

ANTICHRIST

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“In knowing the signs of antichrist, do not keep them to yourself but extensively inform every one of them”. (St Cyril of Jerusalem)

The Lord Jesus Christ said: “I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Mat. 16:18). What do the “gates of Hades” mean? The Jews had a custom where they held meetings – presided over by an elder – at the gates of the city, in order to discuss political, legal and social matters. These meetings were of the highest order in all important matters because here too, God’s directives were announced. They carried a certain authority among the people. This practice by the Jews can be read in the Book of Ruth (4:1,11). In the writings about an active woman in the Book of Proverbs (31:23), it states: “Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land”, i.e. he was endowed with society’s trust and participates actively in all important meetings, (Prof. V.V.Bolotov).

Consequently, “gates of hades” doesn’t simply mean the forces of hell, but the general staff of hell’s forces dedicated to developing at their important meetings, a sweeping plan of battle against the Church. The Church and hades represent two powers that are locked in battle, and in this war, according to God’s words, the Church will remain invincible.

The Gospel calls the Hades plan of battle with the Church as “mystery of lawlessness” that has been active over many centuries, which will cease with the appearance of antichrist (2 Thess. 2:8). The antichrist will only appear as a result of world Apostasy i.e. people turning away from God and His ways – when God’s grace shall leave them: “When the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up.” (Dan. 8:23), “the coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan” (2 Thess. 2:9).

Antichrist’s persona will contain all possible evil in all its fullness and power that human nature can adopt and tolerate. In order to receive the purest and most perfect Fruit from the tree of Mankind – in the image of the Most Blessed Mary - required thousands of years of development and refinement of the good human seed. Likewise, in order to receive the vilest fruit that would be capable of holding all of satan’s malice, requires effort by a whole number of human generations indulging in depravity and defilement of human nature, motivated by the mindless hatred against Christ and struggle against His Church. “It could be conceded” - states Professor A.D.Belayev – “that inborn and acquired evil, which slowly accumulates over a succession of antichrist’s ancestors and passed on with every new generation, will attain the highest level in antichrist that

human makeup can absorb, display and tolerate. The evil in him, which resides in the human race, will reach a maximum height in its extension”.

Naturally, the degree of strengthening of a person’s evil intentions is matched by the devil’s assistance, who acquires greater access to his soul. Because the personal evil capriciousness and depravity of mind will reach the highest level of development in antichrist, the devil’s relationship with him will realize the utmost intimacy. This will be reflected by the devil himself constantly acting through the persona of antichrist. Saint John of Damascus writes: “In seeing the future corruption of his (antichrist) mind, God will permit the devil to domicile in him”. The same teachings are advanced by Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, while Saint Andrew of Caesarea writes that antichrist: “will emerge from the dark depths of countries of the earth into which the devil has been banished”. Blessed Theodorite states: “Before the coming of Christ, the enemy of mankind and God’s adversary, a demon, a stealer of God’s Name will appear on earth as a human being”. A number of Saints refer to antichrist as the son of satan.

According to the teachings of the Holy Fathers, not one second of antichrist’s life will be free of satan’s influence. It will start to manifest itself in the actual birth, especially in the unusual and exceptional defilement of its conception. “From the defilement of a woman will his (satan) instrument be born”, says Saint Ephraim of Syria. The same is declared by Saint John Damascene: “a man (antichrist) will be born through fornication”.

Saints Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Hilary, Ambrose, Hieronymus and Augustine all note that he will be born of Judean race – the tribe of Dan.

In the Synaxarion, during Cheese-Fare week, we read: “Antichrist will be born, so speaks Saint Hippolytus of Rome, of a defiled woman and illusory maiden, of real Jews from the tribe of Dan”. The Word of God carries some basis to these indications:

- a) In Patriarch Jacob’s prophecies concerning each of his sons, placing them as racial heads of the tribes of Israel, the future of Dan’s descendants is depicted in such a way that can only be attributed to antichrist: “Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path” (Gen. 49:17).
- b) In Jeremiah’s prophecy: “The snorting of his horses was heard from Dan: the whole land trembled at the sound of the neighing of his strong ones; for they are come, and have devoured the land, and all that is in it” (8:16).
- c) In the revelations of the Apocalypse where the remnants of all the Israel tribes were sealed by an Angel for salvation, the tribe of Dan is completely excluded (7:8).

According to the teachings of the Holy Fathers, in promoting antichrist, the devil will try to simulate the signs that preceded Christ’s coming on earth. Naturally, while antichrist will have some similarities with Christ, they will be purely superficial and false in essence, because his whole life will be dedicated to lead a hostile and blasphemous revolt against Christ and His Church. This

