

# THE PERFECTION OF ALL

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE END OF THE AGE AND THE SECOND COMING OF THE LORD

Divine Revelation does not only speak of the creation from nothingness of the world but **also** about the End, towards which the whole visible Creation is guided according to the Plan of the All-wise Creator. This End is due to the mortality which is within the visible world. **It will occur according to the Teachings that were** foretold by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and is characterised as “...*the End of the Age*.”<sup>1</sup> It will **take place simultaneously** with the Second Coming of the Lord, followed by the Universal Judgement and separation of the just from the sinners.<sup>2</sup> This Second Coming of the Lord is referred to in Holy Scripture as “*the appearance of the Lord*,” “*the appearance of the glory of the Saviour*,” “*the Day of the Son of Man*” and will be contrary to His first appearance when He came as a humble Servant. It will occur in all His Divine Glory and Power and He will be accompanied by countless Angels.<sup>3</sup> This event was foretold by the Lord **Himself as well as** by all the Holy Prophets and Apostles. Hence the awaiting of His Coming is a fundamental Doctrine of the Orthodox Christian Faith, taught not only by Holy Scripture and Apostolic Tradition but by all the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church and incorporated in the different Creeds right from the beginning of the Christian Era. Although this Event will take place, **the time** is unknown. In the New Testament we find some indications **of events that** will occur before the Second Coming, **such** as the preaching of the Holy Gospel throughout the entire world, the return of the Jews to Christ, as well as the long period of the **Christ’s reign for a period of a thousand years**. **After these events there will be** the final battle between Christ and His Church and the Antichrist, **his false prophet and the Beast**.(Armagedon) **The Antichrist will** be defeated and Christ **will appear** as a “*Thief in the night*” and **will shine** as “*the lightning*”<sup>4</sup> on the **Great Day of His Second Coming**.

#### 1. The Doctrine of the End of the Age according to Holy Scripture

The assurance of the End of the Age **is derived** from the mortality of Creation, which falls under the law of unpreventable mortality. Holy Scripture stresses the fact that “...*the form of this world is passing away*.”<sup>5</sup> The term “*form*” **implies** that all “...*the things of this present world have appearance and have nothing permanent or secure*.”<sup>6</sup> **At other times** it proclaims that “...*the End of all things is at hand*...”<sup>7</sup> and that “...*the Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burnt up*.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Matth. 13:39, 40, 49; 24:3; 28:20.

<sup>2</sup> Frangopoulos, *Christian Faith*, pp. 231-232. Mitsopoulos, *Themata*, pp. 95, 373. Labadarios, *Sermons*, v. 1, pp. 34-35.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Thess. 1:7.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 17:24.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinth. 7:31.

<sup>6</sup> St. Ecumenius, *To 1 Corinthians*, in Migne, P.G., 118, 740.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Peter 4:7.

<sup>8</sup> 2 Peter 3:10.

The End of this present Age was foretold by Holy Scripture. It will take place suddenly and unexpectedly with the Second Coming and appearance of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who will come to “...judge the living and the dead...”<sup>9</sup> on the Day **that is referred to** by Holy Scripture as the “last Day,”<sup>10</sup> “the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ,”<sup>11</sup> “the Day,”<sup>12</sup> “the Day of the Lord Jesus,”<sup>13</sup> “the Day of Christ,”<sup>14</sup> “the Day of Judgement”<sup>15</sup> and “the Day of the Son of Man.”<sup>16</sup> Because this Coming of the Lord will be glorious and visible to everyone **throughout the world**, it is called His “Coming,”<sup>17</sup> “Appearing,”<sup>18</sup> “when His glory is revealed,”<sup>19</sup> etc.

The Coming of the Lord is frequently mentioned in the Old Testament. The Prophets **foretold** that “...the Lord will come as fire and His chariots as a storm to render His vengeance with wrath, and His rebuke with a flame of fire. For with the fire of the Lord all the earth shall be judged, and all flesh with His sword: many shall be slain by the Lord.”<sup>20</sup> They **spoke of** the “...great and glorious Day of the Lord...”<sup>21</sup> “...for the great Day of the Lord is near, it is near, and greatly hastens; the sound of the Day of the Lord is made bitter and harsh. A mighty Day of wrath is that Day, a Day of affliction and distress, a Day of desolation and destruction, a Day of gloominess and darkness, a Day of cloud and vapour, a Day of the trumpet and cry against the strong cities, and against the high towers. And I will greatly afflict the men, and they shall walk as blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord; therefore He shall pour out their blood as dust, and their flesh as dung. And their silver and their gold shall in nowise be able to rescue them in the Day of the Lord’s wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy; for He will bring a speedy destruction on all them that inhabit the land.”<sup>22</sup>

“For, behold, a Day comes burning as an oven, and it shall consume them; and all the aliens, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the Day that is coming shall set them on fire, said the Lord Almighty, and there shall not be left of them root or branch.”<sup>23</sup>

“I beheld until the thrones were set, and the Ancient of Days sat; and His raiment was white as snow, and the hair of His head as pure wool: His throne was a flame of fire, and His wheels burning fire. A stream of fire rushed forth before Him: thousand thousands ministered to Him, and ten thousands of myriads attended upon Him: the Judgement sat, and the books were opened. I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which that horn spoke, until the wild beast was slain and

<sup>9</sup> 2 Tim. 4:1.

