

CHAPTER SIX

THE END AND THE RENEWAL OF THE WORLD

According to Holy Scripture and the Tradition of the Orthodox Church, this present world will come to an end. This end, which takes place at the same time as the Universal Resurrection of the dead and Universal Judgement, must not be **considered** as being the **abolishment** and **destruction** of the world but its renewal and recreation.¹ This recreation of the world remains a mystery that falls under the Plan of Creation, which is hidden in the **Omnipotent** Will of the Creator. The only **certainty** is that this New Creation is the “...new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells...”² **as well as** the Kingdom of God **which is** the Church of the firstborn. The power and authority of death and mortality will **be abolished** and sin will no longer enter. After “...the end, when Christ delivers the Kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power...”³ **He remains** the centre of the union of His people. “He must reign **until** He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.”⁴ “Now when all things are made subject to Him, the Son Himself will also be subject to Him Who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.”⁵

1. Holy Scripture on the Renewal of the World

In the Old Testament we find prophecies referring to the catastrophe of the world, its recreation and its change. “Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, and heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You will endure; yes, they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will change them, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will have no end.”⁶ The Prophet Isaiah **proclaimed**: “... all the powers of the heavens shall melt, and the sky shall be rolled up like a scroll: and all the stars shall fall like leaves from a vine and as leaves fall from a fig-tree.”⁷ “Lift up your eyes to the sky, and look on the earth beneath: for the sky was darkened like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and the inhabitants shall die in like manner: but My Righteousness shall not fail.”⁸ “For there shall be a new heaven and a new earth: and they shall not at all remember the former, neither shall they at all come into their mind.”⁹

Initially in the New Testament, our Lord **repeatedly** assured us that “...heaven and earth **shall** pass away, **but** one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law until all is fulfilled.”¹⁰ He **foretold** great tribulations, according to which “...the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven,

¹ Mitsopoulos, *Themata*, pp. 403-405.

² 2 Peter 3:13.

³ 1 Corinth. 15:24.

⁴ 1 Corinth. 15:25.

⁵ 1 Corinth. 15:28.

⁶ Psalm 101(102):26-27.

⁷ Is. 34:4.P

⁸ Is. 51:6.

⁹ Is. 65:17.

¹⁰ Matth. 5:18; 24:35. Mark 13:31. Luke 16:17; 21:33.

*and the powers of the heavens will be shaken...’’¹¹ ‘...and on 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.’’¹² However, Christ did not **fail** to reassure His Apostles, and through them His Orthodox Church, that He **would** be with them ‘...even to the end of the age.’’¹³*

St Paul, on the other hand, **taught** that all Creation ‘...was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him Who subjected it in hope; because the Creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole Creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.’’¹⁴ **Furthermore**, ‘...the Lord Jesus is revealed from Heaven with His mighty Angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.’’¹⁵

St Peter spoke in more detail of this fire **verifying** that ‘...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 the ungodly men.’’¹⁶ ‘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.’’¹⁷ ‘Nevertheless we, according to His Promise, look for a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.’’¹⁸

Parallel to this, St John the Apostle, Evangelist and Theologian, in the Book of Revelation, **saw** that with the Resurrection of the dead and the following Judgement ‘...the earth and the heaven fled away...’ from the Face of Him Who sat on the Throne. ‘And there was found no place for them.’’¹⁹ ‘Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.’’²⁰ ‘Then He Who sat on the Throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’’²¹

2. The Tradition of the Orthodox Church on the Renewal of the World

The *Epistle of Barnabas* **emphasises** that ‘...when His Son comes, He will destroy the time of the lawless one and will judge the ungodly and will change the sun and the moon and the stars, and then He will truly rest on the seventh day.’’²²

¹¹ Matth. 24:29.

¹² Luke 21:25-26.

¹³ Matth. 28:20.

¹⁴ Rom. 8:20-23.

¹⁵ 2 Thess. 1:7-8.

¹⁶ 2 Peter 3:7.

¹⁷ 2 Peter 3:10.

¹⁸ 2 Peter 3:13.

¹⁹ Rev. 20:11.

²⁰ Rev. 21:1.

²¹ Rev. 21:5.

²² *Barnabas*, 15, 5, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 182.

St Clement of Rome stressed that “... you know that ‘the Day’ of Judgement is already ‘coming as a blazing furnace,’²³ and ‘some of the heavens will dissolve’²⁴ and the whole earth will be like lead melting in a fire, and then the works of men, the secret and the public, will appear.”²⁵ “For the Lord said, ‘I Am coming to gather together all nations, tribes and languages.’²⁶ Now by this He means the Day of His appearing, when He will come and redeem us, each according to **our** deeds. And the unbelievers ‘will see His Glory’²⁷ 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’²⁸ and we did not realise 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.’²⁹ 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.’³⁰

The Shepherd of Hermas emphasises “... they will fit into another much inferior place, but not until they have been torment and fulfilled the days of their sins. And they will be transferred for this reason only, that they received the righteous word. And then it will happen that they will be transferred out of their torments... they will not be save, because of their hard-heartedness.”³¹