outward likeness to Christ will emerge in the very birth of antichrist. Bearing in mind that Christ was born of a Virgin, the devil's instrument will not be born of a virgin but quite the opposite – of a woman filled with all types of iniquities and satanic filth. Furthermore, just as Christ remained incognito for His first 30 years on earth, it must be assumed that antichrist will emulate this. Similarly, just as Christ began His salvific service with sermons of His Divine Teachings and with miracles, antichrist will likewise commence his all-destructive service by deceiving people with his false teachings and shameful counterfeit miracles. Just as it was God's convenience when to reveal Himself as the Messiah in His triumphant entry into Jerusalem and its temple, antichrist will also declare himself as the Jewish false messiah, universal monarch through the triumphant entrance into Jerusalem and sitting upon the throne in the temple of Jerusalem, **which will be restored by that time.** The Lord's entrance into Jerusalem writes Archbishop Innokenti of Herson, was "a nationwide declaration to the Judeans that Jesus Christ is the true Messiah. The undisputable proof of that can be found in His own words, uttered before the gates of Jerusalem: "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your day, the things that make for your peace!" (Luke 19:42). With this Messiah's rejection, on this fateful day the fate of the Israelites was forever decided". Similarly, on the day of the false messiah's – antichrist - entry into Jerusalem, the fate of humanity of those times will be forever and inalterably sealed. Blessed will be those who in those **last days, granted by God for people to make their final personal evaluations,** will be capable of recognizing antichrist as a servant of satan and the inescapable spiritual death that will come with him and everyone that had accepted him. Finally, as the Lord revealed Himself to the world and accomplished His ministry: as Prophet, as King and as High Priest, so will antichrist concentrate in his hands all the three authorities and realize his all-destructive functions – as a teacher to mankind; as a monarch of a universal monarchy; and as the foremost high priest of all religions that demands worshipping as a god.

Antichrist's whole life and activities can be examined in three phases:

The First Period of antichrist's life from the moment of his birth to the day of his entry into the public arena, will flow in obscured anonymity. Saint John Damascene says that "Antichrist will be brought up secretly".

The Second Period of antichrist's life will commence with his blaring presentation in the role as a universal teacher or "prophet". It's highly probable that he will begin his activity during conditions of a world war. After suffering its horror, people will see no release from their plight because all the hidden controls capable of solving this will be in the hands of a clandestine organization, which will be assisting him. Antichrist will propose a very auspicious scheme, from both a political and social wisdom point of view, which will solve the world crisis – by the establishment of a uniform political and social order throughout the whole world. Weary from the upheavals of war

and being spiritually blind, mankind will not only not recognize the scheme's danger of a trap to themselves, which is enticing it into a very desperate and merciless slavery, but quite the opposite – it will acknowledge his display of scholarship and genius.

In a very short time, world-wide publicity about antichrist being a genius-thinker, new leader and saviour of nations will reverberate throughout all the countries. “Sent throughout the universe, the evil spirits will arouse within people high opinions of antichrist, general rapture and irresistible attraction to him”.

During this period, antichrist will not apply any force but will attempt to win the people's trust and disposition toward him, through deception and a mask of pretentious virtue. In Vladimir Soloviev's words: “to throw a veil of shining goodness and truth over clandestine lawlessness”. According to Saint Ephraim the Syrian, he will arrive “in such an appearance as to delude everyone; he will be humble, meek, hater of falsehood (as he will speak of himself), repugnant of idols, prefer piety, kind, lover of beggars, will be at the highest level extremely handsome, steadfast, gentle with everyone and especially showing respect for the Jewish people - because the Judeans will be anticipating his arrival... He will undertake cunning measures so as to please everyone, thereby receiving love from the people very quickly; he will not accept gifts; speak angrily; look sullen but be clothed outwardly with decency – and begin to delude the world until his enthronement”.

From the rich experiences of our great ascetics, we know that when the black demon cannot overwhelm one of them because of the ascetic's stoical opposition, the powerful devil appears in the form of an “angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14), attempting to evoke sympathy and trust from the ascetic, thereby enticing him toward perdition. Consequently, we can imagine how easily and quickly universal affinity will be attracted by the bright image of antichrist after the repulsive demon in the image of Communism.

As a result of this deception, the very attitude in the human essence will “generate a demand to invite antichrist. A call will be raised in human society, expressing an insistent demand for the genius of geniuses, who would be able to elevate material development and success to the highest level, and establish prosperity on earth”. (Bishop Ignatius Branchaninov).

During this stage his hypocrisy will be so great that instead of showing hatred toward Christians, he will extend his desire to be their patron. In his public behaviour, he will be endeavouring to emulate Christ. Being under the control of human wisdom and not that of a spiritual one of the Church, the majority of Christians will not recognize this fraud and acknowledge antichrist as Christ that has descended to earth in His second coming. The monks of Solovetsky monastery once asked Blessed Zosima as to how would one recognize antichrist when he came. This is what they heard: “***When you hear that Christ has appeared or came down to earth, know then that it is antichrist***”. The answer

is quite precise. As Bishop Ignatius writes: “The world or humanity will not recognize antichrist: it will acknowledge and proclaim him as Christ... However, it will be unnecessary and impossible for people to relay news to one another about the Son of God’s arrival. He will appear suddenly – appear by His omnipotent power to all mankind and the whole world at the same time”. Christ Himself gave us this warning: “And they will say to you, ‘Look here !’ or ‘Look there!’ Do not go after them or follow them. For as the lightning that flashes out one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day”. (Luke 17:23-24). In order to delude people, antichrist will display many amazing miracles. As Apostle Paul writes: “The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders”. (2 Thess. 2:9). “Being the father of lies, he will delude people’s imagination through deceit so that when they see a dead person resurrected, it will be an illusion; seeing the lame walk and the blind see - when in fact there was no curing or healing”. (Saint Cyril of Jerusalem).

