sup> Cf. St. Matthew 24:30.

<sup>3</sup> Revelation 13:18.

<sup>4</sup> Ezekiel 9:4, 6. *Tav* (*Taw*) is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet—TRANS.

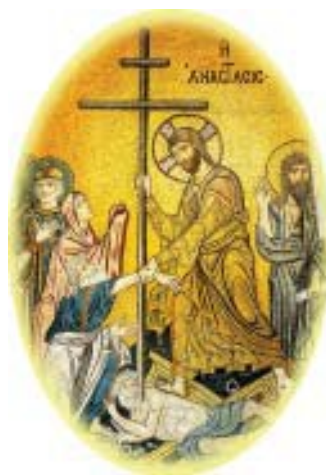
- In this prophetic vision, the idolatrous inhabitants of Jerusalem are struck by six Angels, whereas the innocent and the pious are “marked” on the forehead by another Angel.
- See also the “signs” of salvation: Exodus 12:7, 13; Isaiah 44:5; Revelation 7:3–8; 9:4; 14:1.

- d. The number 666 does not exist in this passage. In fact, in manuscripts it is rendered in a variety of forms: at times the Greek numeral, in two forms (χξς' or ΧΞς'), and at times written out (“ἑξακόσια/-οι/-αι, ἑξήκο-ντα ἕξ”).
- e. The number 666 does not have only one, fixed form, but many: 666 (Arabic numerals), χξς' or ΧΞς' (Greek numerals), DCLXVI (Latin numerals), תרסן or מטר (Hebrew numerals), 1010011010 (the binary system used in computer systems), etc.

tive connotation given to it through its transformation into a symbol of the Antichrist, with all that this entails, is not consonant with the spirit of the Book of Revelation, which exhorts—when the Beast is already treading the boards of history and engaged in anti-Christian activities—simply and solely, “let him count”; that is, let him perform a purely symbolic arithmetical operation in order to discover the “number of the [then familiar] name.”<sup>5</sup>

“Here is wisdom. He that hath understanding, let him count the number of the beast; for it is the number of a man: and his number is Six hundred and sixty and six.”<sup>6</sup>

**35** Consequently: The “mystification” of the neutral number 666 and the nega-



<sup>5</sup> Revelation 13:17.

<sup>6</sup> Revelation 13:18.

## ■ C8. Demystification of the Number 666

**36** The non-explicit transmission by the Book of Revelation of the name of the Antichrist, with the sole exception of his arithmetical formula, has contributed to the “mystification” of the number 666. The “number of the Beast” has been invested with a veil of mystery, something which has led to many misunderstandings.

- The verse Revelation 13:18 is “not only difficult, but impossible to understand, and it assuredly provokes the interest of the believer, since it is mysterious and speaks about the Antichrist, that is, it combines the incomprehensible with the fascinating. More interpretations of it have been proposed than of any other passage in Scripture.”<sup>1</sup>

**37** For a hermeneutical approach to the number 666, which is at first sight cryptic, the following preconditions are necessary:

- a. Rigorous investigation and fervent prayer are required:
  - “Beloved, we need much diligence, much watchfulness, to be able to look into the depth of the Divine Scriptures. For it is not possible to discover their meaning in a haphazard way, or while asleep; rather, there is need of rigorous investigation and also of fervent prayer.”<sup>2</sup>
- b. Avoidance of literal interpretation is required:
  - “In the case of the Divine Scriptures, those who read the letters carelessly suppose them to be mere letters and to have no more content than any other letters”,<sup>3</sup> “For if one

should attend haphazardly to the words and inquire into nothing more than the letters, he will be greatly in error.”<sup>4</sup>

- c. Knowledge of the hermeneutical canons according to the method<sup>5</sup> followed by the Fathers is required:
  - “For this is the best method of inquiry”,<sup>6</sup> “so also those who do not know the method of the Divine Scriptures, and do not examine its idioms and laws, but go over everything carelessly and in one way, will mix the gold with earth and will never discover the treasure that is laid up therein”;<sup>7</sup> “We need great watchfulness, or rather the Grace of God, in order to avoid dwelling on mere words. For this is how the heretics are led astray, because they neither examine the purpose of the speaker nor the disposition of the hearers. Therefore, if we do not add these factors and others besides, such as times, places, and the mind of the hearer, many absurdities will result.”<sup>8</sup>

**38** One of the fundamental rules of the Patristic method of exegesis is the historical basis, the historical milieu in which a sacred text was written: “Who is the writer, when did he write, and about what?”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> “Homily VIII ‘On the Incomprehensibility of God,’” §1, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XLVIII, col. 769.

<sup>5</sup> Despite the fact that all parts of Divine Scripture were written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (a very important hermeneutical principle), the tools of the historical and grammatical method are indispensable; the Divine Chrysostomos greatly enriches and systematizes them for the first time, characterizing them all together as a “method” (Ἀκολουθία) (for further details, see Stylianos G. Papadopoulos, *Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος* [St. John Chrysostomos] [Athens: Apostolike Diakonia tes Ekklesias tes Hellados, 1999], Vol. II, pp. 102ff).

<sup>6</sup> St. John Chrysostomos, “Against Those Who Left the *Synaxis* of the Church,” §3, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LI, col. 71.

<sup>7</sup> *Idem*, “Homily XL on St. John,” §1, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LIX, col. 229.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Idem*, “Against Those Who Left the *Synaxis* of the

<sup>1</sup> Stergios N. Sakkos, “ΧΕΣ – Τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου” [666: The name of the Antichrist], in *Ἡ ἔρευνα τῆς Γραφῆς* [The study of Scripture] (Thessalonike: Ekdotis “He Apolytrosis,” 1969), p. 152.

<sup>2</sup> St. John Chrysostomos, “Homily XXI on St. John,” §1, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LIX, col. 127.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, “To Those Who Reproached Him for the Prolixity of His Words,” §2, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LI, col. 126.



- The historical milieu must be taken very seriously into account, especially with regard to the controversial passage in question, and certainly more broadly with regard to the entire Book of Revelation, since in our view it constitutes the decisive hermeneutical key to the “number-name.”

a. In interpreting the Apocalypse, we should not restrict ourselves to its futurological dimension alone by isolating it from its historical basis. The Holy Apostle John (†101)<sup>10</sup> writes from exile,<sup>11</sup> and certainly not in a historical void, but about the dramatic times through which the contemporary Christian communities in Western Asia Minor were passing, always from an eschatological perspective: in the sacred text, history and eschatology interpenetrate, and “the present” is revealed “through the categories of the past and in the perspective of the future.”<sup>12</sup>

- “Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall (must) be hereafter.”<sup>13</sup>

b. The Saint, in writing about his era, about events pertaining to his generation, presents by means of very vivid images and symbols the increasing hostility of the Roman Empire towards the Church and the culmination of this warfare, the eschatological war, the victory of the Lamb, the conclusion of the primordial drama and the eschatological renewal of all things with the coming of the Kingdom of God. The early Church expected all these events to occur in the near future. There prevailed a lively and abiding impression of their proximity, of something immediately immi-

nent.<sup>14</sup>

- “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.”<sup>15</sup>

- “[K]nowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand.”<sup>16</sup>

- “The time henceforth is short.”<sup>17</sup>

- “The Lord is at hand. In nothing be anxious.”<sup>18</sup>

- “The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.”<sup>19</sup>

- “Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.”<sup>20</sup>

c. It should also not be forgotten that two great

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Church,” §3, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LI, col. 71.

<sup>10</sup> *Paschal Chronicle, Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XCII, col. 608B.

<sup>11</sup> Revelation 1:9: “I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

<sup>12</sup> Basileios P. Stogiannes, “Ἀποκάλυψη καὶ Πολιτικὴ” [Apocalypse and politics] in *Ἑρμηνευτικὰ Μελετήματα* [Hermeneutical studies] (Thessalonike: Ekdoseis P. Pournara, 1988), p. 575.

<sup>13</sup> Revelation 1:19; 4:1.

<sup>14</sup> In the early Church, there were primarily four factors that contributed to the faithful being at a very high level of watchfulness and having a very profound sense that the End and the Judgment were at hand, that the Kingdom of God was already being realized, and that their hopes were being fulfilled: (1) the eschatological predictions of the Lord; (2) their intense experience of the presence of the Savior, especially by way of spiritual gifts; (3) the great antithesis between the morals of the new and the old world; and (4) the increasing hostility of their environment.

- The very intense nature of these experiences and feelings gave rise to what are called “enthusiastic tendencies”: life, worship, and theology moved within this perspective. The Church prayed for the swift coming of the Lord (“Μαρὰν ἄθᾶ” [*Maran atha*]) and was in a state of readiness to meet Him; morals were very strict; those who sinned gravely were excluded from the community; ecstasies, visions, and revelations were common.

- It is within this milieu of intensity and watchfulness, of hope and expectation, of tribulation and consolation, of the clash between the Kingdom of God (Light) and the Kingdom of Satan (Darkness), that the Sacred Apocalypse was “given” and “sent.” The Apocalypse begins with the indicative statement, “for the time is at hand” (1:3), and concludes with the striking affirmation of Christ, “Yea, I come quickly” (22:20).

<sup>15</sup> St. Matthew 24:42. See also St. Matthew 25:13; St. Mark 9:1; 13:30–37; St. Luke 12:35.

<sup>16</sup> Romans 13:11–12.

<sup>17</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:29.

<sup>18</sup> Philippians 4:5–6 (RV).

<sup>19</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:2.

<sup>20</sup> 1 St. John 2:18.

persecutions had already occurred during the first century: the first in 64 A.D., under Emperor Nero (reigned 54–68 A.D.), and the second in 95–96 A.D., under Emperor Domitian (reigned 81–96 A.D.), which just preceded or coincided with the writing of the Apocalypse.

- “‘I also will keep thee from the hour of trial’: He means the persecution of Christians that took place during the reign of Emperor Domitian, who became the second persecutor after Nero, as Eusebios relates in his *Ecclesiastical History* and in his *Chronological Canons*. It was during his reign, too, that the Divine Evangelist was condemned to live on Patmos, a small and desolate island.”<sup>21</sup>
- “[T]he hour of trial’: He speaks of the imminent persecution against the Christians by those who impiously ruled Rome at that time.”<sup>22</sup>
- “‘I also will keep thee from the hour of trial’: By ‘the hour of trial’ he means...the persecution under Domitian, the second after Nero, as Eusebios, the disciple of Pamphilos, recounts; at that time the Evangelist himself was condemned to [exile on] Patmos by Domitian.”<sup>23</sup>
- d. During the persecution by Nero, the faithful underwent “sudden and successive calamities and adversities” and a large number of the elect suffered martyrdom, among them the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul;<sup>24</sup> many more suffered during the persecution by Domitian.<sup>25</sup>
- e. The chief cause of friction was the enforcement of worship of the emperors as deities.

<sup>21</sup> Oikoumenios, *Complete Commentary on the Apocalypse*, Discourse II, p. 194; Eusebios, *Church History*, Bk. III, ch. 17, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XX, cols. 249C–252A; cf. *Paschal Chronicle*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XCII, col. 604A.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, ch. 8, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 248A.

<sup>23</sup> Arethas, *Collection of Interpretations of the Apocalypse*, ch. 8, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 557B.

<sup>24</sup> St. Clement of Rome, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, chs. 1, 5, 6, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. I, cols. 205A, 271A–221A.

<sup>25</sup> See the testimonies of Eusebios, Dio Cassius, Suetonius, St. Jerome, and Tertullian.

This tactic, which commenced under Augustus (31 B.C.–14 A.D.), culminated under Domitian (81–96 A.D.): with sacrilegious arrogance, he demanded of his subjects that he be addressed by the religious terms “Lord and God” (“Dominus et Deus”)<sup>26</sup> and promoted the imperial cult by means of coercive procedures both in Rome and in the rest of the Empire.

- This blasphemous tactic of deifying the civil authority, a usurpation of God on the part of the totalitarian state, is hinted at by the Holy Apostle Paul: the Antichrist will try to show “that he is God”;<sup>27</sup> and by St. John the Theologian: in order to prove his divinization, the Antichrist bore “upon his [seven] heads names of blasphemy” and “there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies.”<sup>28</sup>
- f. Of particular interest to us here is that Asia Minor evolved into a center of this loathsome emperor-worship: in many cities statues of gold and silver were set up and shrines in honor of the Emperor were constructed.
- It is significant that in Ephesus, during the time of St. John, there were renowned shrines for the worship of the Emperors Claudius (41–54 A.D.), Nero (54–68 A.D.), and Domitian (81–96 A.D.).<sup>29</sup>
- g. This very oppressive milieu in Asia Minor, on account of the imperial cult, was exacerbated by the traditional worship of Greek

<sup>26</sup> Octavian (31 B.C.–14 A.D.), who “in the Greek cities of Asia Minor was worshipped as early as 29 (together with the goddess ‘Rome’),” assumed the titles *Augustus* and *Divus* after his death; Caligula (37–41 A.D.) not only blasphemed the Divine Name, but demanded that a bust of himself be set up in the Holy of Holies for worship, a statue of himself for worship in Cæsarea, and busts of himself in the synagogues of Alexandria; Nero (54–68 A.D.) is referred to on coinage as “Savior of the World.”

<sup>27</sup> II Thessalonians 2:4.

<sup>28</sup> Revelation 13:1, 5, 6; 17:3.