<sup>10</sup> John 6:39; 11:24; 12:48.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinth. 1:8; 5:5.

<sup>12</sup> 1 Corinth. 3:13.

<sup>13</sup> 1 Corinth. 5:5.

<sup>14</sup> Phil. 1:10.

<sup>15</sup> 1 John 4:17.

<sup>16</sup> Luke 17:24. Cf. St. Symeon, *Euriskomena*, Homily LVII, pp. 287-301.

<sup>17</sup> Matth. 24:3. 2 Thess. 2:8.

<sup>18</sup> 1 Tim. 6:14. 2 Tim. 4:1. Tit. 2:13.

<sup>19</sup> 1 Peter 4:13.

<sup>20</sup> Is. 66:15-16

<sup>21</sup> Joel 2:31.

<sup>22</sup> Zeph. 1:14-18.

<sup>23</sup> Mal. 4:1.

*destroyed, and his body given to be burnt with fire. And the dominion of the rest of the wild beasts was taken away; but a prolonging of life was given them for certain times. I beheld in the night vision, and, lo, one coming with the clouds of Heaven as the Son of man, and He came on to the Ancient of Days, and was brought near to Him. And to Him was given the dominion, and the honour, and the Kingdom; and all nations, tribes, and languages, shall serve Him: His Dominion is an Everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His Kingdom shall not be destroyed.”<sup>24</sup>*

The prophecies of the Old Testament **concerning** Christ’s Coming was **initially** fulfilled with His first Coming, the Incarnation of the Word of God and His appearance in the form of a servant and habitation amongst men. During this period the Lord **did not come** “...to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be Saved.”<sup>25</sup> The Judgement and **Condemnation of men is due to their** the Salvation **that our Lord and Saviour offers** to the **entire** world. **Therefore,** “...he who believes in Him is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the Name of the Only Begotten Son of God.”<sup>26</sup>

Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, condemned Satan, the ruler of this world, who tempted the Lord in the desert but who was defeated.<sup>27</sup> Thus Christ entered into the “...strong man’s house...” **having** “... first (**bound**) the strong man...” **before plundering** “... his house.”<sup>28</sup> **Furthermore,** before His sufferings, our Lord **warned us** that “...the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me.”<sup>29</sup> Christ explained that Satan was **already** “judged”<sup>30</sup> and “cast out”<sup>31</sup> **from Heaven,** **although his authority had** received a deadly blow **due to the Sacrifice of** the crucified Lord, it was not **yet** completely **destroyed.** **The fulfillment of the first Appearance of Christ and the Judgement of the works of men as well as the complete abolishment of the devil’s works will take place at the Second Coming** of the Lord, when He will come “...in His glory, and all the Holy Angels with Him.”<sup>32</sup> **With the “flame of fire”** He will **punish** **take** **revenge** those who did not know God and **who** did not obey His Gospel<sup>33</sup> “...because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be Saved.”<sup>34</sup>

**Since the time of His Sermon on the Mount** our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, **referred to His Second Coming**<sup>35</sup> by very clearly stating that “...in that Day ... many will say to (Him) ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy Name, cast out demons in Thy Name, and done many wonders in Thy Name?’” And He warned us that He “...will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”<sup>36</sup> Then in the Lord’s Prayer, He **advised** every disciple **to**

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<sup>24</sup> Daniel 7:9-14.

<sup>25</sup> John 3:17.

<sup>26</sup> John 3:18.

<sup>27</sup> Matth. 4:1-11. Mark 1:12-13. Luke 4:1-13.

<sup>28</sup> Matth. 12:29.

<sup>29</sup> John 14:30.

<sup>30</sup> John 16:11.

<sup>31</sup> John 12:31.

<sup>32</sup> Matth. 25:31.

<sup>33</sup> Daniel 7:9, 10.

<sup>34</sup> 2 Thess. 2:8.

<sup>35</sup> Matth. 5:1-7:29.