All of these antichrist’s measures – his teachings and fame of a genius thinker, his false miracles and his hypocritical display of a virtuous life, will all have one purpose: to seize power over the entire world and its inhabitants. The first stage toward this aim will be become popular among the Jews. Antichrist will undertake whatever efforts necessary to make the Jews acknowledge him as the promised messiah. He will be successful in establishing a Jewish state and commence to realize the Jewish 1000 year old longing – restoration of the temple of Solomon.

All of these antichrist’s endeavours to promote himself as the true Messiah will be met with an unexpected and miraculous opposition. This will be in the form of 2 Old Testament Prophets-exposers who - by the will of God, were taken up to heaven while alive in order to descend to earth before its end, fulfill their mission and accept death. They were Prophets Enoch and Elijah. God will send them to Jerusalem in the last days of earth, so that they will display the final and miraculous warnings against the delusion that had enveloped them. For the following 3.5 years, which will be antichrist’s second period, they will reveal and condemn all his deceitfulness with unrestricted authority. Still maintaining his façade of benevolence – even to his enemies – he will be powerless to impede their sermons of condemnation, or apply any type of force against them. It’s futile to interpret the miraculous appearance of Enoch and Elijah figuratively. The Holy Gospel and Church Tradition quite definitely speaks of their real arrival on earth, 7 years before the end of the world, about their denunciatory sermons, about their martyrdom and about their resurrection and ascension into Heaven.

In the Apocalypse, we read: “And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days (or 3.5 years), clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands

standing before the God of the earth. And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner, These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophesy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire. When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them”. (Rev.11:3-7).

In the Book of Zachariah (4, 11, 12, 14), we read: “And two olive trees by it... What be these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves?... Then said he, these are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth”.

The meaning of the two “olive trees” being the Prophets Enoch and Elijah is proven by Saint Andrew of Caesarea, who bases his interpretation on the Apocalypse, which refers to them as 2 olive trees.

In the Book of Malachi (4:5), one of the Prophets is named directly: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord”. Both Saints Ephraim of Syria and John Damascene clearly affirm that the “two witnesses” that will come before the end, are the two Prophets.

Church Tradition, which is expressed in our books of Church Services, also speaks of the literal understanding of the prophesy on the appearance of Enoch and Elijah before the end, thereby nullifying any thoughts of an allegorical understanding. During Meat-Fare week, we read in the Synaxarion: “Before the 7 years, enunciates Daniel, Enoch and Elijah will come, preaching to the people not to accept him (antichrist): he will torture them to death, and will behead them”. In the Troparion during the Church service of Saint Prophet Elijah, he is referred to as “the second forerunner of Christ”. In the Greater Synaxarion read on the 20th of July, we hear that Elijah with Enoch will be Christ’s forerunners that will come to condemn the evil of antichrist and to console the faithful.

However, despite all of God’s forewarnings, because of their earthly reasoning characteristics, the majority of people will not only not recognize the artificiality in antichrist’s outward behaviour, but quite the opposite – they will surround him with rapture and glorification. “When many groups and peoples see such good deeds and power of antichrist, they will become of one mind... to proclaim him King, saying to one another: can another person be found that is so upright and truthful.”(Saint Ephraim).

The reactions from antichrist’s theatrical presentation of himself as God’s emissary, the true Messiah, will be so strong that even despite the grave condemnations by the Prophets Elijah and Enoch, the Jewish people will be the first to proclaim him their king.

Revelations speaks of antichrist’s rule in Israel in a concealed way, inviting its readers to decipher the name of the beast or the number of his name: “Here is

wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is **666**

SIX HUNDRED and SIXTY SIX

(Rev. 13:17-18)

Many expositors (interpreters) of this mysterious number have failed to give a correct explanation, as they had not established any preliminary principles of deciphering it. "In the practice of deciphering" writes Saint Andrew of Caesarea, "one can find many names, both appellative (common) and proper". (Some of the proper names that had been applied to him: Limpetic, Titan, Benedict... while the appellative ones: Evil leader, Ancient coveter, Truly bad, Unrighteous lamb etc... It is in this spirit that Protopriest M.Polski attempted to decipher "666" in his article published in the publication "Holy Land" in 1938. His explanation is that the figure "666" is called the power of gold and the power over human endeavours. The power of the beast is that power, which "seizes not only all the wealth but all your labours – it seizes your hands".

However, before we start to thinking up some forms of explanation, let us first try to establish the sole correct principle of deciphering. This must be applied in such a way so that in deciphering the number, it will at the same time be able to explain the reason as to why the holy Apostle was forced to resort to numbers and not enunciate the name of the beast clearly and openly. Thus, if we ask: why did the Apostle deemed it necessary to cipher such simple meanings as gold, or the power of gold over human endeavours, or such names as "Evil leader" etc... then all these interpretations will become superfluous. This is because as they carry no answers to this question, they make the very code frivolous and practically a senseless amusement, akin to contemporary crossword puzzles, which of course is totally incompatible with Divine inspiration it carries or the seriousness of the Holy Author.

