

A Patristic Glimpse into Our Age: Antichrist and the End of All Things

Matthew Raphael Johnson
Johnstown, PA

The end times are a daily, pop-culture reality. At no other time have there been so many movies and shows dedicated to the collapse of civilization. At no other time have there been the endless conflicts and hatred of our era. At any given time, there are 15 million cases in the American court system. In the US, the head of the snake, there are 1000 percent more sex crimes than elsewhere in the world per capita. The top six percent of Americans possess half the globe's wealth. About 44 million Americans read at the fourth grade level.

While the “health care” crisis gets yelled about from time to time, no one mentions that the overwhelming majority of the increases in spending are on mental illnesses, with mental patients taking up about half the American health care budget. Almost 90 percent of the population is taking an SSRI or a derivative at some point in their lives. Over 50,000 take their lives in the US each year, almost all white males. While much of the budget is getting trimmed due to chronic bankruptcy, the Justice Department has seen its budget increase by over 900 percent from 2003 to 2013.

Over 80 million Americans cannot live on their incomes. There's been a 70 percent increase of teen prostitution since 2003. In 1997, before the crash, there were 1.7 million bankruptcies. Then the economy bottomed out, with millions more filed in the first half of 2008. Just about 20 percent of employed Americans care about their jobs. Housing and fuel prices have increased in real terms by 200 percent from 1981 to 1996. Its gone up far more since then. Of all the layoffs since 1978, almost 90 percent have been male. According to the FBI, there are 21,500 criminal gangs in the US and metropolitan police departments have shed half their officers.

These numbers are under-reported. Unemployment is about 30 percent in the US, but the official statistics only count those Americans actually receiving unemployment checks. This is a deliberate attempt to suppress the real number. Almost everything the educated American believes about the world is false.

The ultimate cause of this is nominalism and liberalism: the rise of materialism, secularism and industrialism that has de-sacralized the world. Few know how to ask themselves what the point of their lives are, let alone hazard a guess. These are the last times, since they are worse than that of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Saint Nifont of Constantinople, in the 15th century, wrote:

And they will be rewarded for the fact that in those days there will be no one in their eyes who would perform miracles, and people from themselves will take the zeal and fear of God in their hearts, for at that time the hierarchy's rank will not be understood and will not to love wisdom and reason, but will only care about self-interest. Similar to them and monks will be from the possession of large estates; from their vain glory their soulful eyes are darkened, and they that are in disregard of them that love God with all their heart; and their love of money will reign with all their might. But woe to the monks who love gold: they will not see the Face of God! The black hoarders, the greedy, their prayer will not be accepted, and

fasting without benefit, and offering of sacrifice to God, and alms-all are imputed to them in abomination and desecration.

Few in the last times will actually own anything, but this will be the ultimate goal. There are very few monks at all, let alone bad ones. Few understand what the liturgy is, so certainly, they do not grasp monasticism. Happiness and money are equated, and few deny this in practice. Saint Anthony the Great said in the 350s:

The time will come, my children, when the monks leave the desert, and they will flow for them in rich cities, where instead of these desert caves and narrow cells erected proud buildings that can argue with the chambers of kings; Instead of poverty, the love of gathering wealth will increase; humility will be replaced by pride; many will be proud of knowledge, but naked, alien to good deeds, corresponding to knowledge; love will grow cold; instead of abstinence, gluttony will multiply, and very many of them will care for luxurious dishes no less than the laity themselves, from whom the monks will not differ in any way as a dress and a chevalier, and, despite living among the laity, they will call themselves secluded .

This is the language of the day. In reality, they speak of the entire auto-demolition of the church. The clergy are rarely knowledgeable in medieval history, the font of their church. They live in fear of being called “racist” on the internet.

St. Seraphim Vyritsky (d 1949) says about our days:

It will be so hard, so bad, so terrible that God forbid to live up to this time. There will come a time when there will not be persecution, and the money and delights of this world will turn people away from God, and many more souls will die, than during open hostility . On the one hand, they will erect crosses and gild the domes, and on the other – there will come a kingdom of lies and evil. The True Church will always be persecuted, and it will be possible to be saved only by sorrows and illnesses, *persecution will be taken by the most sophisticated, unpredictable nature*. It will be terrible to live up to these times.