<sup>29</sup> It should not be forgotten that the “apotheosis” of the city of Rome belongs in the same milieu: shrines to the goddess Rome had already been built in Smyrna (195 B.C.) and Pergamon (29 B.C.).

and oriental deities, and still more so by the confrontation with Jewish communities and poly-heretical and syncretistic Gnosticism.<sup>30</sup>

**39** Therefore, keeping in view—albeit in brief—this historical foundation of the Book of Revelation and the fact that St. John is addressing the Christians of Western Asia Minor, who were being oppressed and harassed on many fronts, in order to strengthen, edify, and console them, we can now easily understand why he writes to them in iconic, symbolic, and allusive terms about all that Christ the Lamb had revealed to him.

- a. As far back as the times of Nero, Christianity had been included in the list of “proscribed societies,”<sup>31</sup> and adherence to the Christian Faith constituted a penal offense.
- “The subject peoples were obligated to offer worship to the Emperor, thereby certifying their respect for the law. As long as they did this, they were able to maintain their own faith. Failure to conform to this obligation constituted a serious offense against the State and carried the death penalty.”<sup>32</sup>
- The persecutors of Christians invoked “chiefly laws against sacrilege (“atheism”; i.e., neglect of the official Roman religion, *sacrile-*

<sup>30</sup> For further details about the contents of §38.iii-vii, see Protopresbyter Ioannes G. Skiadareses, *Λειτουργικές Σκηνές και Ύμνοι στην Αποκάλυψη του Ιωάννη* [Liturgical scenes and hymns in the Apocalypse of John] (Thessalonike: Ekdoseis P. Pournara, 1999), pp. 296–341, 418–419.

• See also Stogiannes, “Αποκάλυψη και Πολιτική,” who offers a very workmanlike picture of the historical environment of the Apocalypse: he places emperor-worship, as an official state ideology, in the context of a concerted endeavor to promote the Emperor as the supreme religious and political ruler, an endeavor pursued by Domitian as a cohesive bond for the peoples of the vast Roman Empire. Thus, political activity was invested with religious terms and political ideology was transformed into theology: the pseudo-theology of the imperial cult.

<sup>31</sup> *Religio illicita* or *societates illicitae*.

<sup>32</sup> Georgios Galites, *Ιστορία Έποχής τής Καινής Διαθήκης* [History of the New Testament era] (Thessalonike: Ekdoseis P. Pournara, 1999), pp. 193–194.

*gium*) and laws against treason (*majestas*). Christians who rejected worship of the emperors were regarded as conspirators against the Roman State. Thus, ‘atheism’ turned into a charge of treason.”<sup>33</sup>

- b. Because of this, for reasons of security, Christians used a symbolic system, a coded language, so that by a number or by different symbols, images, and depictions familiar to them from the prophetic and apocalyptic tradition<sup>34</sup> they might understand particular persons, truths, and ideas. Thus, one message is “revealed” (to the initiated addressees), while at the same time it is “disguised” (for the uninitiated state authorities).
- c. Allusive formulations in general, aside from the arithmetical expression of human names, are not unknown in sacred texts, especially when they make mention of the brutishly anti-Christian Roman Empire.
- “When therefore ye see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the Prophet, standing in the holy place [standing where he should not] (let him that readeth understand), then let them

<sup>33</sup> Archimandrite Basileios K. Stephanides, *Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία* [Church history], 6th ed. (Athens: Ekdoseis Papademetriou, 1998), pp. 131–132.

• Cf. “...whereas they speak against you as evildoers” (1 St. Peter 2:12). “From this we may conclude that the first Christians were accused of being bad citizens as not obeying powers, authorities, and good laws” (Panagiotes N. Trembelas).

<sup>34</sup> On the basis of this prophetic and apocalyptic tradition, in the Johannine vision political authority, along with all of its machinery, is symbolized by “Beasts” (see Daniel 7 and 8; Revelation 13–20).

• “I, Daniel, beheld in my vision by night, and, lo, ...there came up four great beasts out of the sea, differing from one another.... These four beasts are four kingdoms that shall rise up on the earth” (Daniel 7:2–3, 17).

• “In type and image [the narrative] exhibits the kingdoms that have risen up in this world as beasts destructive of humanity” (St. Hippolytos of Rome, *Comments on Daniel*, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. x, col. 680b; see also *Βιβλιοθήκη Ἑλλήνων Πατέρων και Ἐκκλησιαστικῶν Συγγραφέων*, Vol. vi [Athens: Ekdosis tes Apostolikes Diakonias tes Ekklesias tes Hellados, 1956], p. 75, ll. 2–4).

that are in Judæa flee unto the mountains.”<sup>35</sup>

- “And now ye know that which restraineth, to the end that he [the Antichrist] may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only there is one that restraineth now, until he be taken out of the way.”<sup>36</sup>
- d. Specifically with regard to the Apocalypse, it is absolutely clear that when the Holy Apostle utters the exhortation, “let him count,” he is in no doubt whatsoever that those among his contemporaries (“He that hath understanding,” “Here is the mind that hath wisdom”)<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> St. Matthew 24:15–16 (RV).

- “The expressive term ‘abomination’ occurs in somewhat the same sense also in Revelation 17:4, 5 and 21:27. In the Old Testament, it is used specifically concerning things pertaining to the worship of idols (Deuteronomy 29:17; Ezekiel 7:20; III Kings 11:5; IV Kings 16:3). The phrase ‘abomination of desolation’ [i.e., an abomination that causes desolation] occurs twice in Daniel (11:31; 12:11; cf. also 9:27)” (Panagiotēs N. Trembelas, *Υπόμνημα εἰς τὸ κατὰ Μάρκον Εὐαγγέλιον* [Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Mark], 3rd ed. [Athens: “Ho Soter,” 1983], p. 247b).
- The parenthetical clause, “let him that readeth understand,” is supplied by the sacred authors Matthew and Mark: the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans armies is imminent; vigilance is needed....

<sup>36</sup> II Thessalonians 2:6–7 (RV).

- Regarding the variety of interpretations of “that which restraineth,” see Andreas Theodorou, “Ἡ περὶ Ἀντιχρίστου ἰδέα” [The idea of Antichrist], *Θεολογία*, Vol. XL (1970), pp. 111–112, 115, 218–220; Ioannes L. Galanes, *Ἡ Δευτέρα Ἐπιστολή τοῦ Ἀπ. Παύλου πρὸς Θεσσαλονικεῖς* [The Second Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Thessalonians] (Thessalonike: Ekdoseis P. Pournara, 1989), pp. 180ff.

<sup>37</sup> Revelation 13:18; 17:9.

- It is indisputable, from the fact that the Book of Revelation is self-interpreting only at certain points, that the seer-writer and his readers (the People [of God]) know the same linguistic code, the same means of expression of the broader apocalyptic philological kind. (See the remarks of the Angelic interpreter, one of the Elders, the author himself, or Christ: Revelation 1:20; 5:8c; 7:14; 19:8b; 21:9.)
- “The characteristic means of expression [of the Apocalypse] were comprehensible for that period and its people, whereas ever since then and to this day they are considered the main reason for the difficulty or impossibility of understanding the Apocalypse” (Evangelia Amoiridou, *Ἱστορία τῆς Ἑρμηνείας τοῦ «Ἀριθμοῦ τοῦ Θηρίου χξς» – 666* [History of the interpretation of the “Number of the Beast,”

who are judicious recipients and readers of his epistle understand without any difficulty which person is indicated by the number 666, just as they understand everything hinted at in the following citations, which, moreover, fully clarify the contents of chapter 13 and, in particular, the identity of the Antichrist:

- “Here is the mind that hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman [drunk with the blood of the Saints and Martyrs] sitteth [the seven hills of Rome]. And they are seven kings [a schematization of the Roman Empire].... The Beast that thou sawest was, and is not [and shall come], and is about to come up out of the abyss, ...and he goeth into perdition [the Roman Emperor, the archetype of anti-Christian bestiality; in the eschatological perspective, the Antichrist].<sup>38</sup>
- e. It is, therefore, evident that the Saint’s injunction, “let him count,” does not, in essence, urge one to undertake any diagnostic test whatsoever, since those who are judicious are certainly aware of the identity of the “Beast”; rather, the purpose of his exhortation is an encouraging reminder to the faithful in tribulation<sup>39</sup> and peril, as though he were saying to them:
- “Little children, we know that it is the last hour.... Do not lose heart and do not submit to the ‘Beast,’ which oppresses you and demands that you worship it as ‘Lord and God....’ Do not let his false wonders amaze you.... His ‘number’ is the ‘number of a man’ and not of a god.... He is not omnipotent.... He is not God, but only an imperfect man, with limited powers and mortal: ‘He was, and shall come, and is not, and goeth into perdition....’ The final word in history belongs to God, and not to the forces of the serpent, the author of evil, no matter how much they prevail temporarily.... Little chil-

666], Doctoral Dissertation [Thessalonike: 1998], p. 18).

<sup>38</sup> Revelation 17:9, 10, 8, 11.

<sup>39</sup> Revelation 1:9; 2:9, 10, 22; 7:14.

dren, be of good cheer; watch and pray; the Lord is near and will slay the ‘Beast’ ‘with the breath of His mouth,’ ‘and bring to nought [the Antichrist] by the manifestation of His coming.’<sup>40</sup>

f. This encouraging reminder, as an essential interpretation of the word “let him count,” is easily understood by the attentive reader of the Apocalypse, who—interpreting and viewing chapter 13 together with the other chapters of the sacred text—is astonished as he ascertains the way in which the holy visionary of Patmos consoles and upbuilds the beleaguered Church of Western Asia Minor, and also, of course, the Church of the last times; he systematically juxtaposes Christ the Savior and His Truth to that which constitutes its direct opposite or counterfeit; thus, he relativizes the bestial and anti-Christian Roman Empire and the eschatological Antichrist:<sup>41</sup>

- To the exalted Christ, Who alone is Lord of history and lives unto the ages of ages<sup>42</sup> he juxtaposes as His counterfeit and antagonist the self-deified Emperor,<sup>43</sup> who “goeth into perdition.”<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Cf. 1 St. John 2:18; Revelation 13:18; 17:8, 11; 11 Thessalonians 2:8.

<sup>41</sup> Regarding this astonishing juxtaposition, cf. Skiadareses, *Λειτουργικὲς Σκηνὲς καὶ Ὑμνοὶ*, pp. 310–311.

<sup>42</sup> Revelation 1:18. Cf. the whole of chapter 5 (the Glory of the Lamb) and abundant Christological references in the sacred text, such as: Revelation 11:17; 16:5, etc.

<sup>43</sup> See especially chapter 13.

<sup>44</sup> Revelation 17:8, 11.

• The “Beast,” the self-deified Emperor, as a counterfeit of Christ the Lamb, usurps His authority within history. The “new song” to the Lamb (Revelation 5:9–10) and the “song of Moses and of the Lamb” (Revelation 15:3–4) function as diametrical opposites of the parodic songs of the followers of the “Beast” and of the “great city” (Revelation 13:4; 18:18). Whereas the “Beast” (the Roman Emperor) “goeth into perdition” (Revelation 17:8, 11) and the “great city” (Babylon/Rome) “is fallen, is fallen,” and “in one hour is... made desolate” and “shall be found no more at all” (Revelation 18:2, 19, 21), conversely: Christ is the “Lamb that standeth on Mount Sion,” “the Alpha and the Omega,” “Who is and Who was and Who is to come, the Almighty,” the “Temple” and the “Lamp” of the “Bride,” the “Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven” (Revelation 14:1;

- To the eternal and new city of Jerusalem that descends from Heaven<sup>45</sup> he juxtaposes Babylon/Rome, which rules the world, but is doomed to destruction.<sup>46</sup>
- To the bride, Jerusalem/the Church<sup>47</sup> he juxtaposes the whore, Babylon/Rome.<sup>48</sup>
- To the deeply loving bond between Christ the Bridegroom and the Church, His Bride,<sup>49</sup> he juxtaposes the whorish relationship between the political authority<sup>50</sup> and its subjects or Babylon/Rome and the mighty of the earth.
- To the Banquet of those called to the marriage supper of Christ the Lamb,<sup>51</sup> which is filled with joy and exultation, he juxtaposes the orgy<sup>52</sup> of the worshippers of the whore Babylon/Rome.
- To the seal of the Lamb (the adoption into sonship of Christ’s elect)<sup>53</sup> he juxtaposes the mark of the Beast (the sign of ownership and fellowship of Satan’s followers).<sup>54</sup>
- To the Bridal Escort/Friend of Christ (the Holy Spirit)<sup>55</sup> he juxtaposes the second Beast/False Prophet (the pseudo-theology of the imperial cult and ideology).<sup>56</sup>
- To the unceasing and universal worship of

1:8; 21:22, 23, 9, 2, 10).

<sup>45</sup> Revelation 21:4, 9.

<sup>46</sup> Revelation 14:8; 17:1–5; 18:3, 9; 19:2.

<sup>47</sup> Revelation 19:7–9; 21:2, 9.

<sup>48</sup> Revelation 14:8; 17:1–5; 18:3, 9; 19:2.

<sup>49</sup> Revelation 19:7–9; 21:2, 9.

<sup>50</sup> Revelation 14:8; 17:2; 18:3, 9.

<sup>51</sup> Revelation 3:20; 19:9.

<sup>52</sup> Revelation 14:8; 17:2; 18:3, 9.

<sup>53</sup> Revelation 7:2, 3, 4, 5, 8; 9:4.

<sup>54</sup> Revelation 13:16, 17; 14:9; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4.

<sup>55</sup> Revelation 19:10; 22:6, 17.

<sup>56</sup> Revelation 13:11–18; 16:13; 19:20; 20:10.