The only serious and in-depth attempt to decipher the beast's number and explain the reason for it, was presented by a Catholic priest Fr.Sloet and published by "Revue Biblique" in 1893. His interpretation was in a form of a letter to the publishing house. He writes:

"Reverend Father. In the previous publication of the "Revue Biblique", Reverend Semery mentions the opinions expressed by G. Gode, who identifies the apocalyptic beast with the "revival of the Judean power at the end of times". In witnessing the growing power of the contemporary Jews, this opinion is certainly confirmed by modern history. If so, then antichrist will be a Jewish king.

Saint John reveals to us the "Number of his name: 666", and invites us to calculate the "number of the beast". If the meaning behind this is to deduce antichrist's name from this number, and if this deduction can be made before his coming, then it appears hardly probable that Saint John had a personal name in

mind; and if we were to apply personal names to him, we would reach a completely haphazard conclusion.

This interpretation of the beast's number also explains the practical necessity for adopting a code for him. After all, if the Saint decided to write openly that the beast or antichrist will be king of Israel, who was awaited so passionately by the Jewish people, and who in conformity with the interpretations of their teachers, before anything else – free the Jews from the Roman yoke, and then conquer all the nations to form one universal state, then such a declaration would have had a character of a strictly religious warning, but would have been perceived by the Jews as an anti-patriotic statement, evoking an explosive indignation against the author. Apart from that, an open declaration of the coming of Israel's king – irrespective of his characteristics – may have been taken by the Jews as political betrayal, because they have been carefully concealing their designs for their own king while endeavouring to convince the Romans that they have no desire to have anyone other than the Roman Caesar.

The Third Period and the final activities of antichrist will commence with him seizing power over the whole world. This will be assisted greatly by the ruinous state of the world and the severe destruction of peoples from a world war. The majority of people will see that the only guarantee left against future wars and the future peaceful flourishing of mankind, is the concentration of power in the hands of all those that glorify antichrist.

The Word of God describes antichrist's actual emergence as the world leader in the following manner: "ten kings that shall arise" (Dan.7:24) on a devastated and decimated earth, after the war. Seven of them will be "of one mind" with antichrist: "they will give their power and authority to the beast" (Rev. 17:13). The other three will defend their independence: antichrist will have to subjugate them with force (Dan. 7:8, 20, 24). As Lactantsi wrote: "When people will increase their armed forces excessively at the expense of arable farming – which is the beginning of ruin and defeat – they will ravage, consume and exhaust what they have. Then a mighty force will suddenly arise against them from a northern country. He will destroy the three of them, while the others will conclude an alliance with him, making him the leader over everyone".

According to Saint John the Goldentongue, the three kings that antichrist will "subdue" will be: Egyptian, Libyan and Abyssinian.

After his victory over the three powers and thereby elimination of any impediments on his way to world domination, Revelations depicts him in the shape of a red beast having 10 horns (i.e. having subordinated the 10 nations) and 7 heads (i.e. those leaders that have voluntarily accepted him and are fully empowered to rule their countries). "And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns". (Rev.13:1).

Revelations speaks of antichrist's world political power: "And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue and nation" (13:7). While, ordinary human force and material means will play an important part in antichrist's process of

seizing world power, the major source of his success will not lie with them. “And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power” (Dan. 8:24). He will receive his authority and power from satan: “The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority” (Rev. 13:2). It is only because of the satan’s continuous assistance that can explain antichrist’s extraordinary success and rapid seizure of total power over the world, as well as his exceptional supremacy, which no human power and authority will be able to interfere or resist. As Professor Belyaev writes: “Antichrist will function with the power of the devil and miracles, and this power is very mighty...”. Apart from this, “he will have many helpers” and also “with speedy paths of communication and methods of information, it would be possible to produce an instant upheaval throughout the whole world”.

The general acknowledgement of antichrist will be associated with the universal acceptance of him as the *sole head of all religions*. In his work “Three Conversations”, Vladimir Soloviev presents a supposition that upon securing power, antichrist will convene an Ecumenical Council, made up of representatives of all religions. He would then propose at the gathering (in Jerusalem) for everybody to unite into one flock under one shepherd. His main attention will be focused on Christians of all denominations, to whom he will offer various benefactions for having proclaimed him their pastor. Saint Ephraim writes: “He will trumpet about himself just as his predecessors touted him: he will call himself preacher and restorer of true gnosiology (knowledge of God). The unschooled Christianity will see in him a true representative and champion of the true religion, and will join him. He will promote himself as the promised Messiah. Upon meeting him, the neophytes of earthly wisdom will extol him. Seeing his glory, power, genius abilities, the broadest development of earthly facets, they will proclaim him a god and become his fellow-workers”. Incidentally, it’s very important to note that all the Holy Fathers regard the major reason for the people’s rapid and incautious enthusiasm for antichrist, was the absence of spiritual sense because they were fully immersed in a corporeal state. A spiritual sense can only be acquired and developed under the conditions of a correct spiritual lifestyle, imparted by the **true Orthodox Church**. Then, at that given moment, such people will find themselves in full spiritual armour and will be able to discern all of antichrist’s deceptions and plots. However, they will be only Orthodox Christians – **and even not all but just a small number of them, who will be leading spiritual lives according to the Church’s set of laws**. Heretics or pseudo-believers, who either have no spiritual practices in their lives, or practice them incorrectly or in a distorted form, will unavoidably become victims to antichrist’s delusion.