<sup>36</sup> Matth. 7:22-23.

address all petitions to our Heavenly Father, in the expectation that “...*Thy Kingdom come.*” Therefore the prayers of the first Christian Community were based on the sayings: “*Even so, come, Lord Jesus...*”<sup>37</sup> and “...*may Grace come, and may this world pass away. Hosanna to the God of David. If anyone is Holy, let him come; if anyone is not, let him repent. Maranatha! Amen.*”<sup>38</sup>

The Lord referred to the prophesy of Daniel,<sup>39</sup> which refers to His glorious Second Coming. He assured that after the tribulations of the world, all nations “...*will see the Son of Man sitting at the right Hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of Heaven...*”<sup>40</sup> and “...*all the Angels...*”<sup>41</sup> will accompany Him as witnesses of the Universal Judgement. “*Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the Sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And His Angels with a great sound of trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*”<sup>42</sup> Thus the Lord repeatedly assured us that He will appear again in all His Glory and Power, visible to the sight of all, even to sinners, manifesting the Majesty of His Kingship. “*Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him.*”<sup>43</sup> To manifest this Royal Majesty our Lord compared Himself to “...*a certain nobleman who went into a far country to receive for himself a Kingdom and to return.*”<sup>44</sup> Referring to the Judgement that will follow His Second Coming, He revealed that He will separate the just from the sinners, just “...*as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.*”<sup>45</sup> He also assured us that He “...*will send out His Angels, and they will gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend, and those who practise lawlessness and will cast them into the furnace of fire.*”<sup>46</sup> When teaching His Disciples and the Jews concerning His Second Coming, He used the analogy of the dragnet, which “...*was cast into the sea...*” and gathered “...*some of every kind, which when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels. But threw the bad away.*”<sup>47</sup> In the fourth Holy Gospel Christ referring to the faithfulness of St John the Evangelist, assured St Peter that: “*If I Will that he remains until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me.*”<sup>48</sup> Elsewhere, Christ proclaimed that the Father “...*has given Him Authority to execute Judgement ... because He is the Son of Man...*”<sup>49</sup> whereas, on the contrary, He assured that “... *the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His Voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who*

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<sup>37</sup> Rev. 22:20.

<sup>38</sup> *Didache*, 10, 6, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 155.

<sup>39</sup> Daniel 7:9-14.

<sup>40</sup> Mark 14:62.

<sup>41</sup> Matth. 25:31.

<sup>42</sup> Matth. 24:29-31.

<sup>43</sup> Rev. 1:7.

<sup>44</sup> Luke 19:12.

<sup>45</sup> Matth. 25:32.

<sup>46</sup> Matth. 13:41-42.

<sup>47</sup> Matth. 13:47-48.

<sup>48</sup> John 21:22.

<sup>49</sup> John 5:27

have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, he taught that the Will of God the Father is “...that of all He has given...” to the Son “...should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last Day...”<sup>51</sup> and “...everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life.”<sup>52</sup>

In addition the two chapters in **the Holy Gospel of St Matthew**<sup>53</sup> refer to the events of the **future during** the last Days to come and which will take place before the Second Coming. They also refer to the preparation and watchfulness **that** one should have **in order** to receive the Lord as the Heavenly Bridegroom Who will **suddenly** arrive “...at an hour you do not expect,”<sup>54</sup> so as to be able to enter the Wedding Festival with Him in His Kingdom. Nevertheless, in all the promises and prophecies concerning the Second Coming of the Lord, we have one unchangeable Truth: **That Christ will come as King of the Heavenly Kingdom vested with all His Glory.**

The Lord made this **declaration** when He was in the form of a Servant dwelling among us and even after His glorious Ascension into Heaven, the fulfillment of His Prophecies concerning the catastrophe of Jerusalem and the falling of the world of idolatry. Each one of these manifestations of the Power and Glory of our Lord, consist of prophetic words and prefigurations of His Second Coming

In all the writings of the Holy Apostles, they urged the faithful to have their hope in and to await the Second Coming of the Lord. He who renounces this Truth **uproots** the whole structure of Apostolic Theology.

St Peter addressing the Jews “...in the porch which is called Solomon’s...”<sup>55</sup> proclaimed that, according to the Eternal Plan of God, “...Heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, **that** which God has spoken by the mouth of all His Holy Prophets since the world began...”<sup>56</sup> and which will follow the Repentance of Israel.<sup>57</sup> In this case the Second Coming of Christ is combined with the instruction of repentance of Israel, whereas elsewhere St Peter projected it as joy “...to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.”<sup>58</sup> St Peter in his 2<sup>nd</sup> Epistle **spoke of the** hope and promises urging the faithful: “That you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the Holy Prophets, and of the commandment of us, the Apostles of the Lord and Saviour, knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.’ For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word are reserved for fire until the Day of Judgement and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, do not forget this one

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<sup>50</sup> John 5:28-29.

<sup>51</sup> John 6:39.

<sup>52</sup> John 6:40.

<sup>53</sup> Matth. 24 and 25.

<sup>54</sup> Matth. 24:44.

<sup>55</sup> Acts 3:11.

<sup>56</sup> Acts 3:21.

<sup>57</sup> Acts 3:11-26.

<sup>58</sup> 1 Peter 4:13.

*thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burnt up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, and looking for and hastening the coming of the Day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless.”<sup>59</sup>*

St Paul repeatedly projected to the faithful that “...*the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ...*” is the Day “...*waiting for the revelation...*” of the Lord<sup>60</sup> Who, when He comes, “...*will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts.*”<sup>61</sup>

This Day of Christ’s Coming is desirable for every Orthodox Christian because “...*when Christ Who is our Life appears...*” we “...*also will appear with Him in glory...*”<sup>62</sup> enjoying “...*the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the Righteous Judge, will give to all who have loved His appearing.. on that Day.*”<sup>63</sup> “*For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of an Archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.*”<sup>64</sup> Meeting the Lord Who will come from the Heavens we will **be** inseparable from Him, living with Him for all Eternity.

Regardless of how desirable the Day of the Lord is, it will be frightful and catastrophic for “...*those who did not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ...*” because “...*these shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the Presence of the Lord and from the Glory of His Power.*”<sup>65</sup> Hence St Paul stressed the obligation and the need of the faithful to “...*establish their hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His Saints.*”<sup>66</sup>

St Peter **speaking of** “...*times of refreshing...*”<sup>67</sup> **did** not expressed a different **opinion** of that which St Paul assured saying that “...*the Lord will appear a second*

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<sup>59</sup> 2 Peter 3:2-14.

<sup>60</sup> 1 Corinth. 1:7.

<sup>61</sup> 1 Corinth. 4:5.

<sup>62</sup> Col. 3:4.

<sup>63</sup> 2 Tim. 4:8.

<sup>64</sup> 1 Thess. 4:15-17.

<sup>65</sup> 2 Thess. 1:8, 9.

<sup>66</sup> 1 Thess. 3:13.

<sup>67</sup> Acts 3:19.

time, apart from sin, for salvation.”<sup>68</sup> St Jude wrote that the Lord is coming “...to execute Judgement on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.”<sup>69</sup> St James encouraging the faithful urged them to: “Establish their hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.” “Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!”<sup>70</sup> St John also urged to “...abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming...”<sup>71</sup> and in the book of Revelation he proclaimed that “...every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth.”<sup>72</sup>

The essential part of the prophetic promise and hope, which refers to the Second Coming of Christ, is the agreement of all the voices of Prophets and Apostles.

Concluding the Apostolic testimonies we refer to the assurance given by the Holy Angels on the Day of Christ’s Ascension into Heaven: “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”<sup>73</sup>

## 2. The Doctrine of the End of the Age According to Holy Tradition

In the *Didache* we read: “Watch over your life: ‘do not let your lamps go out, and do not be unprepared, but be ready, for you do not know the hour when our Lord is coming.’<sup>74</sup> Gather together frequently, seeking the things that benefit your souls, for all the time you have believed will be of no use to you if you are not found perfect in the last time. For in the last Days the false prophets and corrupters will abound, and the sheep will be turned into wolves, and love will be turned into hate. For as lawlessness increases, they will hate and persecute and betray one another.<sup>75</sup> And then the deceiver of the world will appear as a son of God and ‘will perform signs and wonders,’<sup>76</sup> and the earth will be delivered into his hands, and he will commit abominations the likes of which have never happened before. Then all humankind will come to the fiery test, and ‘many will fall away’ and perish; but ‘those who Endure’ in their faith ‘will be saved’<sup>77</sup> by the accursed one himself.<sup>78</sup> And ‘then there will appear the signs’<sup>79</sup> of the truth: first the sign of an opening in heaven, then the sign of the sound of a trumpet,<sup>80</sup> and third, the resurrection of the dead – but not of all; rather, as it has been said, ‘The Lord will come, and all his saints with him.’<sup>81</sup> Then the world ‘will see the Lord coming upon the clouds of heaven.’<sup>82,83</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Heb. 9:28.

<sup>69</sup> Jude 15.

<sup>70</sup> James 4:8, 9.

<sup>71</sup> 1 John 2:28.

<sup>72</sup> Rev. 1:7.

<sup>73</sup> Acts 1:11.

<sup>74</sup> Mark 13:35, 37. Matth. 24:42, 44. Luke 12:35, 40.

<sup>75</sup> Matth. 24:10-12.

<sup>76</sup> Mark 13:22.

<sup>77</sup> Matth. 24:10, 13.

<sup>78</sup> Gal. 3:13

<sup>79</sup> Matth. 24:30.

<sup>80</sup> Matth. 24:31. 1 Corinth. 15:52. 1 Thess. 4:12.

<sup>81</sup> Zech. 14:5. 1 Thess. 3:13.

<sup>82</sup> Matth. 24:30.