• “Of these opinions [of the different commentators] the most probable is that which finds in the following paragraph [Revelation 13:11–18] allusions to the activity of the idolatrous priesthood in general, combined with the theurgy practiced among certain priests (the cult of Asclepius, etc.), especially following the deification of the secular authority (worship of the goddess Rome, emperor worship, etc.)” (Bratsiotēs, *Ἡ Ἀποκάλυψις τοῦ Ἰωάννου*, p. 213).

the Triune God<sup>57</sup> and especially of Christ the Lamb, he juxtaposes the demonic and parodic worship of the God-opposing trinity (the Dragon and the two Beasts),<sup>58</sup> etc.

**40** On the basis of all the foregoing, it is now very easy to remove the veil of “mystery” that cloaks the “number of the Beast” in such a way as to demystify the number 666, and particularly in relation to the end times.

a. Nero Cæsar (reigned 54–68 A.D.), representing the self-deified Roman Empire, was transformed in the conscience of Christians at a very early stage into an archetype of ungodly morality, an archetype of anti-Christian bestiality and blasphemy, into a symbol *par excellence* of the Antichrist:

- he had gathered together in his person a multitude of dignities (“seven heads”);
- he had collected many crowns, as an athlete, a poet, an artist, a liberator, etc. (“ten crowns”);
- he had a brutish and savage character (“the Beast from the sea”);
- he had fiercely persecuted the Christians (“war with the saints”);
- he had carried on warfare against God, calling himself “Savior of the world” (“he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God”).

b. It is very significant that in the conscience of early Christianity Nero was considered a “type” of the Antichrist.

- “‘For the mystery of iniquity doth already work.’ He speaks here of Nero, as if he were the type of the Antichrist. For he too wished to be considered a god.”<sup>59</sup>

• “Some have said that Nero was called ‘the mystery of iniquity,’ and had become a worker of impiety.”<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Revelation 4:8–11; 5:6–14.

<sup>58</sup> Revelation 13:4, 8, 12, 15; 14:9, 11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4 (the Satanic trinity, 16:13).

<sup>59</sup> St. John Chrysostomos, “Homily IV on II Thessalonians,” §1, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LXII, col. 485.

<sup>60</sup> Theodoretos of Cyrros, *Commentary on II Thessalonians*,

- “‘The mystery of iniquity.’ He speaks of Nero as being a type of the Antichrist. For Nero was indeed immoral and sought to be called a god. He says that Nero is the ‘mystery’ because Nero did not do shamelessly the kind of things that the Antichrist will do. But for now, he says, he is working quietly, that is, under the influence of Satan. For Satan brought about through Nero whatever he pleased.”<sup>61</sup>

- “He speaks in this way of Nero, who was a type of the Antichrist. For Nero was indeed depraved and sought to be called God. Rightly does he say ‘the mystery.’ For Nero does not advance openly against every god, as he will, nor without shame. What he is saying is something like this. Before the time of the Antichrist comes, another has been found who is not inferior to him. Therefore, what surprise is it if the Antichrist is already here? He is speaking in a veiled way about Nero.”<sup>62</sup>

- “[He calls here] Emperor Nero ‘the mystery of iniquity’ on the ground that Nero was doing secretly and in a veiled way what he [the Antichrist] will do. For he was more depraved and more iniquitous than the emperors who preceded him, and wanted to be a god, albeit not openly, like the Antichrist, but in a more secret and concealed manner. Nero, therefore, is a type of the Antichrist and a mystical and shadowy image of him: the Devil ‘works’ through him, carrying him this way and that, and the Devil will work [likewise] through the Antichrist.”<sup>63</sup>

- c. “Nero Cæsar,” expressed in Hebrew letters<sup>64</sup>—without the vowels, of course—and

*Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LXXXII, col. 665B.

<sup>61</sup> Oikoumenios, *Commentary on II Thessalonians*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CXIX, cols. 120D–121A.

<sup>62</sup> St. Theophylact of Ohrid, *Commentary on II Thessalonians*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CXXIV, col. 1341C.

<sup>63</sup> Euthymios Zigabenos, *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἸΔ’ Ἐπιστολάς τοῦ Ἀποστόλου Παύλου* [Commentary on the fourteen epistles of the Apostle Paul], ed. Nikephoros Kalogeras (Athens: Typois Adelfon Perre, 1887), Vol. II, p. 201.

<sup>64</sup> In that era, it was not at all unusual for Greek words to

“counted,” yields the “number of the Beast”:  
נרון קסר = 666.<sup>65</sup>

- It is worth noting that the word “θηρίον,” when “counted,” also yields the “number of the Beast”: תריון = 666.<sup>66</sup>
- d. Every Roman emperor, such as Domitian (reigned 81–96 A.D.) in the time of St. John—the time when the Apocalypse was written<sup>67</sup>—was a replica of “Nero Cæsar,” that is, a “Beast,” whose number was 666.
- “Domitian, having displayed great cruelty towards many people, ...ended up becoming a successor of Nero in his enmity towards, and warfare against, God.”<sup>68</sup>
- e. Consequently, every reference on the part of the beleaguered Christians to the person of the Roman emperor, and thus also to Domitian, when it was negative in nature, had to be couched in allusive terms through “his number, 666.”

**41** It is necessary, in connection with what we have previously said, to clarify the following two issues, in order to draw sure and final conclusions:

- a. In Holy Scripture, it is common for elements of the historical past (persons, peoples, cities, countries)<sup>69</sup> to be taken and transformed into positive or negative archetypes (or types of attitudes towards God and His People). At

be written in Hebrew letters.

<sup>65</sup> ק [=100] + ס [=60] + ר [=200] + נ [=50] + ר [=200] + י [=6] + י [=2=50] = 666.

<sup>66</sup> ת [=400] + ר [=200] + י [=10] + י [=6] + י [=2=50] = 666.

<sup>67</sup> St. John wrote the Apocalypse “towards the end of Domitian’s reign” (St. Irenæus of Lyons, *Scrutiny and Refutation of Knowledge Falsely So-Called (Against Heresies)*, Bk. v, ch. 30, §3, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. vii(B), col. 1207A).

<sup>68</sup> Eusebios, *Church History*, Bk. iii, ch. 17, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xx, col. 249BC.

<sup>69</sup> Peoples (Gog and Magog); cities (Sodom and Gomorrha, Babylon); a country (Egypt). For example: “[I]f the Lord Sabaoth had not left us a seed, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been made like Gomorrha” (Isaiah 1:9); “[I]n the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen horrible things.... They are all become to Me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrha” (Jeremiah 23:14).

the “reincarnation” of archetypes in history, the full traits of their historical identity are not repeated; rather, the antitype of a given prototype or archetype is repeated, in a certain way, only “in spirit and power.”

- A characteristic example:

The Holy Prophet Elias the Thesbite is the archetype of the Prophet and Forerunner of Christ: according to the Prophet Malachi, Elias would be sent before the Messiah, “before the great and glorious Day of the Lord cometh.”<sup>70</sup> The Lord assured us that “this is Elias,” “Elias is come already”<sup>71</sup> in the person of John the Baptist, “whom Christ called ‘Elias,’ not because he was Elias, but because he was fulfilling his ministry.”<sup>72</sup> According to the prophecy of the Holy Archangel Gabriel, the Baptist would go before Christ “in the spirit and power of Elias”:<sup>73</sup> “He called the spiritual gift spirit and the activity power.”<sup>74</sup>

- b. The Antichrist that is awaited in the end times will bear the primary traits of Nero Cæsar, that is, blasphemous self-deification and anti-Christian bestiality, but he is certainly not identical with him, and still less in name, and it will not be necessary for Christians who are contemporary with him to refer to him cryptically or by way of *Gematria*, nor will they have to undertake diagnostic tests, since—according to the Divine Paul—his “appearance,” his “coming,” will cause a sensation, “after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders.”<sup>75</sup>
- The use of coded language was imperative at that time, St. John’s time, for purely his-

<sup>70</sup> Malachi 4:5.

<sup>71</sup> St. Matthew 11:14; 17:12.

<sup>72</sup> St. John Chrysostomos, “Homily LVII on St. Matthew,” §1, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LVIII, col. 558.

• “He said this because he [John] had fulfilled the ministry of Elias” (St. Hesychios the Presbyter, *Questions and Solutions*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xciii, col. 1396A).

<sup>73</sup> St. Luke 1:17.

<sup>74</sup> Euthymios Zigabenos, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. cxxix, col. 864c.

<sup>75</sup> II Thessalonians 2:3, 6, 8, 9.

torical necessities; that is, it was an element of the historical environment and context of the Apocalypse, and certainly not an intrinsic and essential element of its prophecy. It belongs to “the things which are” (the era of Domitian) and not to “the things which shall [which must] come to pass hereafter” (the end times).<sup>76</sup>

**42** Consequently:

- a.** The number 666, in the times of the sacred author of the Apocalypse, functioned in a purely historical and circumstantial manner: it alluded to Nero Cæsar who, as an archetype of blasphemous self-deification and anti-Christian bestiality, was identified, not by name, but “in spirit and power” with the “Beast” of that time, that is, the God-fighting and cruel persecutor Domitian.
- b.** In this sense, the following two phrases in the Book of Revelation apply to all of the “Beasts” throughout history, in whom “Nero Cæsar” was in some way embodied (Hitler, Lenin, Stalin, Hoxha):

the first: “he was, and is not, and shall come, and goeth into perdition”<sup>77</sup> (at that time it was Nero; he no longer exists now; his embodiment is present; but he, too, will perish); the second: “and his number is Six hundred and sixty and six”<sup>78</sup> (he, too, is a “Nero,” a transitory man, do not be afraid).

- c.** During the brief period of the universal dominion<sup>79</sup> of the final “Beast”: the identity of the Antichrist and his name will be obvious and self-evident; the faithful will have no need of cryptic numbers to refer to the Antichrist; owing to the critical times, the important thing will not be arithmetical calculations, but
- firstly: a profound and confident conviction that the domination of the “Beast” is temporary;
  - secondly: constant vigilance to preserve the “seal of the Lamb” (communion with Christ); and
  - thirdly: martyric resistance to the “mark of his [the Beast’s] name” (fellowship with the Devil).



“Here is the patience of the saints, they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.”

(Revelation 14:12)

“Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments.”

(Revelation 16:15)

<sup>76</sup> Revelation 1:19; 4:1.

<sup>77</sup> Revelation 17:8.

<sup>78</sup> Revelation 13:18.

<sup>79</sup> Revelation 3:10.



■ **C9. The Number 666 Is Not, and Does Not Function as, a “Preliminary Mark”**

**43** On the basis of all the aforesaid, we are led naturally to the conclusion that the number 666 cannot today, prior to the coming of the Antichrist, be considered, or function as, a “preliminary mark,” and still less as one perceptible and equivalent to the eschatological “mark,” a position which is confirmed by the following even stronger arguments.

- a. There is absolutely no evidence in Holy Tradition that would provide any basis for this utterly newfangled theory concerning the number 666 as an allegedly perceptible, external, and very effective “pre-eschatological mark.” This is completely unknown to Holy Scripture or the Divine Fathers.
- The only passage that can be adduced in support of this newfangled theory concerning the putative “pre-eschatological mark” comes from a homily on eschatology by St. Ephraim the Syrian (306–373).<sup>1</sup> This passage, on the one hand, does not constitute a secure basis for far-reaching conclusions<sup>2</sup> and, on the

other hand, is patently misinterpreted or “wrested,” since:

- The passage is unclear, almost “out of place” within the entire discourse, owing evidently to its translation from a Syriac original;<sup>3</sup>
- the passage is not a commentary [on the Apocalypse], just as, indeed, the whole discourse more generally is not a commentary either;
- the discourse is, in literary terms, a highly charged and dramatic text, a “devout poetic meditation”—a typical phenomenon in the literary oeuvre of St. Ephraim;<sup>4</sup>
- the discourse unfolds within the eschatological framework of the symbolic three and a half years of the maleficent activity of the “Beast,” and consequently the contents of the passage at issue are situated hermeneutically in the same temporal framework;
- one way or another, the “seal” should not be understood literally, but symbolically, since it denotes ownership, relationship, participation, and communion.

- b. If it is supposed that the number 666 would be applied as a perceptible and visible “pre-eschatological mark,” then there would have to exist a historical and particular “pre-Antichrist,” who would impose it by means of a specific procedure, to indicate a preliminary ownership by Satan and fellowship with him. Holy Tradition, however, is completely unaware of such a “pre-Antichrist.”
- If a historical “pre-Antichrist” and a “preliminary mark” did exist, there would have to be, at the same time, a historical and particular intervention by God in order to apply the Name of the Lamb “and the Name of His Father”<sup>5</sup> as a perceptible and external

<sup>1</sup> St. Ephraim the Syrian, “Discourse on the Second Coming of the Lord, on the End of the World, and on the Coming of the Antichrist,” in *Ἔργα τοῦ Σύρου* [Works of St. Ephraim the Syrian], ed. Konstantinos G. Phrantzolas, Vol. IV, 1st ed. (Thessalonike: Ekdoseis “To Periboli tes Panagias,” 1992), pp. 111–128.

• The passage at issue (pp. 116–117):

“The tyrant is preparing such a means, in order that all might bear the seal of the Beast, when he comes to deceive all things, in his own time, with signs, in the fullness of time.”