Antichrist will very subtly substitute the creed of God-man with a cult of Man-god, and will demand people worship him as a god. In the Holy Gospel, he is portrayed as the “son of perdition who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God” (2 Thess. 2:3-4), as “speaking great things and blasphemies”

and “to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in the heaven” (Rev. 13:5-6).

According to Apostle Paul’s predictions, antichrist will make himself god “ so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (2 Thess. 2:4). In the words of Prof.Belyaev, undoubtedly “antichrist will not have the time, the inclination or the opportunities to sit in the temple. He will only do this on especially ceremonial and important occasions, like when he announces himself as king of the world and god. In any case, there is no need for him to be in the temple constantly. Having sat on the throne once to declare himself as god, he will make a sign and issue an order that his image (statue or icon), be placed in all temples – Christian and otherwise – so that all the people may worship him as an image of god. And indeed, services to antichrist will begin in all the churches”.

This defilement of the sanctity of the Christian church and Christian faith is foretold in veiled terms through “the abomination that maketh desolate set up” in the holy place:

- a) ... “and he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week (after 3.5 years of the second period and the beginning of the third, which will be the last 3.5 years of antichrist’s activities) he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate” (Dan. 9:27).
- b) ... “and arms shall stand on his part, and they shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily sacrifice, and they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate” (Dan. 11:31).
- c) ... “and from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days” (Dan. 12;11).

In these prophetic perspectives, there is a simultaneous depiction of three events. Although these events are separated by whole centuries, they do have a deep inner affinity between themselves. In reality, the first two events foreshadow the forthcoming third one - to which the prophesy mainly applies.

- a) The First event – is the persecution of the faith by the 4th Syrian king Antiochus Epiphan. He ascended the throne after the death of his brother Seleucus 1V, during the Seleucid era, 176 years before the birth of Christ. His horrific reign and cruel persecution of the faith is mentioned in the two Books of Maccabees: “He arrogantly entered the sanctuary... and ordered that in his kingdom, everyone will be one people, and that everybody should give up their laws”... and “denounced the Sabbath and Feast days, and defiled the sanctuary and the Saints”... “And if someone doesn’t carry out the king’s directive, let him be put to death”... “arranged an abomination on the altar making it desolate”... “and the

books of the Law that they found, they tore them apart or burned them. Those who kept the Law, were put to death by the king's directive... women who had their children circumcised were killed and their infants were hanged by the neck, while their houses plundered... temples were filled with whoremongering and licentiousness from the heathens". To Christian theologians, Antiochus Epiphan is acknowledged as the most graphic representation of the approaching antichrist.

- b) The Second event – is the destruction of Jerusalem and defilement of the Temple by the Roman soldiers in the year 70 after Christ's Birth. "If Daniel's prophecy related only to Antiochus, then Jesus Christ's reiteration of the Prophet's 'abomination of desolation' (Mat. 24:15-21; Luke 21:20-24) would not have been said about an event that was to happen in the future, because the era of Antiochus Epiphan had long gone" (Prof. Belayev "About godlessness and Antichrist").

This event was recorded by the Jewish historian Joseph Flavius. He noted that in crushing the Jewish uprising, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and "brought in their emblems into the altar, and placed them facing the Eastern Gates; they then brought triumphant (heathen) sacrifices before them and with loud shouts, pronounced Titus as dictator. Thus, became the 'abomination of desolation' in the city and the altar of the city... in the Temple of Jerusalem. Now, sacrificial offerings to heathen gods had been brought by heathen hands into the Temple; from this time on, prayers in it to the true God ceased forever" (Prof. Belayev).

- c) However, the prophecy of "abomination of desolation" could pertain only partly to the destruction of Jerusalem 70AD. It mainly has in mind another approaching epoch, "when all the temples around the world will be defiled and simultaneously, the 'abomination of desolation' of the New Zion – Christ's Church – will occur throughout the world. This will happen before the end of the world – during antichrist" (Prof. Belayev). Blessed Jerome attributes all of Daniel's prophecies on "abomination of desolation" to antichrist, and only some of his characteristics to Antiochus.

In the not totally understood narrative on "abomination of desolation", the word "overspreading" appears (Dan. 9:27). A clever attempt at its interpretation was made by the renowned compiler of the Jewish grammar and Jewish –German lexicon – Gezen, who translated it with explanations. He interprets Daniel's utterances in the following manner: "And for the overspreading of abomination - despoiler". He explains his interpretation thus: "The enemy of the Church i.e. antichrist, is presented here as being carried on the wings of abominable idol, akin to the presentation of Jehovah being carried on the wings of cherubs". It's quite possible that antichrist will be transported from place to place on a winged idol, similar to a chariot or throne. It will also not be incredible if antichrist will fly through the air on a winged idol – a specially built aeroplane, in the shape of an abominable winged idol. While not applicable to this specific narration, the

last supposition was expressed many centuries before by Saint Ephraim of Syria.

In launching his world domination, antichrist will catch all humanity into satanic bondage with the aid of the same methods that satan used in tempting the Lord Himself.