St Justin the Philosopher and Martyr distinguished **the prophecy of Moses whereby** the “fire” “...has been kindled out of My wrath; it shall burn to hell below; it shall devour the land; it shall set on fire the foundations of the mountains...”³² from the theories of Plato and other philosophers, observing that “...we do not believe in the same as the others, but all of them imitate ours.”³³

St Cyril of Jerusalem **taught** that “...the end of the world takes place and this world which is born will be regenerated.” This is necessary **due to** the numerous sins, which polluted the Creation.³⁴

St John Chrysostom **with reference to** Psalm 101(102) and Isaiah, observed that as those who inhabit the earth will not perish but “...will change to immortality...” likewise the Creation.³⁵

²³ Cf. Mal. 4:1.

²⁴ Cf. Is. 34:4.

²⁵ St. Clement of Rome, *2nd Corinthians*, 16, 3, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 76.

²⁶ Cf. Is. 66:18.

²⁷ Cf. Is. 66:18.

²⁸ Cf. John 8:24, 28; 13:19.

²⁹ Cf. Is. 66:24. Mark 9:48.

³⁰ St. Clement of Rome, *2nd Corinthians*, 17, 4-7, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 77.

³¹ *Shepherd of Hermas*, Vision III, 15, 6, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 206.

³² Deut. 32:22.

³³ St. Justin, the philosopher and martyr, *I Apology*, 60, §§ 8-10, in *B*, v. 3, p. 194.

³⁴ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*, XV, § 3, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 873 and 876.

³⁵ St. John Chrysostom, *To Romans*, Homily 14, § 5, in Migne, *P.G.*, 60, 530.

3. Our Lord and Saviour as the Eternal King

In this new condition, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, will be the Eternal King Whose Kingdom will have no end. St Paul informed us that at the end, “...when He delivers the Kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power...”³⁶ and “...when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him Who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.”³⁷ The Archangel Gabriel **assured** the Ever Virgin Mary and Theotokos that her Son and Lord “... will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His Kingdom there will be no end.”³⁸ Daniel spoke of His Kingdom, saying “...and to Him was given the dominion, and the honour, and the Kingdom... His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His Kingdom shall not be destroyed.”³⁹ “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.”⁴⁰ “And they shall reign forever and ever.”⁴¹

The above verses agree by proclaiming the same Truth, which was incorporated in the Nicene Creed: “...and His Kingdom shall have no end.” Thus, the Son will reign over all and it is said that He is the *Pantocrator* (Almighty) King and His Kingdom shall have no end. **Furthermore**, our Lord reigns over the hearts of all the Orthodox Christians who willingly submit themselves to His Divine Will. This Kingdom has as its principal the words of the Lord Who said: “Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession.”⁴² Until **the moment He submits** the Kingdom to His Father, “...He must do the duties of a king; in other words to fight the enemies, enter into alliance with His own; the ones to conquer and the others to free ... thus He makes the work of submitting us under His Kingdom.” When this submission **has been** completed, “...His work of ruling over us ends.” “Then, after these nothing is needed; for the Kingdom is without rebellion.”

When the Salvation of the Church and the people of the Lord Jesus are completed, it **will no longer** be necessary for the God-Man to act as our High Priest and Mediator, neither to struggle as King and Head of His Church, which **no longer** be Militant **but the** one Triumphant and glorious. Having thus submitted Himself to the Will of **God the Father** Who sent Him to the human race, He will present **His Church** to Him, submitting her and Himself according to His humanity **and** as the Head of His Church.⁴³

Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, **fulfilling** the work which the Father gave Him, remains forever the God-Man and the “...*firstborn among many brethren*.”⁴⁴ He is the first among those who are in His image **and** is “*the Lamb*” Who “...*leads them to the living fountain of waters*.”⁴⁵ He is the “*Light*” which

³⁶ 1 Corinth. 15:24.

³⁷ 1 Corinth. 15:28.

³⁸ Luke 1:33.

³⁹ Daniel 7:14.

⁴⁰ Heb. 1:8.

⁴¹ Rev. 22:5.

⁴² Psalm 2:8.

⁴³ St. John Chrysostom, *To 1 Corinthians*, Homily 39, § 6, in Migne, *P.G.*, 61, 341.

⁴⁴ Rom. 8:29.

⁴⁵ Rev. 7:17.

“*illuminates*” the City of God,⁴⁶ the Mediator between God and man, Who with the Father is One and through His humanity is united with the human race as the Head of His Church. He is the Eternal Light and Life for the glorious Church, granting Life to all those who believe in Him. “*They shall see His Face, and His Name shall be on their foreheads.*”⁴⁷

Thus, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in the Kingdom to come, will be exalted above all and will be glorified with the Father and the Holy Spirit for all Eternity. “*And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of Life freely.*”⁴⁸

“*The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all the Saints. Amen.*”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Rev. 21:23.

⁴⁷ Rev. 22:4,

⁴⁸ Rev. 22:17.

⁴⁹ Rev. 22:21.