<sup>2</sup> We are, of course, familiar with a large number of Greek texts which are, or are presented as, translations of works by St. Ephraim from the original Syriac, but we should at least be cautious about coming to final hermeneutical conclusions when we take into consideration that the majority of Greek works by St. Ephraim “are clearly spurious, while others are adaptations (and manifold, at that), paraphrases, compilations, and arbitrary combinations of Ephraimite and Greek texts,” and that among “the agglomerations of varying length of genuine and spurious works of Ephraim” are reckoned “three discourses on the Second Coming” (Stylianos G. Papadopoulos, *Πατρολογία* [Patrology], Vol. II [Athens: 1990], pp. 332–333, 339).

<sup>3</sup> St. Ephraim was, *inter alia*, a great poet, and the bulk of his oeuvre, homilies and hymns, are in poetic, rhythmic, and strophic language.

<sup>4</sup> See the preceding note.

<sup>5</sup> Revelation 14:1; cf. 3:12; 22:4.

“pre-seal” of His servants “on their foreheads.”<sup>6</sup> Holy Scripture is, likewise, wholly unaware of this, and we do not, at least in our contemporary historical milieu, detect any such thing.

- It is very significant that our Lord, when speaking of all that will precede the final Apostasy and concluding His words, “behold, I have foretold you all things,”<sup>7</sup> not only did not include in “all things” even one single reference to any perceptible and visible “preliminary mark” or to any “pre-Antichrist,” but on the contrary directs the attention of His Disciples to the “many” precursors of the Antichrist who “shall come in My Name” and “shall deceive many,”<sup>8</sup> that is, will not “impose a preliminary mark” on them.
- Besides, St. John the Theologian, too, who is preëminently qualified to provide us with reliable information about eschatological signs, while drawing it very emphatically to our attention that “it is the last hour” and that “there have arisen many antichrists,”<sup>9</sup> and while enumerating for us the distinguishing characteristics of the perennial Antichrist, that is, the precursors of the Antichrist,<sup>10</sup> does not mention at all, or even hint at, any “preliminary mark” as a visible tool of the “Deceiver”<sup>11</sup> and “Liar”<sup>12</sup> *par excellence* or his precursory “seducers”<sup>13</sup> and “liars.”<sup>14</sup>
- Holy Tradition has never spoken about an historical and particular “pre-eschatological mark”; it has never brandished the fear of a “preliminary mark,” and still less one identified with the number 666; it has never prepared us for an historical and particular “pre-Antichrist.” On the contrary, it has always

assured us that:

→ “Even now have there arisen many antichrists’: He is speaking of Cerinthos and those like him [Gnostics], ...the many antichrists who pave the way for the one”; “These things have I written unto you concerning them that would lead you astray’: That is, on account of the heresies that had come forth [and deluged them]”; “[A]nd even now already is it [the Antichrist] in the world’: He says that the Antichrist is already in the world, not bodily, but through the false prophets, false teachers, and heretics who pave the way for his coming.”<sup>15</sup>

→ “Even now have there arisen many antichrists’: For the Antichrist, he says, will come at the end of the world; but behold, he has already appeared in the world; for heresies, which are his friends and sisters, have preceded him. Each of them, both the heretics and the son of perdition, likewise blaspheme against Christ”; “These things have I written unto you concerning them that would lead you astray’: I have gone through all of these thoughts on account of the heresies that have come forth”; “[A]nd even now already is it [the Antichrist] in the world’: For heresies have preceded him. The Manichæans and the Paulicians who have now recently appeared pave the way for him by proclaiming him to be God.”<sup>16</sup>

→ “Many antichrists have appeared, all of whom are forerunners and harbingers of the one who in and of himself and properly is, and is called, the Antichrist.... According to Metrophanes, St. John calls antichrists Simon and those in his circle, Menander, Saturnilus, Basilides, Carpocrates, Cerinthos, and Nicholas, the impious heresiarchs.... He saw that the aforementioned heresiarchs took on the personality of him who is the Antichrist

<sup>6</sup> Revelation 7:3; 9:4; 14:1.

<sup>7</sup> St. Mark 13:23.

<sup>8</sup> St. Mark 13:6.

<sup>9</sup> I St. John 2:18.

<sup>10</sup> I St. John 2:22; 4:3; II St. John 7.

<sup>11</sup> II St. John 7.

<sup>12</sup> I St. John 2:22.

<sup>13</sup> I St. John 2:26.

<sup>14</sup> I St. John 2:22.

<sup>15</sup> Oikoumenios, *Commentary on I St. John, Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CXIX, cols. 641B, 645B, 661D.

<sup>16</sup> Euthymios Zigabenos, *Ἐρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἸΔ' Ἐπιστολάς τοῦ Ἀποστόλου Παύλου*, Vol. II, pp. 605, 607, 620.

*per se*, and while in appearance they were not considered the Antichrist, yet they held and championed all of the loathsome doctrines of the Antichrist.”<sup>17</sup>

→ “How is it that the Antichrist is now in the world? Theophylact, Metrophanes, and Oikoumenios reply that he is in the world now, not he himself bodily, but through the precursors of his coming, who are the afore-said false prophets, false apostles, and heretics. He will come near the last time before the end of the world, as the Blessed Paul says. He appears even now, stalking through the world by means of the deception and activity of Satan, which works in the sons of disobedience; for the same Satan who is going to work through the actual Antichrist in order to lead the world astray even now effects various blasphemous heresies in the person of heretics in order to deceive the inattentive.”<sup>18</sup>

c. Patristic Tradition acknowledges one and only one preliminary mark as a perennial sign of the Antichrist: the “mystery of iniquity” that has always been at work and its cognate marks of polymorphous sin and error, which we receive by our own free choice from wicked and unclean spirits in our hearts and which lead us gradually to become antichrists and bring us into full and decisive eschatological fellowship with the Satanic trinity: the Dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet.<sup>19</sup>

- “[B]lot out the letters, or rather the marks, which the Devil has imprinted on your soul.”<sup>20</sup>
- “From the passions that lie hidden in the soul the demons take the opportunity to arouse passionate thoughts in us. Thereafter, warring

against our mind [νοῦς] through these they compel it to consent to sin. Once the mind has been overcome, they induce it to sin in the intellect [διάνοια]. When this has been accomplished, they lead it captive into carrying out the sin. After this, then, those who have devastated the soul through thoughts withdraw with them. There remains in the soul only the idol of sin, about which the Lord says: ‘When therefore ye see the abomination of desolation...standing in the holy place (let him that readeth understand).’ For the mind of man is a holy place and temple of God, in which the demons, having laid waste the soul through passionate thoughts, set up the idol of sin.”<sup>21</sup>

- “For the law of the flesh differs in no way from the Antichrist, always striving against the spirit and opposing its Divine law, until the present life becomes dear and pleasant to those who have been overcome by it.”<sup>22</sup>
- “Although the ‘man of sin,’ the ‘son of iniquity,’ by which I mean the Antichrist, has not yet come, the Theologian beloved of Christ says, ‘Even now, beloved, there is the Antichrist.’... The great Paul teaches us quite clearly that the Antichrist is among us, even though he has not yet come, saying, ‘His mystery doth already work in us.’”<sup>23</sup>
- “This statement of the Theologian, that the Antichrist ‘even now already is...in the world,’ is identical to what St. Paul says about the Antichrist: ‘[T]he mystery of iniquity doth already work.’ ...The mystery of the coming of the Antichrist was at work in those heretics of old, who appeared in the times of the Holy Apostles, and is at work even now in to-

<sup>17</sup> St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite, *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς Ἐπτὰ Καθολικὰς Ἐπιστολάς* [Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles], 3rd ed. (Thessalonike: Ekdoseis “Orthodoxos Kypsele, 1986), pp. 495, 496.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 563; cf. Ephesians 2:2.

<sup>19</sup> Revelation 16:13.

<sup>20</sup> St. John Chrysostomos, “Homily xi on St. Matthew,” §7, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LVII, col. 200.

<sup>21</sup> St. Maximos the Confessor, “Second Century of Texts on Love,” §31, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 993c; St. Matthew 24:15.

<sup>22</sup> *Idem*, *Concerning Various Difficult Passages of Sts. Dionysios and Gregory, to Thomas the Sanctified [Ambigua]*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xci, col. 1132c.

<sup>23</sup> St. Gregory Palamas, “Homily xi, ‘On the Precious and Life-Giving Cross,’” *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. cli, col. 125c. Cf. 11 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 St. John 2:18; 11 Thessalonians 2:7.

day’s heretics, the atheists, the mortalists, the materialists, the mechanists, and the various others who espouse many different kinds of impiety.”<sup>24</sup>

d. Likewise, our Ecclesiastical Tradition acknowledges one and only one preliminary seal as a perennial sign of Christ: the imperceptible, invisible Seal of Christ the Lamb, through which we are vouchsafed the salvific blessing of having communion with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and thereby becoming Priests, Prophets, and Kings.

- “The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.”<sup>25</sup>
- “God is faithful, by Whom ye were called unto the communion of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”<sup>26</sup>
- “[A]nd our communion is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.”<sup>27</sup>
- “Now He that establisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God, Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.”<sup>28</sup>
- “Consider how he very clearly signifies the Holy Trinity: for it is the Father Who confirms us in Christ,” that is, “He Who does not allow us to be shaken from the faith which is in Christ,” “He Who has anointed us through the Holy Spirit,” “Who has sealed us by Divine Baptism; for this is a seal of the new People”; “the Father anoints and seals through the Holy Spirit. For these, the unction and the seal, are a pledge of the Comforter”; “and given the earnest of the Spirit,” that is, the gifts of the Spirit”; “and now

we are anointed, so that we might become Kings, ruling over the passions; Priests, offering our own bodies in sacrifice”; “and to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice well-pleasing to God”; “and Prophets, being taught the great mysteries”; hence, “we have now not one dignity, but the three dignities preëminently.”<sup>29</sup>

- “God has made all Christians Prophets, Kings, and Priests, though not in the special sense in which we speak of Prophecy, Kingship, and Priesthood, for in this sense only those who receive the Anointing and the Grace of Prophecy, Kingship, and Priesthood are Prophets, Kings, and Priests; but in the sense in which Prophecy, Kingship, and Priesthood are more commonly and generally understood. For thus is it written in the Apocalypse: ‘[A]nd He made us to be a Kingdom, to be Priests unto His God and Father; and again: ‘and [Thou] madest them to be unto our God Kings and Priests, and they shall reign upon earth.’”<sup>30</sup>
- “‘The light of Thy countenance is signed upon us, O Lord’: a sign, he says, of the light of Thy countenance has come to us and been imprinted on us, and this light of Thy countenance has been engraved in such a way that one who knows how to see the sign of the light of God that has been signed on us might immediately understand that this has come about for us.... Those who participate thus in the light and can say in reality, ‘The light of Thy countenance is signed upon us, O Lord’—since it [this light] is a

<sup>24</sup> St. Nicodemos, *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς Ἑπτὰ Καθολικὰς Ἐπιστολάς*, p. 263. Mortalism is the doctrine that the soul perishes with the body at death; mechanism is a philosophy which rejects Divine governance and posits that the universe operates mechanically and by wholly natural processes—TRANS.

<sup>25</sup> II Corinthians 13:14.

<sup>26</sup> I Corinthians 1:9.

<sup>27</sup> I St. John 1:3.

<sup>28</sup> II Corinthians 1:21–22.

<sup>29</sup> St. John Chrysostomos, “Homily III on II Corinthians,” §4, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LXI, col. 411; Oikoumenios, *Commentary on II Corinthians*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CXVIII, col. 932CD; Euthymios Zigabenos, *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἸΔ' Ἐπιστολάς τοῦ Ἀποστόλου Παύλου*, Vol. II, p. 382.

<sup>30</sup> St. Nicodemos, *Αἱ ἸΔ' Ἐπιστολαὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἐνδόξου Ἀποστόλου Παύλου Ἑρμηνευθεῖσαι μὲν ἑλληνοιστὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ Μακαρίου Θεοφυλάκτου Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Βουλγαρίας* [The Fourteen Epistles of the Holy and Glorious Apostle Paul, Interpreted by Blessed Theophylact, Archbishop of Bulgaria], 3rd ed. (Thessalonike: Ekdoseis “Orthodoxos Kypsele, 1990), Vol. II, pp. 36–37 n. 26.

• Revelation 1:6; 5:10; cf. Revelation 20:6; I St. Peter 2:5, 9.

cause of those who need such remedies suffering nothing in the time of torment—have the light of which they partake.... Now, what is the sign given by God to the devout, or what is the sign given on the foreheads of the zealots for the truth, who sigh over the transgressions committed among the people, if not the communion of Divinity that comes to those who have a sound understanding thereof?”<sup>31</sup>

- “The light of Thy countenance is signed upon us, O Lord’: He [David] did not say, ‘hath appeared’; he did not say, ‘hath shone’; rather, he said, ‘is signed,’ indicating that just as what is signed on the forehead is manifest to all, and it is not possible for anyone not to notice it, neither can one be unaware of a face replete and resplendent with light and emitting rays; so also, he says, neither can one fail to be aware of Thy providence. For, just as light that is signed, that is, imprinted and engraved, on a face is plain to all; so also is the providence of Thy love for mankind. For by ‘light,’ here, he means help, solicitude, assistance, and providence.”<sup>32</sup>
- “The light of Thy countenance is signed upon us, O Lord’: In more abstruse and mystical terms, the Son is [understood to be] the countenance of God the Father, and the light is the Spirit sent forth from Him to us, through Whom we are sealed, refashioned in the original image.... Now, what is the countenance of God the Father, the light of which is signed upon us? The Son of God, His exact image, and because of this He says, ‘He who hath seen Me hath seen My Father.’ He has been signed upon us, showing us to be conformed to Himself, and engraving the illumination through His own Spirit as a Divine image on those who believe in Him.”<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Psalms, Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XII, cols. 1164CD, 1165AB, 1165C. Psalm 4:7.