1) Satan's first temptation was expressed in his offer to the Lord to change stones into bread (Mat.4:3). At first glance this may seem "fully in accord with the ultimate aims of the Son of God's ministry", because what could there be against "the wilderness blooming like the fields", so that hunger, poverty, wants and all painful labours through the sweat on the face in securing bread (which appeared as a result of the first curse of the ground as punishment for man's sin (Genesis 3:17-19), finally ending? However, the entire sin and cunning of this proposal consisted of it being offered as the beginning instead of as the conclusion i.e. to invite full material abundance in the visible world, and not in the capacity as the result and expression of the inner domain of truth" (Trench). The improvement – solely in the standard of living without an inductive moral improvement of the people themselves, would appear as a triumph of evil. This is because a satiated wellbeing would consolidate the hopeless corporeal condition of the participant, paralyzing any chance of moral rectification and spiritual improvement. Consequently, Christ answered satan: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Mat. 4:4). In this response, the Lord doesn't ignore the physical needs of man but places them on a secondary level after spiritual needs. The Gospel only censures the efforts to gratify the flesh with total oblivion of God – censures the purpose to make people materially happier while not making them morally improved. The Lord warns us: "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of life" (Luke 21:34), because in the last instance, we lose our moral freedom, become slaves to our ugly desires and destroy our soul with eternal death.

It is this type of "spiritual" slavery that the contemporary revolutionary world leaders are leading the people – "New World Order". Their teachings and calls are clothed in lofty words about equality and brotherhood, but in reality they are attempting to entice people toward establishing material wellbeing only by leading them away from every noble – moral and religious – aspiration. When material welfare becomes the sole value in a person's life, he will undoubtedly become a slave to the provider of its source. Purely materialistic upbringing of people will provide antichrist with unlimited power, because all material sources will be under his full control. He will only distribute this largesse generously to his followers and agents. And a person, untrained in abstention and lacking in spiritual and ethical stoicism, will be forced to submit to his will: "He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy and sell

except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name” (Rev. 13:16-17).

2) Satan’s second temptation manifested itself when he took Christ into the holy city and set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said: “If You are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over You, in their hands they shall bear You up, Lest you dash Your foot against a stone’” (Mat. 4:5-6). The interpretation of the devil’s offer is this: throw Yourself down and have a multitude of Angels surround and carry You before the astonished people, so that upon witnessing this sign they will immediately acknowledge You as the Son of God. This temptation by the devil, under the specious concern about arousing the people’s faith in the Divine worthiness of the Saviour, was in fact nothing but a complete rejection of Christ’s Cross – rejection of Redemption. This was a proposal for Christ to become a leader, to allure the people with an empty effect that didn’t require any moral deeds and selflessness.

Similar demands for signs from the Lord were heard on a number of occasions from the Pharisees: “Then the Pharisees came out and began to dispute with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven” (Mark 8:11). A desire to see signs was also voiced by the people. Thus, after the miraculous multiplication of 5 breads and the satiation of the gathered multitude of 5000 people (not counting women and children), the witnesses who partook of this phenomenal meal were saying to the Lord: “What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do? Our fathers ate the manna in the desert” (John 6:30-31). It wasn’t sufficient for them to see the miraculous increase of breads in our Saviour’s hands: it occurred in silence, with holy humility, which permeated all of God-man’s behaviour. What they needed was a spectacle – they needed an effect. They needed the heavens to become covered with empty clouds, so that thunder would rumble and lightning flashed – so that the breads fell from thin air” (Bishop Ignatius Branchaninov).

The demand from the Son of God for this type of sign was a grave sin, as it emanated from human intellect that rejected any type of elevated spiritual purpose for the sake of outward effect. Upon hearing this insolent and blasphemous demand for a sign, the Lord sighed deeply and said: “”Why does this generation seek a sign? Assuredly, I say to you, no sign shall be given this generation” (Mark 8: 12-13). This demand for a sign from heaven was a demand for a sign that is characteristic of satan’s miracles. Signs from heaven couldn’t have any special authenticity, because why would only they be regarded as testimony that they are from God? From the Word of God, it appears as the opposite, because it narrates that through the devils actions, fire rained down from heaven and incinerated the sheep and servants of righteous Job (Job 1:16). Apparently, this fire originated in the air, just like lightning does. Simon the sorcerer used satan’s power to amaze unseeing people with his

miracles, who viewed it as the might of God (Acts 8:10). Simon especially brought utter amazement to a multitude of heathen Romans, when in declaring himself god and announcing that his intention was to ascend into the heavens, suddenly began to rise into the air: this is chronicled by Blessed Simeon Mataphras, who had taken citations of witness about this from the most ancient of Christian writers. Pinetti, who lived at the end of the 18th century, also performed similar miracles. Others have performed and continue to perform these signs (Bhp. Ignatius).

Those miracles that Christ refused to perform, will be done by antichrist: he will give signs from heaven i.e. signs in the air, which is satan's chief domain (Saint Ephraim of Syria). Saint John the Theologian writes that antichrist will carry out great works, "He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men" (Rev. 13:13). "The Gospel indicates that as satan's greatest sign, and the place of this sign – air. It will be a magnificent and frightening spectacle. More than on anything else, it will act on the sense of sight, enthralling and deceiving it" (Bhp. Ignatius).