St Clement of Rome in his 2<sup>nd</sup> Letter to the Corinthians assured that “...*the Lord said, ‘I am coming to gather together all the nations, tribes, and languages.*”<sup>84</sup> Now by this He means the Day of His appearing, when He will come and redeem us, each according to His deeds. And the unbelievers ‘will see His glory’<sup>85</sup> and might, and they will be astonished when they see that the Kingdom of the world belongs to Jesus, saying, ‘Woe to us, because it was you’<sup>86</sup>, and we did not realize it, nor did we believe; and we did not obey the elders when they spoke to us about our salvation’. And ‘their worm will not die and their fire will not be quenched, and they will be a spectacle for all flesh.’<sup>87</sup> He means that Day of Judgement when people will see those among us who lived ungodly lives and perverted the commandments of Jesus Christ. But the righteous, having done good and Endured torments and hated the pleasures of the soul, when they see how those who have gone astray and denied Jesus by their words or by their actions are being punished with dreadful torments in unquenchable fire, will give glory to their God as they say, ‘There will be hope for the one who has served God with his whole heart.’<sup>88</sup>

St Hippolytus assured that “...*they are two appearances of the Lord, one is the first which was dishonourable because He was humiliated.*” The second appearance “...*was preached in glory as coming from heaven with the power of the angels and the fatherly glory.*”<sup>89</sup>

St Cyril of Jerusalem proclaimed that the Lord “...*is coming at the End of this world with glory during the last Day.*” The “...*second from the previous much beauty...*” will not be “...*humbled...*” as the first but “...*glorious.*” Because “...*in the previous He suffered the humiliation of the Cross...*” in “...*the second He is coming accompanied and glorified by an army of Angels; He is coming not to be judged, but to judge those who judged Him.*” “*He is coming upon the clouds of heaven and angelic trumpets will then sound...*” and not only glorious, but and “...*the descent of the Master will be frightful.*”<sup>90</sup>

Finally, St John of Damascus emphasised that the Lord “...*is coming from heaven, as the Holy Apostles saw Him ascending into Heaven, perfect God and perfect Man with glory and power.*”<sup>91</sup>

### 3. Unknown the Time of the Second Coming

The Second Coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the most certain event which will take place. But the time of His Coming remains

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<sup>83</sup> *Didache*, 16, 1-8, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 158.

<sup>84</sup> Is. 66:18.

<sup>85</sup> Is. 66:18.

<sup>86</sup> John 8:24, 28; 13:19.

<sup>87</sup> Is. 66:24. Cf. Mark 9:48.

<sup>88</sup> St. Clement of Rome, 2<sup>nd</sup> *Corinthians*, 17:4-7, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 77.

<sup>89</sup> St. Hippolytus, *About Christ and Anti-Christ*, XLIV, in *B*, v. 6, p. 211.

<sup>90</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*, XV, §§ 1, 2, 9, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 869.

<sup>91</sup> St. John of Damascus, *Catechesis*, IV, 26, in Migne, *P.G.*, 94, 1217. Mogilas, in Karmeris, *The dogmatics*, v. II, p. 619.

unknown.<sup>92</sup> Although our Lord repeatedly was asked about the time of His Coming by the Holy Apostles, He sated that *“It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.”*<sup>93</sup> Christ as a perfect Man ignores the time, as He proclaimed saying: *“But of that Day and hour no one knows, not even the Angels of Heaven, but My Father only.”*<sup>94</sup>

St Paul presented this truth of Christ’s Coming saying: *“For you yourselves know perfectly that the Day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.”*<sup>95</sup> St Peter also used this example saying: *“But the Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.”*<sup>96</sup> This example of the “thief” was used by the Lord, who instructed His Disciples to be watchful, because as the owner of the house does not know *“...what hour the thief would come...”*<sup>97</sup> likewise and the disciples and all the faithful ignore *“...what hour the Lord is coming.”*<sup>98</sup> Both Holy Apostles draw the attention on the event, that, when men *“...say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.”*<sup>99</sup> The Lord also compared the time of His Second Coming to the times of Noah saying: *“As the Days of Noah were so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the Days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the Day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.”*<sup>100</sup> According to our Lord and the Holy Apostles, it is not for us to ask about the time of the Second Coming, but rather to be watchful, alert and always ready to receive the Master.<sup>101</sup>

#### 4. The Signs Before the Second Coming

Although the Second Coming of our Lord will take place in an unknown time, *“...as a thief in the night...”*, some events will prepare the ground for His Appearance.<sup>102</sup> These events comprise *“...the signs of His Coming, and the End of the Age...”*<sup>103</sup> which foretold the Coming of the Lord. *“When you see all these things, know that it is near – at doors.”*<sup>104</sup> The Lord spoke of these signs shortly before His sufferings and they are clearly prophetic.<sup>105</sup>

According to the above these signs can be as follows:

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<sup>92</sup> Bryennios, *Paralipomena*, ch. XLI, v. III, p. 122.

<sup>93</sup> Acts 1:7.

<sup>94</sup> Matth. 24:36. Mark 13:32.

<sup>95</sup> 1 Thess. 5:2.