<sup>32</sup> St. John Chrysostomos, “Exposition of Psalm 4,” §9, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LV, col. 54.

<sup>33</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Psalms, Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LXIX, col. 740BC. St. John 14:9.

- “The light of Thy countenance is signed upon us, O Lord’: ...The succor of Thy providential care has been signed upon me; for this is how ‘light’ should be understood, as dispelling the darkness of despondency, and as being engraved, it has made me familiar to those afar off. Some say that this verse is prophetic of Christians, upon whom Christ, Who is the Light of the Father, has been signed, that is, placed as a mark, since they are called Christians. The Prophet joins himself to them on account of their kinship and affinity in the virtues.”<sup>34</sup>
- “Learn, brethren, what is the true imprint of the seal of Christ.... The illumination of the Spirit is truly a single seal.... All, therefore, who are without this seal, run hither; all who lack this sign, make haste to be signed with the sign of the Spirit.”<sup>35</sup>

#### 44 Consequently:

- a. It is futile to search, prior to the “appearance” and “coming”<sup>36</sup> of the Antichrist, for a special and particular external “preliminary mark,” which would, supposedly, be perceptible and visible and identical to the number 666.
- b. The “mark” is, and is identical throughout history with, the “mystery of iniquity,”<sup>37</sup> that is, with the corrosive activity of the wicked and unclean spirits, by means of which a man’s heart is enslaved to sin and alienated from Christ the Lamb.
- c. This activity of the Devil that prepares the

<sup>34</sup> Euthymios Zigabenos, *Commentary on the Psalter, Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CXXVIII, cols. 96D–97A.

• Noteworthy, here, is the way in which the “mark” (the seal of Christ) transcends time: the Holy Prophet aligned himself with the Christians, since the Grace of Christ, the Light of the Father, had been “pre-signed/engraved” in his heart.

<sup>35</sup> St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Catecheses*, Discourse II, “Ἐργα,” Vol. I, pp. 37, 32–33.

<sup>36</sup> II Thessalonians 2:3, 6, 8, 9.

<sup>37</sup> II Thessalonians 2:7.

way for the Antichrist<sup>38</sup> has always been going on (see the Beginning: the primordial drama of Paradise<sup>39</sup>/the serpent, or Satan: “[T]hrough envy of the Devil came death into the world”<sup>40</sup>); and will come to a head (see the End: the eschatological cleansing of history<sup>41</sup>/the Beast, or Satan: “And the Devil...was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone...for ever and ever”<sup>42</sup>).

d. Satan, who labors methodically to make men antichrists, has no need of perceptible and visible signs in order to achieve domination—“[H]e quietly introduces worship of himself”<sup>43</sup>—so as to “[find] them instructed beforehand in his ways, and [to] recognize himself as already formed in them.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, “when he comes after these things, finding them made ready and mankind led astray and without God’s help, it will be easy for him to achieve his desire.”<sup>45</sup>



“But it is not so among the Saints, or rather not even among us sinners, who vehemently despise it [the scheming of the demons]. For even if our life is unbearable, yet, because by God’s Grace we cleave with much assiduity to the doctrines of the truth, we are above the scheming of the demons.”

(St. John Chrysostomos, “Homily LXX on St. Matthew,” §4,  
*Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LVIII, col. 691)

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<sup>38</sup> Revelation 12:9; 20:2: “The great Dragon..., that ancient Serpent, he that is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the world.”

<sup>39</sup> Genesis 3.

<sup>40</sup> Wisdom of Solomon 2:24.

<sup>41</sup> The eschatological war: Revelation 16:14–16; 14:19–20; 17:14–16; 19:11–21; 20:7–10; Ezekiel 38–39; Zacharias 14; Joel 3.

<sup>42</sup> Revelation 20:10.

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<sup>43</sup> A sentence from one of the *Catena* on the New Testament.

<sup>44</sup> St. Athanasios the Great, *History of the Arians*, §78, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xxv, col. 789A.

<sup>45</sup> A sentence from one of the *Catena* on the New Testament.

■ C10. A Message of Edification, Consolation, and Hope

**45** The Book of Revelation, when approached hermeneutically by means of the presuppositions of Christocentric and Church-centered Orthodox spirituality, can be understood as a unique and astounding message of edification and consolation, based on hope and blessed expectation of our Bridegroom Christ Who is to come. In no case whatsoever is it to be understood as a text characterized by eschatological anxiety, fear of the “Beast,” and fear of his “mark,” since its “good tidings” are preëminently Theocentric and Christological, and not centered on the Devil and the Antichrist.

- The attention of the pious reader of the Apocalypse is not drawn primarily to chapter 13, but to chapters 4 and 5, which constitute literally “the theological center of the book,”<sup>1</sup> and especially the “New Song,”<sup>2</sup> which is sung by “the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders” and which forms “the Christological center *par excellence*”<sup>3</sup> of the sacred text:

Worthy art Thou / to take the book, /  
and to open the seals thereof, /  
for Thou wast slain, / and didst purchase  
unto God with Thy blood /  
men of every tribe and tongue, /  
and people and nation, /  
and madest them to be unto our God /  
a Kingdom and Priests; /  
and they shall reign upon earth.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Chapters 4 and 5 “constitute the most fundamental section of the work, which is justifiably characterized as the theological center of the book. This section is the starting point and the end point not only for the major themes that form its backbone, but also for noteworthy small details which undergird the Apocalypse as a whole” (Skiadareses, *Λειτουργικὲς Σκηνὲς καὶ ὕμνοι*, p. 104).

<sup>2</sup> Revelation 5:9–10.

<sup>3</sup> Skiadareses, *Λειτουργικὲς Σκηνὲς καὶ ὕμνοι*, p. 154.

<sup>4</sup> Revelation 5:9–10.

- The Christological and ecclesiological nature of the song is very clear: Christ the Lamb is the Creator of the New People and Nation, that is, His Church; the New Israel—the Priestly and Royal People—is the heir of God’s Covenant; the People of the New Covenant form a multiethnic, mul-

**46** Pious Christians are not influenced by various newfangled theories concerning “marks” and “preliminary marks,” nor are they in the grip of any “fear of numbers,” since, living as they do the Hesychastic and Eucharistic ethos of the Church, they preserve and constantly renew the Baptismal “Seal of Grace,” which functions preternaturally as their “seal, safeguard, and illumination.”

a. “Now, indeed, we receive the firstfruits of the Holy Spirit through Baptism, and this regeneration becomes the beginning of another life for us, its seal, safeguard, and illumination.”<sup>5</sup>

b. “May we preserve indwelling in our soul the Communion of the Holy Spirit and the Seal of Holy Chrism, which we received when we were baptized and became the Lord’s anointed. For if we guard this through the observance of the life-giving commandments, it will protect us in return from all harm of visible and invisible enemies. And just as the sheep that are sealed are not easily ensnared by perceptible wolves, so also if we Christians, the sheep of Christ the Chief Shepherd, preserve safe and whole in our soul the Seal of Grace that we received through Holy Chrism at our Baptism, we will not be ensnared by those noetic wolves, the demons—as St. Gregory the Theologian says, ‘a sheep that is sealed is not easily ensnared’<sup>6</sup>—but will be encompassed by the almighty right hand of the Most High and protected by the Holy Angels.”<sup>7</sup>

c. “If you wish to defeat the Devil, you can do so with this Blood [of our Master Jesus Christ].

tiracial, and multilingual Community, which belongs, as Bride, exclusively to the Bridegroom Christ and certainly not to the Beast (the self-deified Emperor—the Antichrist).

<sup>5</sup> St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Bk. iv, ch. 9, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. xciv, col. 1121c.

<sup>6</sup> “Oration xl, ‘On Holy Baptism,’” §15, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. xxxvi, col. 377b.

<sup>7</sup> St. Nicodemos, *Ἐορτοδρόμιον*, pp. 177–178.

As it is written in the Apocalypse: ‘And they [the Saints] overcame him [the Dragon] because of the blood of the Lamb.’... If you desire to enjoy the aforementioned Divine charisms—that your soul be enlivened, that your heart be made resplendent, that your mind be illumined, and that you receive purification of your pardonable sins—and yet other ineffable and incomprehensible gifts, approach the Immaculate Mysteries frequently and commune. However, be careful to commune with due preparation: that is, through Confession, through fasting as much as possible, through abstinence, through prayer, through attentiveness, with contrition of heart, and with a clear conscience...; for according to the preparation that you make you will be given the Grace that comes from Communion. There are two things, therefore, that you should do: you should commune frequently and commune worthily, to the best of your ability.”<sup>8</sup>

**47** Orthodox Christians who care about preserving the “Seal of Grace” do not ever forget that they are “sheep sealed” by our Chief Shepherd, Christ, Who is the “Good Shepherd”: “He first loved us,” He “knoweth” His sheep, and “calletH” them “by name”; He is concerned about the safety of His “property,” “seals” it, and “sacrifices Himself” for it.

- a. “I am the Good Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine...: and I lay down My life for the sheep”; “the sheep hear His voice, and He calleth His own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. ...[A]nd the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice” and “they know not the voice of strangers.”<sup>9</sup>
- b. “We love Him, because He first loved us”; “[a]nd we have known and believed the love that God hath for us.”<sup>10</sup>
- c. “For He did not say, ‘My sheep know Me

and I know Mine,’ but introduces Himself as knowing His own sheep first, and then afterwards He says that He will be known by them”; “We did not know Him first, but He knew us first.... It is not we who initiated this state of things, but the Only-Begotten God from God; for we did not lay hold of the Godhead that is beyond [our] nature, but He Himself, Who is by nature God, took on Him the seed of Abraham and became man, in order that, being made like unto His brethren in all respects, save sin, He might receive into kinship him who of himself did not have this [privilege], that is, man.”<sup>11</sup>

- d. “I know My sheep, and am known of Mine. As the Father knoweth Me, even so know I the Father’: This means: ‘I shall be united with My sheep, and My sheep shall be united with Me, according to the manner in which the Father is united with Me, and again I also am united with the Father’”; “for I think that in these words He means by ‘knowledge’ [γνώσις] not simply intellectual knowledge [εἰδησις], but rather understands it in the sense of unity [οἰκειότης], either by kinship and nature, or as it were by participation in Grace and honor.... And that the Divine Scripture, too, understands unity [οἰκειότης] as knowledge [γνώσις], we shall perceive from what follows. For Christ somewhere says concerning those who were in no way united with Him: ‘Verily, I say unto you, I never knew you’.... As though He says: ‘I do not know you to have been lovers of virtue, or to have honored My word, or to have joined yourselves to Me through good deeds.’”<sup>12</sup>
- e. “Notice that He first knows us and then we Him, and that it is not possible to know God in any other way than if we are known by

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17. Revelation 12:11.

<sup>9</sup> St. John 10:3, 4, 5, 14, 15.

<sup>10</sup> 1 St. John 4:19, 16.

<sup>11</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, Bk. VI, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LXXIII, col. 1048BCD.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 1045A, 1044CD. In this context, γνώσις denotes spiritual knowledge as opposed to merely intellectual knowledge (εἰδησις)—TRANS.



Him. For He was first united with us in the flesh, when He became man; thereafter we were united with Him, having received the gift of deification by Grace.”<sup>13</sup>

- f.** “For this, too, is a hallmark of the shepherd, that he shows extreme concern for each sheep. For he would not call them by name if he did not know each one precisely, out of his extreme concern for each one.”<sup>14</sup>
- g.** “[He] so loves [us] that the hairs of our head are numbered, as He says in the Gospels: not that God numbers hairs, but in order to indicate His precise knowledge of and great providence for us.”<sup>15</sup>
- h.** “But if you would fortify yourself beforehand with the Seal, and secure yourself for the future with the finest and firmest of resources, being signed both in body and in soul with the Chrism and the Spirit, as Israel was of old with that blood that protected the first-born by night, what then will happen to you, and what has been accomplished for you? Listen to Proverbs: ‘For if thou sittest, thou shalt be unafraid; and if thou sleepest, thou shalt slumber sweetly.’ And listen to David giving you the glad tidings: ‘Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night...nor for the mishap and demon of noonday.’ This, even while you live, will be greatly conducive to your security; for a sheep that is sealed is not easily ensnared, whereas one which is unmarked is easy prey for thieves.”<sup>16</sup>
- i.** “Therefore, when [Sts. Symeon and John] had formed their plan [to leave the monastery and go out into the desert], as soon as night fell, the Abbot saw in his sleep someone opening the door of the monastery and saying: ‘Go forth, sealed sheep of Christ, into

your pasturage.”<sup>17</sup>

- j.** “The Lord knoweth them that are His’: Those who are His own, even though they are unknown to men.”<sup>18</sup>
- k.** “For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand’: His people, as of a King, His sheep, as of a Shepherd; and ‘the people of His pasture,’ as nourished and provided for by Him, ‘the sheep of His hand,’ as guided and led by Him.”<sup>19</sup>

**48** The faithful, as “sealed sheep,” have full confidence in Christ, our Master and Shepherd Who loves mankind and Who will always and constantly, but especially during the period of eschatological tribulation, mark them with the “Sign of Grace” as “being His,” will protect them from every machination of the Dragon, and will lead them far away from the catastrophe, as He did the righteous Lot.