Saint Simeon the new Theologian warns that "Look at the sky very rarely for fear of the cunning spirits in the sky, for which they are called aerial spirits as they produce many and different enticements in the air". Apostle Paul calls satan "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephes. 2:2). Those beguiled by the demons' signs and heed them, are in danger of inevitable downfall. "All of the demons' signs have such attributes, that even a negligible interest to them will be dangerous: from such a single attention, permitted even without any empathy to the appearance, may implant the most harmful impression, which would subject the person to acute temptations" (Bhp. Ignatius). Antichrist's signs, performed by satan's power, will produce irresistible effect on the viewer.

"People will not comprehend that his miracles have no noble or judicious goal; no definitive meaning; they are devoid of truth and are filled with lies; that they are – monstrous, all-evil, totally heinous, abounding in theatrics, increasing in power to amaze, bring into puzzlement and self-obliviousness, to beguile, dupe, and to entice through the allure of an extravagant, empty and senseless effect" (Bhp. Ignatius).

Because of the people's blindness and triumph of their worldly intellect, in witnessing these miracles they will immediately accept satan's actions as being great manifestation of God's power, and accept antichrist as god. "Antichrist will bring about fear through thunder and his wonder of miracles; he will gratify their reckless curiosity and gross ignorance; satisfy their vanity, human pride, earthly wisdom, superstition and bring human learning into confusion. Every person, governed by the force of their fallen nature and alienated from God's controlling light, will be carried away in their subjugation to the seducer" (Bhp. Ignatius).

3) Satan's third temptation consisted of having taken Christ atop a high mountain; he showed Him all the kingdoms and their glory and said: "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me" (Mat. 4:8-9). Satan's dominion over earthly kingdoms has been affirmed on a number of occasions by Christ Himself. The Lord Himself refers to satan as the "prince of this world", while Saint John the Theologian writes in Revelations that satan gives he who serves him: "his power, his throne, and great authority" (8:2). Whereas the Lord Jesus Christ came to affirm His authority on a voluntary moral deed and a son's obedience to a Father, Satan's power is consolidated on deception, seduction and coercion. And what Christ had rejected, antichrist will realize in full measure. As he himself will receive his total power over the world from satan for his total submission to him, Antichrist will also reward others with this power according to the extent of their obedience and service to satan's will.

Having achieved world domination, he will change his behaviour sharply. Instead of a hypocritical and cautious attitude toward people; instead of a theatrical goodwill toward his opponents, he will openly emerge as a merciless persecutor of all those Christians who had refused to bow to him as God. Then, "It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them) (Rev. 13 6-7) and he will "wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws" (Dan. 7:25). Open Christian church services will cease. "Antichrist and his followers" writes Prof. Belyaev, "will commence to destroy books of the Holy Gospel; will oppress and torture preachers of God's Word and those who perform Christian Services; will watch so the Eucharist is not, and the Eucharist anywhere. Despite this, the preaching of God's Word will not be silenced, and the Services will not cease, and the Eucharist will be performed. However, this will take place, but **only in secret places, akin to the first Christian era**".

Antichrist will have an active helper in persecuting Christians and enforcing their worship of him like a god. By his cruelty and mercilessness, this assistant antichrist is named the "second beast" in the Gospel. As Saint John writes: "Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast... and he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those... to make an image to the beast... he was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed" (Rev. 13:11-12, 14-15). "Frightening ordeals will befall God's saints: slyness, hypocrisy and miracles of the persecutors will intensify so as to beguile and seduce them. Refined, invented insidious methods of persecution and repression, and unlimited power of the torturer – all will place them in the most arduous situation; their small

number before all humanity will appear as being insignificant... general contempt, hatred, slander, oppression, violent death will be their lot”.

“Antichrist’s opponents will be regarded as agitators, enemies of social order and will be subject to overt and covert persecution – subject to torture and execution” (Bishop Ignatius Branchaninov)

Antichrist’s first victims will be his exposers – Saints Prophets Enoch and Elijah: “When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them and kill them. And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, ‘Come up here.’ And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them. In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake seven thousand people were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven” (Rev, 11:7-13).

After the two Prophets are put to death, an astonishing event will occur, which can only be ascribed to the Prophets’ sermons, their resurrection and ascension to heaven – the conversion to Christ of a substantial number of contemporary Judeans that were committed to antichrist. Saint Theophylactus has this to say about the phenomenon: “Elijah will come... like a forerunner of the Second Coming and return to Christ all the Jews that will be obedient, as though bringing back to their heritage all those that have fallen away from Him”.

The basis for these assertions can be found in the following prophetic words of the Holy Scripture:

- a) “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse” (Mal. 4:5-6).
- b) “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again stay upon him that smote them; but shall stay upon the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God” (Isaiah 10:20-21).
- c) “And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is

in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon” (Zach. 12:10-11).

- d) “For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (Rom. 11:24-25).

In attempting to explain allegorically the prophesy concerning the appearance of Prophets Elijah and Enoch, Vladimir Soloviev had unwittingly made mistakes here, as well as in his explanation of the closely related appearance of the Prophets with the conversion of the remnants of Israel. In his opinion, the Jews realizing that the individual they have accepted as their Messiah was not circumcised, would become disappointed and accept Christianity. If this premise about antichrist’s non-circumcision turned out to be correct, then it would have prompted the fanatical Jews to just walk away from him and await another more suitable candidate for the role of Messiah. But it couldn’t have been the cause of their disenchantment in their religious-national ideology and then embracing the Christian faith. The Judeans had many unsuccessful pretenders to the Messianic throne, who headed rebellious movements against Rome. However, their subsequent disappointment in them didn’t lead the Jews to believe in the genuineness of Christianity. Vladimir Soloviev’s explanation must be seen as being unsuccessful. Only the Holy Gospel’s testimony about the miraculous appearance of the Prophets Elijah and Enoch, about their sermons and condemnation of antichrist, about their martyrs’ death and resurrection, can fully explain the miraculous conversion of Israel’s remnants to Christ in antichrist’s era.