<sup>96</sup> 2 Peter 3:10.

<sup>97</sup> Matth. 24:43.

<sup>98</sup> Matth. 24:42.

<sup>99</sup> 1 Thess. 5:3.

<sup>100</sup> Matth. 24:36-39.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Plato of Moscow, *Orthodox Teaching*, p. 129. Mitsopoulos, *Themata*, p.374

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Plato of Moscow, *Orthodox Teaching*, pp. 129-130. Evdokimov, *Orthodoxia*, pp. 401-404. Mitsopoulos, *Themata*, pp. 374-377.

<sup>103</sup> Matth. 24:3.

<sup>104</sup> Matth. 24:33.

<sup>105</sup> Matth. 24. Mark 13:1-37. Luke 21:5-36.

a) The preaching of the Holy Gospel in the entire world. *“And this gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the entire world as a witness to all the nations, and then the End will come.”*<sup>106</sup>

b) St Paul revealed in his Epistle to the Romans that when *“...the fullness of the Gentiles has come in...,”* then also *“...Israel will be saved...,”*<sup>107</sup> believing in the Gospel and acknowledging Jesus as the true Messiah, Christ and Saviour. Many times the return of Israel is linked with the return of the Prophet Elijah. The Prophet Malachi first spoke of the coming of Elijah. He spoke that the future Messiah will have a *“...messenger ... who will survey the way before...”* him<sup>108</sup> and he names him as *“...Elijah the Thesbite.”* *“And behold, I will End to you Elijah the Thesbite, before the great and glorious Day of the Lord comes: who shall turn again the heart of the father to the son, and the heart of a man to his neighbour, lest I come and smite the earth grievously.”*<sup>109</sup> During the time of our Lord, the awaiting of the return of the Prophet Elijah was a general belief among the Jews. The Angel foretold to the Prophet Zachariah about his son, St John the Forerunner and Baptist, saying that *“...he will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah.”*<sup>110</sup> Christ assured saying that *“But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished.”*<sup>111</sup>

St Hippolytus expressed the opinion that *“...as the two appearances of our Lord and Saviour were shown through the Scriptures, likewise and the two forerunners; the first John the son of Zachariah”* before the second coming *“is necessary His forerunners to be manifested, as Malachi said ... these will go together preaching the future revelation which will take place...,”* according to the prophesy of John in the Book of Revelation.<sup>112</sup> *“And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty Days, 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 prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire.”*<sup>113</sup> St John of Damascus names these two Prophets as *“...Enoch and Elijah the Thesbite.”*<sup>114</sup>

c) The Lord instructed, that a great Apostasy will take place before His Second Coming.<sup>115</sup> The false-prophets *“...will deceive many.”*<sup>116</sup> Increasing indifference, enslavement to materialism and the pleasures of the present life will prevail as these conditions were *“...in the Days of Noah, so it will be also in the Days*

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<sup>106</sup> Matth. 24:14.

<sup>107</sup> Rom. 11:25, 26.

<sup>108</sup> Mal. 3:1

<sup>109</sup> Mal. 4:5-6.

<sup>110</sup> Luke 1:17.

<sup>111</sup> Matth. 17:12.

<sup>112</sup> St. Hippolytus, *About Christ and Anti-Christ*, XLIV-XLVII, in *B*, v. 6, pp. 311 and 312.

<sup>113</sup> Rev. 11:4-6.

<sup>114</sup> St. John of Damascus, *Catechesis*, IV, 26, in Migne, *P.G.*, 94, 1217.

<sup>115</sup> Plato of Moscow, *Orthodox Teaching*, p. 129.

<sup>116</sup> Matth. 24:5.

*of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the Day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise as it was also in the Days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, planted, they built; but on the Day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the Day when the Son of Man is revealed.*<sup>117</sup> Regardless of the tribulations and temptations, by which the Divine providence searched to bring right and the return of the lawless generation, it remained hard and unbent and unrepentant. *“They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.”*<sup>118</sup>

The increasing of sin create a greater misery, which is accompanied by an anxiety and hopelessness. This was described by the Lord saying: *“And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man, coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.”*<sup>119</sup> Thus the prophecy of St Paul will be fulfilled according to which the Lord’s Day will not come *“...unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition.”*<sup>120</sup>

d) The peak of the Apostasy, misery and anxiety will be the coming of the Antichrist. According to *Didache* *“...in the last Days the false prophets and corrupters will abound, and the sheep will be turned into wolves, and love will be turned into hate. For as lawlessness increases, they will hate and persecute and betray one another”*<sup>121</sup>. *And then the deceiver of the world will appear as a son of God and ‘will perform signs and wonders’*<sup>122</sup>, *and the earth will be delivered into his hands, and he will commit abominations the likes of which have never happened before.*<sup>123</sup> The Divine Evangelist John characterized as “*Antichrist*” *“...every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in flesh...”*<sup>124</sup> and assured that *“...many false prophets have gone out into the world.”*<sup>125</sup>

St John of Damascus observed, *“...in a special way the Antichrist is called, he will come at the End of the Age.”*<sup>126</sup> *“Unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”*<sup>127</sup> The Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church accepted the Antichrist as *“...some knowledgeable and wise person, who pretends to have wisdom and philanthropia...”* not as the incarnation of the devil but *“...a man by*

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<sup>117</sup> Luke 17:26-30.