- a.** “And [the Lord] said to him [the Angel], Go through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark on the foreheads of the men that groan and that grieve for all the iniquities that are done in the midst of it. And He said to the first [the other Angels] in my hearing, Go after him into the city, and smite, and let not your eyes spare, and have no mercy.”<sup>20</sup>
- b.** “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment unto the day of judgment.”<sup>21</sup>
- c.** “This [the salvation of Lot from the catastro-

<sup>13</sup> St. Theophylact of Ohrid, *Commentary on St. John*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. cxxiv, col. 72D.

<sup>14</sup> Euthymios Zigebenos, *Commentary on St. John*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. cxxix, col. 132ID.

<sup>15</sup> *Idem*, *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἸΔ' Ἐπιστολάς τοῦ Ἀποστόλου Παύλου*, Vol. II, p. 626.

<sup>16</sup> “Oration XL, ‘On Holy Baptism,’” §15, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xxxvi, col. 377B.

<sup>17</sup> Leontios of Neapolis, *Life of St. Symeon the Fool for Christ*, §15, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xciii, cols. 1689.

<sup>18</sup> Euthymios Zigebenos, *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἸΔ' Ἐπιστολάς τοῦ Ἀποστόλου Παύλου*, Vol. II, p. 284. II St. Timothy 2:19; cf. Numbers 16:5.

• The Lord “knows” fully and completely His own, as having been deified by Grace, and takes an especial interest in them, whereas He “does not know” those who are not united with Him through the life in Christ.

<sup>19</sup> *Idem*, *Commentary on the Psalter*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. cxxviii, col. 965D. Psalm 94:7.

<sup>20</sup> Ezekiel 9:4–5.

<sup>21</sup> II St. Peter 2:9.

phe of Sodom] is a vivid example, which all who live in cities, villages, monasteries, or other places ought to remember and keep always before their eyes. For if they observe righteousness and the commandments of God and do not acquiesce in the evils and transgressions committed in those cities, villages, or monasteries, but in fact grieve and sigh over them, they will assuredly be delivered, because of this grief and these sighs, from the wrath that God is going to send on those cities, villages, or monasteries, just as He delivered Lot from the wrath that He sent on Sodom. This is what God wanted to reveal through the Prophet Ezekiel when He was intending to destroy the city of Jerusalem.”<sup>22</sup>

d. “And I heard another voice from Heaven, saying, Come out of her [Babylon the great; i.e., Rome], My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.”<sup>23</sup>

e. “I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world”: He is speaking of the universal offensive of the Antichrist against the faithful at the end of the age, from which He promises to deliver those who are zealous for Him, for they will be snatched away beforehand through their departure from hence, lest they be tried beyond what they are able to bear.”<sup>24</sup>

f. “Come out [of her], My people’: That which was said to Lot in Sodom, ‘Save thine own life by all means,’ and in Isaiah, ‘Depart ye, depart, go out from thence, and touch not the unclean thing,’ this he says here, too; for one should avoid dwelling with those who anger God.”<sup>25</sup>

g. “Come out of her, My people’: The voice bids those whom the Lord knows as His own to come forth. To come forth, so that the righteous may not perish with the impious. For just as in the case of Lot God enjoined him, ‘Save thine own life by all means,’ [going] forthwith as far as the mountain, remaining nowhere on the ground, so too here.”<sup>26</sup>

h. “This [as in Lot’s case] is what the Apocalypse is now teaching us also; for, since it is not possible for there not to be any servants of Christ in such a great and populous city as Rome, He says to them: ‘Come out of her, My people...’; for to partake of the sins is also to share in the plagues; for the plagues come about on account of them [the sins].”<sup>27</sup>

**49** The “blessed” readers and hearers of the Apocalypse have a profound awareness that the sacred text reveals and manifests to them the true dimension of the “eschatological future,” of which one can have a foretaste only through the soteriological experience of the “present,” the historical “now”:

- at every moment “the time is at hand”;<sup>28</sup>
- now “it is the last hour”;<sup>29</sup>
- “Now is the judgment [of this world]”:<sup>30</sup> it is imperative that we be those “who keep the things that are written therein [the Apocalypse],”<sup>31</sup> those who “keep” and “do the commandments of God”;<sup>32</sup>
- “today”<sup>33</sup> what matters is our personal trans-

<sup>26</sup> Arethas, *Collection of Interpretations of the Apocalypse*, ch. 55, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 725D. Revelation 18:4; Genesis 19:17.

<sup>27</sup> Oikoumenios, *Complete Commentary on the Apocalypse*, Discourse IX, p. 194.

<sup>28</sup> Revelation 1:3.

<sup>29</sup> 1 St. John 2:18.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. St. John 12:31.

<sup>31</sup> Revelation 1:3.

<sup>32</sup> Revelation 12:17; 22:14.

<sup>33</sup> Hebrews 3:13, 15.

• “Today,” he [St. Paul] says, ‘is always, as long as the world lasts’ (St. John Chrysostomos, “Homily VI on Hebrews,” §1, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LXIII, col. 55).

<sup>22</sup> St. Nicodemos, *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς Ἑπτὰ Καθολικὰς Ἐπιστολάς*, p. 386.

<sup>23</sup> Revelation 18:4.

<sup>24</sup> Andrew, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, ch. 8, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 248A. Cf. Arethas, *Collection of Interpretations of the Apocalypse*, ch. 8, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 557C. Revelation 3:10.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 55, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 388B. Revelation 18:4; Genesis 19:17; Isaiah 52:11.

formation in the Holy Spirit, being in Christ and with Christ;

- “now is salvation nearer to us [than when we first believed]”;<sup>34</sup> we have need of the “Seal of Grace,” the “Seal of the Lamb,” the vision of the Face of God and the blessing of His Name, as communion, protection, and security, and also as a precondition for participation in His eternal Glory.<sup>35</sup>

a. “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.”<sup>36</sup>

b. “Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the Tree of Life.”<sup>37</sup>

c. “And the Lord spake..., Thus ye shall bless the children of Israel... And they [the priests] shall put My Name upon the children of Israel, and I the Lord will bless them.”<sup>38</sup>

d. “He blesses those who read and hear through deeds. The present time is near at hand and is appointed for all for the purpose of work; as the Lord says, ‘Work while it is day,’ and it is possible to obtain the blessing.”<sup>39</sup>

e. “The Apostle [Paul], writing to the Philippians, calls the saints those ‘who are,’ because they are in Christ and are in union with God and in His remembrance.”<sup>40</sup>

f. “And they shall see His face; and His Name

<sup>34</sup> Romans 13:11.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Revelation 22:4.

<sup>36</sup> Revelation 1:3.

<sup>37</sup> Revelation 22:14.

• “Tree of Life”: “Through the tree eternal life is indicated periphrastically, Christ being both of these” (Andrew, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, ch. 3, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 233C).

<sup>38</sup> Numbers 6:22, 23, 27.

• The God-given form of the priestly blessing in the Old Testament is as follows: “The Lord bless thee and keep thee; the Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and have mercy upon thee; the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace” (Numbers 6:24–26).

<sup>39</sup> Andrew, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, ch. 1, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 221B.

<sup>40</sup> Oikoumenios, *Complete Commentary on the Apocalypse*, Discourse IX, p. 186. Philippians 1:1.

shall be on their foreheads.’ Those who become, he says, the throne of God through the Master resting among them, these will be inhabitants of that city and will see Him face to face.... They will have...the Divine Name engraved not only on their foreheads, but also on their hearts, indicating their firm, confident, and immutable love for Him; for the inscription on the forehead alludes to an adornment of boldness.”<sup>41</sup>

g. “‘And the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be therein.’ He who has prepared himself by God-pleasing virtues to be a Divine chariot, running unhesitatingly to the rest of God and the Lamb through the Divine precepts of the Old and New Covenants and possessing a share in the Divine foundation, will be an inhabitant of the city of the Jerusalem on high and will see God face to face, not through indistinct images, but just as He was beheld by the Holy Apostles on the holy mountain, as the great Dionysios says.”<sup>42</sup>

**50** Orthodox Christians, as a “holy nation,”<sup>43</sup> a “peculiar people, zealous of good works,”<sup>44</sup> are “partakers of Christ,”<sup>45</sup> Who fulfills history, since He is “He Who is and Who was and Who is to come,” “the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.”<sup>46</sup>

- Being “partakers of Christ,” the faithful become “uncreated” according to Grace, and consequently participate here and now in eschatological reality.

- Being “fellow-members of Christ’s Body,”<sup>47</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Andrew, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, ch. 68, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 444CD. Revelation 22:4.

<sup>42</sup> Arethas, *Collection of Interpretations of the Apocalypse*, ch. 68, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 780BC. Cf. 1 Corinthians 13:12. St. Dionysios the Areopagite, *On the Divine Names*, ch. 1, §4, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. III, col. 592C.

<sup>43</sup> 1 St. Peter 2:9.

<sup>44</sup> St. Titus 2:14.

<sup>45</sup> Hebrews 3:14.

<sup>46</sup> Revelation 1:4, 8; 2:8; 4:8; 11:17; 21:6; 22:13 (RV).

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Ephesians 3:6.

the faithful believe that “greater is He that is in us [the living and active Christ], than he that is in the world [Satan, the prince thereof],”<sup>48</sup> and “stronger.”<sup>49</sup>

• Being “joint-heirs with Christ,”<sup>50</sup> the faithful “look for”—awaiting with ineffable joy—“the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.”<sup>51</sup>

a. “‘We partake of Him,’ he [St. Paul] means; we have become one, we and He. If He indeed is the Head and we are the Body, we are fellow-heirs and fellow-members of His Body; we are one Body, of His flesh, it says, and of His bones.”<sup>52</sup>

b. “The divinizing Grace, deification itself, is uncreated.... Clearly, therefore, this Grace is uncreated, and so clearly that its result, I mean each of those that are Divinely endowed with Grace and deified, is unoriginate, everlasting, unending, which is the same as to say that it is called uncreated in and of itself. For again, according to the Divine Maximos, ‘the inner principle [λόγος] of eternal well-being comes by Grace to those who are worthy, bringing with it God, Who by nature transcends every beginning and end and

Who renders those who have a beginning and end by nature unoriginate and unending by Grace,’ since the Great Paul, no longer living the temporal life, ‘but the Divine and everlasting life of the indwelling Logos,’ became unoriginate and unending by Grace. Therefore, Paul was created only as long as he lived the life that came about by God’s command from non-being; but when he did not live this life, but that which accrues by the indwelling of God, he became uncreated by Grace.”<sup>53</sup>

c. “‘Greater is He that is in us,’ that is, God the Father, through the Son and the Comforter.”<sup>54</sup>

d. “By ‘blessed hope’ he means the glorious appearing of Christ. He called ‘hope’ His second descent and Advent, as hoped for and expected by us, calling it blessed as most desirable and longed-for by those worthy thereof.”<sup>55</sup>

**51** Consequently: Given that the Apocalypse on the one hand reminds us emphatically that the power of Satan is already ontologically and eschatologically defeated, and on the other hand reveals and communicates to us the final triumph of Christ the Lamb and His Kingdom,

• firstly, the Apocalypse should be approached and understood as a message of edification, consolation, and hope in Christ;

• secondly, the Apocalypse should be disencumbered of approaches which forget or overlook the “present” of the Church (the “now,” the “today”) and present it exclusively as a cryptic futuristic text or as a collection of oracles in the form of an assemblage of pessimistic information or disclosures about specific historical developments.

<sup>53</sup> St. Gregory Palamas, “Third Epistle to Akindynos,” §16, in *Συγγράμματα*, Vol. 1, ed. Panagiotes K. Chrestou (Thessalonike: 1962), pp. 307, ll.18, 308, ll. 11–12, 26–29.

• St. Maximos the Confessor, *Ambigua*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xci, col. 1144BC.

<sup>54</sup> Euthymios Zigabenos, *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἸΔ’ Ἐπιστολὰς τοῦ Ἀποστόλου Παύλου*, Vol. 11, p. 620. 1 St. John 4:4.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 323–324. St. Titus 2:13.

<sup>48</sup> 1 St. John 4:4.

• Satan is “the prince of this world” (St. John 12:31; 14:30); he is “the god of this world” (11 Corinthians 4:4) and “the ruler of the darkness of this world” (*cf.* Ephesians 6:12).

• Many of the Holy Fathers, in order to avoid giving a handle to those of the heretics who believed that the creator of the world was different from God, interpreted “the god of this world” in 11 Corinthians 4:4 as the true God. Notwithstanding, the interpretation of St. Cyril of Alexandria, which is accepted by St. Maximos the Confessor and St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite, is more correct. St. Cyril “says that the god of this world is the one supposed by unbelievers to be God, namely, Satan.... The Devil blinded their thoughts” (Oikoumenios, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. cxviii, col. 960c; St. Nicodemos, *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἸΔ’ Ἐπιστολὰς τοῦ Ἀποστόλου Παύλου*, Vol. 11, p. 71).

<sup>49</sup> *Cf.* St. Matthew 12:29; St. Mark 3:27; St. Luke 11:22.

<sup>50</sup> Romans 8:17; Ephesians 3:6.

<sup>51</sup> St. Titus 2:13 (RV).

<sup>52</sup> St. John Chrysostomos, “Homily VI on Hebrews,” §2, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. lxxiii, col. 56. Ephesians 3:6; Romans 12:5; Ephesians 5:30.