This conversion of the Jews to Christ will elicit a potent anger against Christians. “For then there will be great tribulation” for them, “such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Mat. 24:15-21). “It was granted to him (antichrist) to make war with the saints (Christians) and to overcome them (Rev. 13:7).

Salvation for the small remainder of the faithful will be made possible because of antichrist’s short-term reign. “And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened” (Mat. 24:22).

Antichrist’s world domination will continue for three and a half years. From the date of cessation of daily sacrifices (commencement of the 3rd period of antichrist’s reign with the opening of his world monarchy) and the establishment of “abomination that maketh desolate”, 1290 days will elapse

(Dan, 127-11). Similar time-span of antichrist's reign is mentioned in Revelations: "and he was given authority to continue for 42 months" (13:5). No human power will be able to withstand antichrist. Only the Lord Himself will conquer him upon His Second Coming. Then the dread Judgment of the Lord will take place and the end of our world (Mat.24:30-31; 15:31-46; Rev. 20:11-15; 21:1-8). "Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of him who sat on a horse" (Rev. 19:20-21). "The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever (Rev. 20:10).

The biggest tragedy of the era preceding antichrist's attainment of world domination will be the people's exceptional spiritual blindness. Spiritual mentality, i.e. a mind that can clearly see the light of Truth, will become a rare attribute. Being controlled by corporeal reasoning, humanity will not only fail to recognize in him their insidious enemy, but quite the opposite – acknowledge him as their benefactor. "Many will believe in him" said one blessed monk, "and will begin to glorify him as a strong god". **"Those who always have God within them... will see the truth with a pure faith, and will recognize him (antichrist).** Everybody that has spiritual eyes and mind from God – will treat the appearance of the torturer judiciously. Those whose minds are perpetually involved in physical matters and love the corporeal – will not comprehend this, as they are essentially devoted to earthly affairs. Not having the true faith, when they will hear the word (warning about antichrist), the speaker will be loathed by them" (George the Recluse and Saint Ephraim of Syria). The constant caution to us comes from Christ's words: "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly" (Luke 21:34). This is because excessive immersion in material interests and cares in life, promotes the development of earthly reasoning, which will always be opposed to God's teachings and revelations.

In order to accumulate spiritual intellect, first there must be obedience to the Wisdom of the Ecumenical Orthodox Church. Every personal interpretation has to be checked with the Word of God and Patristic teachings. "It's necessary, extremely necessary to pay attention to the Word of God and to the harmful events and attitudes of our times, which are being justified, and we will never go astray" (Bhp. Ignatius Branchaninov). "Do not cease – says Saint Ephraim of Syria – to experience the Holy Gospel, to ask your Mother Church: examine and probe as to the signs of the Bridegroom's coming. Do not cease to inquire until you find out precisely, do not cease to hasten for help to those that know it precisely". All the Holy Fathers recommend that the Holy Scripture be our

constant guide. As well, the guidance of those who too are governed by the word of God and works of the Holy Fathers is beneficial. This guidance from the Church's Wisdom will preserve the believer from indulging in the widely spread false teachings and viewpoints. The absence of such guidance and a developing habit of always following public opinion will inevitably bring you to a false path. Aside from this, "even if a person did decide to reject the established public outlook, to go against the generally accepted standpoint, he would unfailingly be subjected to the following persuasion: he would certainly hear: 'Surely you alone cannot be correct and everybody else, or the majority of people, is wrong?' Only to those that are guided by the Holy Scripture, will such a question carry no weight. The Scripture will tell him that not the majority, but only a **few** will walk the narrow path, because during earth's last days, this path will be extremely depleted" (Bhp.Ignatius). The Holy Scripture will instill fortitude into him: he will not be daunted by the fact that the number of true believers will turn out to be a small island in the middle of a limitless ocean of falsehood and evil. He will recall Christ's covenant: "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

The other calamity of antichrist's epoch will be that in that period, it will be become impossible to have any organized opposition to his authority. Afterward, "do not endeavour to halt him with your feeble hand. Withdraw, protect yourself from him; and that will be sufficient from you" (Bhp.Ignatius). "Be content with the fact that an opportunity to be saved will be granted to those who wish to be saved" advises Elder Isaiah. Consequently, **we must struggle with the approaching reign of darkness now, while the opportunity to do so has not been taken away from us. Every evasion from this battle now – even the very smallest insignificant compromise with evil made today for the sake of co-existing with it, will only increase the difficulty of battle with it tomorrow.** "I must work the works of Him who sent me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work" (John 9:4).

Night – is the impending satanic reign of spiritual darkness, which is preparing to engulf all of humanity. Then, the life of the believers will be so calamitous that they – despite their sinful state and even ignoring fear of the forthcoming Judgment Day, will cry out: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20).