<sup>118</sup> Rev. 16:11.

<sup>119</sup> Luke 21:25-28. Cf. Matth 24:29-31. Mark 13:24-27.

<sup>120</sup> 2 Thess. 2:3.

<sup>121</sup> Matth. 24:10-12.

<sup>122</sup> Mark 13:22.

<sup>123</sup> *Didache*, 16, 3-4, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 158.

<sup>124</sup> 1 John 3:3.

<sup>125</sup> 1 John 3:1.

<sup>126</sup> St. John of Damascus, *Exposition. About the Anti-Christ*, IV, 99, 26, in Migne, P.G., 94, 1217.

<sup>127</sup> 2 Thess. 2:3-4.

nature, who will receive all the power of the devil. And as God and Saviour took up our human nature and was able to work through it the salvation, likewise and Satan will chose a man to give him all his power to deceive men.” “The devil does not become man according to the Lord’s incarnation...” but the devil dwells in a man “...the future freewill the lawless God foreseeing consents that the devil inhabits in him.” And he will work great things and wonders and will show admirable signs, but these will be “...false and deception of magic ... signs and wonders of lies and not real.” “Because the father of lies, Satan in person will act through him, to make the multitudes to believe the dead as risen, and the limp walking and the blind seeing, without the healing taking place.” Through these he will attempt to prove that he is god and “... will oppose God and will destroy the gods and will command to worship him instead of God.” He will appear to the Jews “...as the Christ which they await.” “He will deceive...” many “...and when prevailing he will persecute the Church of God and will manifest all his evilness...” and “...all the human lawlessness will surpass of those who in the pass were unjust and ungodly, murderers and unmerciful and especially will be against the Christians.”<sup>128</sup> Some of the Holy Fathers support the opinion that the Antichrist will come not from the Christians, but from the Jews. He will be worshipped by all those Jews who have not accepted Christ as the Son of God and Messiah as well as by all those who denied the True Christian Faith (heretics) and he will demand the rebuilding of the Temple of Solomon.<sup>129</sup>

St Hippolytus supported the opinion that the Antichrist will be born from the tribe of Dan,<sup>130</sup> according to the prophecy of Moses in the Book of Deuteronomy: “And to Dan he said, Dan is a lion’s whelp, and shall leap out of Basan.”<sup>131</sup> He will hate and put great pressure on the faithful Christians, who will not receive his seal. But, regardless of how much he will prevail, he will have an end. St Paul taught that “... the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.”<sup>132</sup>

e) According to the teachings of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God “... you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the End is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and Kingdom against Kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the End shall be saved. And this gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the entire world as a witness to all the nations, and then the End will come.”<sup>133</sup> St Peter said as “...the world that existed perished, being flooded with water...” so “...the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word,

<sup>128</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*, XV, § 12, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 885. Theodoretus of Cyrus, *To 2 Thessalonians 2:4*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 82, 664. St. John of Damascus, *Catechesis*, IV, 26, in Migne, *P.G.*, 94, 1217. St. John Chrysostom, *To 2 Thessalonians 2:4*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 62, 482.

<sup>129</sup> St. John of Damascus, *Exposition. About the Anti-Christ*, IV, 99, 26, in Migne, *P.G.*, 94, 1217. St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*, XV, § 12, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 889, 893.

<sup>130</sup> St. Hippolytus, *About Christ and Anti-Christ*, XIV, in *B*, v. 6, p. 201.

<sup>131</sup> Deut. 33:22.

<sup>132</sup> 2 Thess. 2:8.

<sup>133</sup> Matth. 24:6-14.

are reserved for fire until the Day of Judgement...,”<sup>134</sup> because “...the Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up”<sup>135</sup>.