- The Apocalypse is not one-sidedly futuristic, since it reveals the history of the Divine Economy (past, present, and future), which we come to know experientially “today” in the Church, participating thus here and now in the all-gladsome eschatological “marriage supper of the Lamb.”<sup>56</sup>

- a. If we are to avoid an exclusively futuristic approach to the sacred text, we should never forget the distinctiveness of prophetic and apocalyptic time, which encompasses past, present, and future:

- “Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.”<sup>57</sup>

- “For he does not speak to us only about things present, but also about things past and things to come.... In saying ‘the things which are,’ he indicates both things past and things present; in saying ‘the things which shall be,’ he indicates things to come. For some of the things seen by the Saint in the vision had already come to pass, which, although they had received an end, had nonetheless not passed into non-existence; this is why he said about them, ‘the things which are’; others were present, and others were to happen, as the discourse will show as it proceeds.”<sup>58</sup>

- “For such were the Prophets: they traverse all times—past, present, and future.... For prophecy is not only the telling of things to

come, but also of things present.... It is the function of prophecy to speak not only of the future, but also of the past, as we learn especially from Moses.... For just as it belongs to prophecy to speak of things that have not yet happened and are still unclear, so it has equal grace to reveal things that have happened, but have been concealed by time, and to bring them into the midst. It is also the function of prophecy to speak of things present, when something happens, but is hidden, as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira. For in that instance the event was neither past nor future, but present, albeit unclear. Peter, therefore, having uncovered these things by prophecy, brings them into the midst.”<sup>59</sup>

- b. Moreover, precisely by reason of this distinctive feature of “prophetic time” intertwines “things that have happened” and “things that will happen”:

- “You have been expounding to us not future events, but things that have happened.... For the oracle that said to the Evangelist, ‘Come up hither, and I will show thee the things which must come to pass hereafter,’ did not negate the fact that he had seen something of what had come about previously, but together with those also indicated things that would come to pass.”<sup>60</sup>

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“And I saw a new Heaven and a new earth...and I saw the Holy City, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven.... And I heard a great voice out of Heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.... And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.”

(Revelation 21:1, 2, 3–4, 5)

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<sup>56</sup> Revelation 19:7, 9.

<sup>57</sup> Revelation 1:19.

<sup>58</sup> Oikoumenios, *Complete Commentary on the Apocalypse*, Discourse 1, pp. 29, 45.

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<sup>59</sup> St. John Chrysostomos: “Exposition of Psalm 43,” §1, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LV, col. 167; “Homily v on 1 St. Timothy,” §1, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LXII, col. 526; *Synopsis of the Old and New Testaments*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LVI, col. 317;

<sup>60</sup> Oikoumenios, *Complete Commentary on the Apocalypse*, Discourse v, pp. 102–103. Revelation 4:1 (RV).

## ■ C11. An Attempt at an “Ecclesiastical Reading” of the Apocalypse

**52** This work of ours is an attempt at an “ecclesiastical reading” of the Apocalypse, and specifically of the issues pertaining to chapter 13. Such a reading becomes feasible only when the sacred text is not viewed in isolation, but

- a. is situated in the historical environment that contributed to the formation of the means of expression employed by the sacred author, which were comprehensible at that time, but which can be understood today only to the extent to which we are familiar with the religious, social, political and other assumptions of his era;<sup>1</sup>
- b. is situated in its apocalyptic environment (200 B.C.–100 A.D.), in which terms, concepts, symbols, and images constitute, as a unified whole, the forms of expression characteristic of apocalyptic literature;<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> With regard to the historical environment, we had in view primarily the following general works: Savvas Ch. Agourides, *Ἱστορία τῶν χρόνων τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης* [History of New Testament times] (Thessalonike: Ekdoseis P. Pournara, 1980); Georgios Galites, *Ἱστορία ἐποχῆς τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης* [History of the New Testament era], 7th ed. (Thessalonike: Ekdoseis P. Pournara, 1999); Johannes Weiss, *Ὁ Ἀρχέγονος Χριστιανισμός: Ἡ Ἱστορία τῆς περιόδου 30–150 μ.Χ.* (Athens: Ekdoseis “Artos Zoes,” 1993) (for an English version of this work, originally published in 1917 under the title *Das Urchristentum*, see *Earliest Christianity: A History of the Period A.D. 30–150*, ed. Frederick C. Grant [New York: Harper, 1959]—TRANS.).

• The following specialized works were especially valuable: Basileios P. Stogiannes, “Ἀποκάλυψη καὶ Πολιτική” [Apocalypse and politics] in *Ἑρμηνευτικὰ Μελετήματα* [Hermeneutical studies] (Thessalonike: Ekdoseis P. Pournara, 1988), pp. 562–591; Protospresbyter Ioannes G. Skiadareses, “Τὸ κλίμα τοῦ Ὑμνου [τοῦ Ἀγγέλου τῶν Ὑδάτων – Ἀποκ. ις 5–6] καὶ γενικότερα ὅλης τῆς Ἀποκάλυψης” [The mood of the hymn (of the Angel of the waters, Revelation 16:5–6) and in general of the entire Apocalypse], in *Λειτουργικὲς Σκηνὲς καὶ Ὑμνοι*, pp. 296–341.

<sup>2</sup> With regard to the apocalyptic environment, we had in view primarily the following works: Savvas Ch. Agourides, *Τὰ Ἀπόκρυφα τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης, Κείμενα–Εἰσαγωγαι–Σχόλια* [The Old Testament Apocrypha: Texts, introductions, and notes], 2 vols. (Athens: 1973, 1985); *idem*, “Φιλολογία καὶ Θεολογία τῶν Ἀποκρύφων Ἀποκαλύψε-

c. is situated in the ecclesiastical environment of Orthodox Christology, ecclesiology, and soteriology, which, being perennial, is unified and unchanging.

**53** Our hermeneutical endeavor has steadfastly aimed to put forth what would be well-pleasing to our Lord, what would be consonant with Holy Scripture and the Divine Fathers, and also what might be regarded as a “completion of what is lacking.”

- a. “We beseech you not to ask in any way for what is pleasing for you to hear from us, but what is well-pleasing to the Lord, consonant with the Scriptures, and not contrary to the Fathers.”<sup>3</sup>
- b. No additions to Holy Tradition are permitted,

“except for a certain development, resulting from progress, that one might observe in what is said, which is certainly not a change from worse to better, but a completion of what is lacking in terms of additional knowledge.”<sup>4</sup>

ων” [The language and theology of the Apocryphal Apocalypses], in *Ἱστορία τῶν χρόνων τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης*, pp. 374–386; Evangelia Amoiridou, “Ἀποκαλυπτικὴ Γραμματεία – Ἀπὸ τὴν Προφητεία στὴν Ἀποκάλυψη – Ἡ Ἀποκάλυψη τοῦ Ἰωάννου” [Apocalyptic literature—From prophecy to apocalypse—The Apocalypse of John], in *Ἱστορία τῆς Ἑρμηνείας τοῦ «Ἀριθμοῦ τοῦ Θηρίου χξς’» – 666*, pp. 15–26; Panagiotis K. Chrestou, “Ἀποκαλύψεις” [Apocalypses], in *Ἑλληνικὴ Πατρολογία* [Greek Patrology], Vol. 1 (Thessalonike: Patriarchikon Hidryma Paterikon Meleton, 1976), pp. 132–135.

• It should be noted that “what is called ‘Apocalyptic literature’ employs popular picture language, which is connected or identical with what is known as allegory. The Apocalypse of John is the great allegory” (Oikonomou, “Ἐξουσία εἰς τὴν «Ἀποκάλυψιν»,” p. 1).

<sup>3</sup> St. Basil the Great, “Homily xxiv, ‘Against the Sabelians, Arios, and the Anomœans,’” §4, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xxxi, col. 609A.

<sup>4</sup> *Idem*, “Epistle cxxiii,” §5, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xxxii, col. 829B.

**54** In our hermeneutical endeavor, certain opinions are likely to appear “contrary to the Fathers,” but this is assuredly not the case, for the following three main reasons:

- a. The holy expositors of the past did not have the sense that they were interpreting the entirety of the Sacred Texts, but each added “more” to the hermeneutical edifice, that is, more than that which “another” had offered.
- “Our best theologian is not he who has discovered the whole [of what God is]—since that which is chained [i.e., the human mind, which is chained, as it were, to the body] is not capable of comprehending the whole—but he who has apprehended more than another and gathered in himself more of the image or adumbration of the Truth, or whatever we are to call it.”<sup>5</sup>
- b. The holy expositors were distinguished for their hermeneutical moderation, offering the reader the freedom to “test” and choose the interpretation that he preferred: “Let the reader be the judge.”<sup>6</sup>
- “For it is the mark of an audacious and obstinate mind to impose knowledge conclusively upon what is presented and to insist nesciently that this is what [the text] means; but to make known to others uncontentiously what one has been vouchsafed to receive in proportion to his purification is the mark of a reasonable and moderate man; for, in setting forth what we have learned from our predecessors concerning the matters at hand, we leave to the judgment [of the reader] to ac-

cept whichever of them he chooses.”<sup>7</sup>

- “This number [666] signifies many other names both proper and common, but it [especially] signifies these.... Therefore, since many names have been found, anyone who wishes may apply the name that is most suitable to the accursed one.”<sup>8</sup>
- “Babylon the great”<sup>9</sup> is either “the confusion of [this] world and the turmoil of the present life”; or “the earthly kingdom in general, as though [existing] in a single body”; or “the capital city until the coming of the Antichrist”; or “that which bears the dominion of the worldly kingdom until the end of time”; or “that which rules in the time of the Persians, or the old Rome [regaining its ancient power], or the new [Rome, the seven kings and kingdoms having thus come to pass<sup>10</sup>].”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Arethas, *Collection of Interpretations*, ch. 33, in Cramer, *Catena Græcorum Patrum in Novum Testamentum*, Vol. VIII, p. 351.

• This section is missing from Migne’s edition of Arethas (*Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 660B).

• In his attempt to interpret the issues pertaining to the “Woman” in chapter 12, Arethas in essence finds fault with Andrew, since he forthrightly rejects the interpretation of the “Woman” as the Theotokos, which Oikoumenios advocates. Although he prefers the perspective of Oikoumenios, Arethas leaves it to the reader to choose whichever interpretation he desires.

<sup>8</sup> Oikoumenios, *Complete Commentary on the Apocalypse*, Discourse VIII, pp. 157–158. According to Oikoumenios, the number 666 especially signifies “Lampetis, Benediktos, and Teitan”—TRANS.

<sup>9</sup> Revelation 17:5.

<sup>10</sup> Revelation 17:10.

• The potential equation (!) of the “seventh kingdom” (the seventh “head” of the Antichrist) with New Rome, that is, Christian Constantinople, is indicative of the latitude of his hermeneutical approach and of the freedom implicit in the phrase “let him [the reader] be the judge.”

<sup>11</sup> Andrew of Cæsarea, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, cols. 345A, 372D, 376A, 377BCD, 380C, 381ABD, 396A, 392D.

• Arethas’ view: “And what is Babylon? Nothing other than this perishable world, in which nothing is free from the sway of the adversary and good is mingled with evil.... Hence, the prophecies are to be understood without a shadow of doubt as being not about Babylon, old Rome, new Rome, or any other city, but about this entire per-

• St. Basil is defending himself to Eustathios of Sebasteia, who accused him of heretical blasphemy against God. The Saint had previously likened this “development” to the development of a seed: “Just as the seed, when it grows, starts small and becomes larger, and yet remains the same in itself, not changing in kind, though becoming perfected in growth” (*ibid.*, §3, cols. 825C–828A).

<sup>5</sup> St. Gregory the Theologian, “Oration xxx (“Fourth Theological Oration”),” §17, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XXXVI, col. 125BC.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew of Cæsarea, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, ch. 10, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 253D.

- c. The holy expositors do not state dogmatically that they are offering a decisive and final interpretation, but at times put forward a variety of explanations, “offering them as a training for mental agility.”<sup>12</sup>
- For example, the two Prophets and Witnesses will be active for “a thousand two hundred and threescore days”;<sup>13</sup> that is, either “for so many days” (literally); or “meaning some mystical number” (figuratively); or “[meaning] that which will assuredly be the case” (certainty of fulfillment).<sup>14</sup>

**55** In our hermeneutical endeavor it has not been possible—for one reason or another—for us to be completely bound by the pre-existing hermeneutical tradition concerning the Apocalypse, since on the one hand, “many of [their] specific interpretations are far-fetched and outmoded,”<sup>15</sup> while, on the other hand, its exponents—who are, in any case, not among the outstanding representatives of Patristic exegesis—provide us, though only in general terms, with the following complicated picture:

**a. Lack of unanimity**

Among the holy expositors<sup>16</sup>

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ishable world” (*Collection of Interpretations*, in Cramer, *Catena Græcorum Patrum in Novum Testamentum*, Vol. VIII, pp. 390, 441; cf. *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, cols. 688B [text missing], 713D, 729C).

<sup>12</sup> Andrew of Cæsarea, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, “Prologue,” *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 220A.

<sup>13</sup> Revelation 11:3.

<sup>14</sup> Oikoumenios, *Complete Commentary on the Apocalypse*, Discourse VI, p. 128.

<sup>15</sup> Ioannes Panagopoulos, “«Τί τὸ Πνεῦμα λέγει»: Ἡ Πατερικὴ κατανόηση τοῦ Βιβλίου τῆς Ἀποκάλυψης” [“What the Spirit is saying”: The Patristic understanding of the Book of Revelation], *Σύναξις*, No. 56 (October–December 1995), p. 56.