## 5. The Millennium and Its True Meaning

The Second Coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the End of the world will happen **simultaneously**. The teaching concerning the reign of Christ is mentioned in the Book of Revelation,<sup>136</sup> according to which the Lord our God will rule on earth for one thousand years. During this period the devil will be bound but before, a great battle will take place **against** the Church and he, his angels and all his evil followers will be defeated (Armagedon). Hence the teaching concerning the Millennium came forth, which was taught by Cerinthus,<sup>137</sup> Papias,<sup>138</sup> Irenaeus,<sup>139</sup> Tertullian<sup>140</sup> and some of the Apologists.<sup>141</sup> However, this theory was opposed by Gaius in Rome, Origen,<sup>142</sup> St Dionysius of Alexandria,<sup>143</sup> Methodius of Olympus,<sup>144</sup> St Gregory of Nazianzus,<sup>145</sup> St Basil the Great,<sup>146</sup> St Epiphanius,<sup>147</sup> St Hieronymus<sup>148</sup> and St Augustine.<sup>149</sup>

Today, the misinterpretation of the Millennium is supported by the heresies of the Rebabtists and Jehovah Witnesses who believe that Christ will rule materially for one thousand years, establishing an earthly government. Briefly, in their false teachings, they renounce the Holy Trinity, the Son, the Holy Spirit, the Church, the Holy Mysteries and the Saints and have adopted all the old and contemporary heresies which Satan has developed in order to mislead men into Eternal Condemnation.

We must never forget that the teachings of the Book of Revelation are under a veil of Divine Mystery. Consequently, we can accept:

1. The period of one thousand years is obviously symbolic and must be considered in the light of the Apostolic Teachings that “...with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”<sup>150</sup> The Holy

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<sup>134</sup> 2 Peter 3:6, 7.

<sup>135</sup> 2 Peter 3:10.

<sup>136</sup> Rev. 20:1-15. Cf. Mitsopoulos, *Themata*, pp. 378-383.

<sup>137</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, III, 28, 2, in Migne, *P.G.*, 20, 273.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, *Church History*, III, 39, 12, in Migne, *P.G.*, 20, 300.

<sup>139</sup> St. Irenaeus, *Heresies*, book V, chs. 32-35, in Hadjephraimides, pp. 414-423.

<sup>140</sup> Tertullian, *Instit.*, VII, 17.

<sup>141</sup> St. Justin, the philosopher and martyr, *Dialogue*, 80, 81, in *B*, v. 3.

<sup>142</sup> Origen, *About Principals*, II, 11, 2, in Migne, *P.G.*, 11, 241 and 242.

<sup>143</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, VII, 24, 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 20, 693.

<sup>144</sup> Methodius, *Symposium*, IX, 1, 5, in Migne, *P.G.*, 18, 176.

<sup>145</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epistle 102 to Cledonius*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 37, 197.

<sup>146</sup> St. Basil, the Great, *Epistle 263*, 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 32, 980. Ibid, *Epistle 265*, 2, in Migne, *P.G.*, 32, 988.

<sup>147</sup> St. Epiphanius, *Panarion, Heresy 77*, §§ 36-37, in Migne, *P.G.*, 42, 697.

<sup>148</sup> St. Hieronymus, *Comm. in Isaiah XXX*, 26; LIV, 11; LV, 3; LVIII, 14, in Migne, *P.L.*, 24, 362, 561, 550, 597.

<sup>149</sup> St. Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, XX, 7, in Migne, *P.L.*, 41, 667.

<sup>150</sup> 2 Peter 3:8.

Gospel will prevail on earth and for a long period the Will of God will rule among men. Thus the Church will be found **triumphantly accomplishing all** her goals on earth. The teachings concerning the Biblical Millennium is a prophecy of the final victory of Christianity **within** the boundaries of time. During that period Satan will be bound because, although evil will not have been completely abolished, it will have been restricted and weakened. The nations and governments will be Enlightened by the Will of God. Science and Art will serve Christian thought and find their ideal expression. The fullness of all the Gifts of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Eastern Orthodox Church will become universal and new, submitting the different religious confessions **under one Holy Christian Faith which will uphold the True Teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. All the followers of Christ will acknowledge** one Leader of their Faith Who is the Head of the Church. They will have one and the same Faith and Love in order to grow together.

2. This Millennium will end because everything under the sun in this world will come to an end. After this period Satan, who **will be** bound **but** not destroyed, will **once again** become free and he will fight against all the Powers of Heaven. However, the Saving Power of Christ at His Second Coming will utterly destroy Satan's power **and will** condemn him and all his evil servants. Even nature itself **will be** regenerated **and** will **glorify** the Lord.

**After the Last Judgement** the faithful will enjoy the extreme Blessedness of God's Kingdom, whereas the ungodly, unbelievers and **unrepentant** sinners will be cast out into Eternal Condemnation.

However, once again, we must **keep** in mind that the Book of Revelation is the only prophetic Book of the New Testament and many things are **hidden** under a veil of **Divine Mystery**, which can only be revealed by the same Holy Spirit Who inspired St John the Apostle and Evangelist. Any attempts to interpret this Holy Book without the Holy Spirit, **the guidance of the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church accompanied by humility**, prayer and acknowledgment of our weakness will consequently lead to dangerous misinterpretations.

The Holy Spirit warns us by saying: *"I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this Book: if anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the pledges that are written in this Book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the Book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the Holy City, and from the things that are written in this Book. He who testifies to these things says: 'Surely, I Am coming quickly.'"*<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Rev 22: 18 – 20.