<sup>16</sup> We restrict ourselves solely to those mentioned in what follows, because contemporary Antichristologists refer almost exclusively to them alone, and also because it is feasible and straightforward to cite their works in our bibliography.

• Let it be noted, especially in connection with the points discussed in §56, that Sts. Irenæus and Hippolytos expressed opinions about the Antichrist and the “mark” of

- St. Irenæus,<sup>17</sup> Andrew,<sup>18</sup> and Arethas<sup>19</sup> identify the first Beast<sup>20</sup> in chapter 13 of the Apocalypse with the Antichrist;
- Hippolytos<sup>21</sup> regards the then Roman Empire as the first Beast (identifying it with the fourth Beast of Daniel<sup>22</sup>) and the “fu-

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the Beast, but *en passant*, and not specifically as commentators on the Apocalypse.

• In the West, the first commentator on the Apocalypse was St. Victorinus (†304), who put forth incorrect views. Both he himself and Sts. Irenæus (†202), Hippolytos (†236), and Methodios (†250? 258? 311?)—to confine ourselves to the most basic sources of contemporary Antichristology—accepted Chiliasm (Millenarianism or Millennialism), misinterpreting chapter 20 of the Apocalypse.

• The opinion of St. Photios the Great is noteworthy: “In how many of our other blessed and Holy Fathers is it possible to find such [incorrect teachings]! Pray consider...the great Methodios of Patara, who shone forth among Hieromartyrs...; Irenæus, the Hierarch of God, who received supervision of things sacred in Lyon; and Hippolytos, his disciple and Martyr among Hierarchs—men admirable in many respects, though at times they fail to restrain some of their statements from diverging from exactitude, ...not all of whose views do we accept, to be sure”; “Many and various writings and epistles of the Divine Irenæus are in circulation, although in certain of them exactitude of the truth in accordance with Church teachings is adulterated with spurious notions, a fact which must be pointed out”; “[Hippolytos] says certain other things that fall short of the truth” (*Discourse Concerning the Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit*, §75, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CII, cols. 356B, 357A; cf. “Epistle xxiv, ‘To the Metropolitan of Aquileia,’” §21, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CII, cols. 813C–816A; *Myriobiblos (Bibliotheke)*, chs. CXX, CXXI, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CIII, cols. 401C, 404A).

<sup>17</sup> St. Irenæus of Lyons, *Scrutiny and Refutation of Knowledge Falsely So-Called (Against Heresies)*, Bk. v, ch. 28, §2, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. VII(B), cols. 1198–1199.

<sup>18</sup> *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, ch. 37, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 336D.

<sup>19</sup> *Collection of Interpretations of the Apocalypse*, ch. 36, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 672A.

• Arethas’ treatment of this issue is marked by great confusion and unclarity, and the fuller form of the text in Cramer does nothing to improve the situation.

<sup>20</sup> Revelation 13:1–10.

<sup>21</sup> *Demonstration Concerning Christ and the Antichrist*, §§25, 28, 49, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. X, cols. 748A, 749A, 768AB; see also *Βιβλιοθήκη Ἑλλήνων Πατέρων καὶ Ἐκκλησιαστικῶν Συγγραφέων*, Vol. VI, p. 205, ll. 15–18, p. 206, ll. 15–20, p. 213, ll. 27–29, 38.

<sup>22</sup> Daniel 7:7.



ture kingdom of the Antichrist” as the second Beast,<sup>23</sup> “and by the two horns [St. John means] him and the False Prophet after him”;

- and finally, Oikoumenios<sup>24</sup> identifies the second Beast with the Antichrist, while he regards the first Beast as being after Satan in order and as superior to the rest of the demons and the Antichrist.

**b.** Patently erroneous interpretations

- Oikoumenios distinguishes the Dragon/Satan from the Devil and opines that the Dragon/Satan is the father of the Devil:

“Satan, the author of evil, will be cast into the lake of fire, that is, Gehenna, along with the Devil and the Antichrist”; “[Christ—TRANS.]...calls the rebellious Dragon the father of the Devil, who is now presented to us in the vision.”<sup>25</sup>

**c.** Hermeneutical inconsistency<sup>26</sup>

- Andrew regards the “image of the Beast”<sup>27</sup> at times as an actual idol,<sup>28</sup> at times as allegorical,<sup>29</sup> and at times as identical to the mark of the Beast.<sup>30</sup>
- Arethas also regards the “image of the Beast” at times as an actual idol<sup>31</sup> and at times as

allegorical,<sup>32</sup> and at times he identifies it with the Antichrist.<sup>33</sup>

- Andrew regards the “mark”<sup>34</sup> at times as spiritual and non-perceptible<sup>35</sup> and at times as corporeal and perceptible.<sup>36</sup>
- Arethas also regards the “mark” at times as perceptible<sup>37</sup> and at times simultaneously as perceptible and non-perceptible.<sup>38</sup>

**56** This phenomenon of hermeneutical disorder, which we have discussed in an entirely tentative fashion and which raises a deeper set of problems for the attentive reader, does not surprise or scandalize us, since Holy Tradition has sufficiently taught us that the Divine Fathers and ecclesiastical writers in certain instances express views that are not only hermeneutically aberrant but also dogmatically unorthodox, but which have not received acceptance from the Church. This certainly does not betoken any diminution of their prestige: they remain as Fathers and teachers in the conscience of the Church, and whatever incorrect views they might have held are not adopted.

- St. Photios the Great of Constantinople dealt theologially with this issue in a completely clear, full, and convincing way. By way of illustration we will cite a very striking selection of his opinions:

But the offspring of the Church, not forgetful of sacred teaching, ...know to cover up their father’s ignominy.... How much could one say in defense of those blessed men? How many circumstances, indeed, compelled many of them to misstate some things, to say other things by way of œcon-

<sup>23</sup> Revelation 13:11–16.

<sup>24</sup> *Complete Commentary on the Apocalypse*, Discourses VII, XI, pp. 149, 226.

• Oikoumenios’ view of the Beasts (Satan, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet) is extremely confused, since he does not employ a unified hermeneutical approach to the Beasts in his comments thereon in chapters 13 and following.

<sup>25</sup> *Complete Commentary on the Apocalypse*, Discourses XI, VII, pp. 226, 150.

<sup>26</sup> We characterize as hermeneutical inconsistency that strategy according to which, whenever a particular topic is under discussion, a new interpretation of the same is given, without any explanations. This strategy is not identical to the principle of polysemy, in which alternative hermeneutical solutions are put forward in order for us to select the one that is most appropriate.

<sup>27</sup> Revelation 13:14–15.

<sup>28</sup> *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, ch. 37, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 340A.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 40, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 345C.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 61, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 412A.

<sup>31</sup> *Collection of Interpretations of the Apocalypse*, ch. 37, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 680B.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 42, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 689A.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, chs. 62, 46, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, cols. 752C, 704C.

<sup>34</sup> Revelation 13:16, 17.

<sup>35</sup> *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, chs. 30, 42, 61, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, cols. 313CD, 345C, 348A, 412A.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 37, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 340AD.

<sup>37</sup> *Collection of Interpretations of the Apocalypse*, chs. 37, 38, 61, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, cols. 680CD, 681A, 752AB.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 42, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, col. 689A.

omy, others in the face of attacks by unbelievers, and yet others out of ignorance, it being human to err. For one was contending against heretics; another was condescending to the weakness of his audience; each one, accomplishing a different goal and bowing to the demand of the occasion to make considerable compromises in exactitude for a greater purpose, both spoke and did things which it is not permissible for us to say or do.... If they spoke incorrectly or, for some reason now unknown to us, deviated from the straight path, and if the matter was not brought to their attention and no one urged them to apprise themselves of the truth, no less do we enroll them in the ranks of the Fathers than if they had not said such, on account of the radiance of their lives, the respect due to their virtue, and their otherwise irreproachable piety; but we will not follow the doctrines whereby they went astray.... If they were in any way negligent of the truth and were misled into saying things contrary to the common teaching of the Church, we do not follow them in these respects; but in no way whatsoever do we abridge the honor and glory due to them as Fathers.... The day would fail me to enumerate the men whom we dignify with the honor due to Fathers; yet we do not emulate them in those matters in which they erred from the truth.<sup>39</sup>

**57** In our hermeneutical endeavor we have made eclectic use of those opinions of the holy expositors which possess indisputable internal unity, with a view to incorporating these into a distinct theological perspective, placing a firm emphasis upon the following basic truths:

- a. Orthodox eschatology is not a passive futurology, that is, a passive apocalypticism, but an active and dynamic eschatology, which constitutes the Orthodox theology of history.
- Passive futurology is distinguished by its morbid eschatological angst and its constant

<sup>39</sup> “Epistles,” Bk. I.24, §§17–22, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. CII, cols. 812AB, 813AB, 816A.

unease over the Antichrist to come; it is incessantly preoccupied with the detailed enumeration of eschatological “signs”; it endeavors to ascertain the correspondence between the contents of prophecies and the contemporary historical developments in any given era; it bases itself on literal exegesis and disregards the symbolic, allegorical, and allusive character of prophetic and apocalyptic discourse; it has no interest in a fruitful and creative approach to Patristic theology or in a dynamic assimilation of Tradition; its primary concern is moralism; it leads to a pietistic ethos, unhealthy introversion, alienation, unremitting neurotic suspicions, a pessimistic view of history, and, finally, to a Manichæan rejection of the world as a whole.

- Active eschatology is vital and liturgical; its two poles are Hesychastic and Eucharistic experience; its focus is mysteriological realism; it provides the assurance that the believer is “of one Body and one Blood with Christ,”<sup>40</sup> that Christ is mysteriologically and eucharistically present in the Church; the present and the *Eschaton* meet in the Theandric Person of our Savior; every historical moment is the “last hour”; the last things are present; the present is interpreted in the light of the last things and is evaluated on the basis of what is to come; the presence of Christ in the historical “now” is, in and of itself, an event that involves judgment, since it demands a “crucial choice”; the struggle with the Antichrist is a present reality; a “watchful attitude” and a refusal to accept the Mark are a consistent frame of mind; the constant renewal

<sup>40</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, “Catechesis xxii (Fourth Mystagogical Catechesis),” §3, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. xxxiii, col. 1100A:

- “Wherefore with all assurance let us partake as of the Body and Blood of Christ...that you, by partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, may become one in Body and Blood with Him. For thus do we become Christ-bearers, since His Body and Blood are imparted to our members; thus it is that, according to the Blessed Peter, we become partakers of the Divine nature.”

of the Seal of the Lamb is a daily experience; our response to the call of the Bridegroom, “Abide in Me, and I in you,”<sup>41</sup> is unceasing; the “New Creation”<sup>42</sup> is lived here and now, as an “earnest of the Spirit,”<sup>43</sup> with our participation in the “Supper of the Kingdom” as its crowning expression.<sup>44</sup>

- b. The Church, the holy Root and the good Olive Tree,<sup>45</sup> is the People of God, the New Israel, which has been redeemed by the Blood of Christ the Lamb and continues to experience exodus and tribulation as it journeys towards the New City<sup>46</sup> of the *Eschaton*, in order to participate in the “marriage supper of the Lamb.”<sup>47</sup>
- c. The Church, in its martyric exodus, is emboldened by the hope-filled and optimistic message of the Sacred Apocalypse, which through a multitude of visions, symbolic portrayals, parables, and hymns depicts the magnificent triumph of the Church

as a repetition of Christ’s triumph; just as Christ was victorious after His Sufferings, so too the Church will triumph after its persecutions and sufferings.<sup>48</sup>

**58** Consequently: Our hermeneutical endeavor, its deficiencies notwithstanding, is a work supported by copious documentation. However, it does not lay claim to “infallibility,” nor does it promote itself as “dogma,” but puts itself at the disposal of our Most Holy Orthodox Church for appraisal and perhaps for pastoral use, in the conviction that

[w]e are not making what we say a matter of dogma, lest we give any occasion to those who would slander us; but we confess that we are merely exercising our intellect by means of the ideas set forth and not setting forth any exegetical teaching in what follows.<sup>49</sup>



“Therefore, with regard to” recent Antichristology, “this is sufficient, as I think, albeit in few words, to provide a basis for the more learned to formulate a more ample refutation” of eschatological error.

(*Cf.* St. Athanasios the Great, *Second Oration Against the Arians*, ch. 72, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XXVI, col. 301A)

<sup>41</sup> St. John 15:4.

<sup>42</sup> *Cf.* II Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15.

<sup>43</sup> II Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:13–14.

<sup>44</sup> *Cf.* St. Luke 14:16, 17.

<sup>45</sup> Romans 11:16, 24.

<sup>46</sup> *Cf.* Revelation 21–22.

<sup>47</sup> Revelation 19:9.

<sup>48</sup> Chrestou, *Ἑλληνικὴ Πατρολογία*, Vol. I, p. 134.

<sup>49</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Apologetic Explication of the Hexameron*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XLIV, col. 68c.

## Bibliographical Clarification

• For our present hermeneutical work, especially for the third chapter, “The Book of Revelation and the ‘Mark of the Beast’” (§§CI–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, MI: 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

- Migne, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, cols. 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

- Migne, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CVI, cols. 487–786.  
—A problematic text.
- J.A. Cramer, *Catena Græcorum Patrum in Novum Testamentum*. Oxford: E Typographeo Academico, 1840. Vol. VIII, pp. 171–496.  
—The best edition, through not a critical one.



The end,  
and to God  
be glory and thanksgiving!



November 21, 2000 (Old Style)  
† Entrance of the 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)