St. Seraphim was already seeing the use of psychology as a method of torture and control in the USSR and saw clearly into the future. He saw dimly the use of the media to control the very meanings of terms, language and social life. Yet, a few of the ancients had dim perceptions of our times. In the works of the Abba Ishirion, of the 4th century, it says:

The fathers of the Egyptian monastery asked - what did we do? Abba Ishirion answered: “We have kept the commandments of God.” Then they asked: “What will those who will do after us do?” “They will do half as well.” Then they asked him: “And what will those who will do after them do?” He replied: “They will not have monastic activities; but they will be grieved, and those who stand will be higher than us and our fathers.”

That's us. This is a dim perception of our own day. They did not even have the language

to describe it. Protestants have been screaming that the end is nigh for centuries. Having no access to the fathers, they impose their own limited interpretation on what they think the Bible is. Sects have sprung up based on these very human conjectures about the end times. The Orthodox very rarely speak of it until the 20th century.

So much of our modern suffering was unknown to the fathers. They had no conception of a mass media, psychological manipulation on a mass scale, the very existence of a “mass scale,” the rule of Jews, corporate monopolies and the internet, just to name a handful. This is why modern fathers are utterly essential.

Every generation has Antichrists, however only this one will have the Antichrist. “False prophets” will target the youth through, of course, mass media in all its forms, where ideology can be hidden in the most nefarious ways.

The great Athosite elder Paisius says “Today we live in the years of the Apocalypse. There is no need to be a prophet to understand this.” The Regime's actions are such that it is an obvious fact. The Romanian elder Justin Porva (1919-2013) was asked about the end times

What we have gone through, but what else has to go through to you! You have already entered into “those days.” Unlike other times, God will allow the enemy of the human race to touch the soul; there will be basically psychological persecution and you will not be able to hide even in the slightest cracks of the earth. Not easy, times are very hard.

This is why we need not fear. Our existence is a constant ascetic prayer. The system as it stands in the US today is a giant mechanism that forces the good of the world to sin. How did it come to this? The Elder Dionysus (Ignat) of the St. George Kellion, Kolitsou Skete, Mount Athos, says, “According to all the creations of the Holy Fathers, no doubt, we are in the forefront of the kingdom of Antichrist.” This great elder was asked why God permits this.

The Grace of the Holy Spirit could have made it impossible for man to ever fall. But in that case he would have had neither personality nor virtues, but would have been an animal or a robot. None of God's creations has the freedom that man has. The Christian who fulfills God's commandments with the help of Divine Grace may become a saint. And God is so good that even when we fall into sins and cry to Him in repentance, “Lord, forgive me! Lord, help me!” He comes to us and helps us to rise from our sins. That is why our Lord Jesus Christ told us, Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden with sins, and I will give you rest (Matt. 11:28).

Its common to here secular people ask about suffering. As if 2000 years of Christian writings had never thought about it before. They speak of innocent suffering, natural disasters and so on. The assumption is that suffering is always a terrible thing and has no positive effects. If people were in bliss all the time, they would be better off. We know too much about the psyche to believe that. As Dostoevsky said, man would destroy such a regime at the first opportunity.

Suffering is rarely a horrible thing once its over. It creates virtues and truth be told, men. They are really asking why God doesn't do as they wish. They're asking why he hasn't created paradise for us. This is why. To force men to love God is like believing a prostitute is really attracted to you. No, one must come to God freely, and the only way that happens, almost

always, is through suffering.

The Monk George, the recluse Zadonsky (d 1863) speaks of the ignorance of the age that he was starting to perceive in Russia of his day,

Many will believe in the Antichrist as God. The pure in faith will know differently. Those who have God's divine knowledge and intelligence, then the advent of the tormentor will be normal. But to those who have rejected the world will recognize evil. Those tied to the world will believe.

In the same vein, St. Varsonofy of Optina (d 1913) says:

He who reads the Apocalypse before the end of the world will be truly blessed, for he will understand what is being done. And, understanding, will prepare himself. While reading, he will see in the events described in the Apocalypse, those or other contemporary events.

Education, in one form or another, is the key. This is not a mere matter of book learning, but a knowledge of doctrine such that one can perceive truth from falsehood even when the latter certainly seems to be true. At least, that good teachers, real apologists, true prophets, can assist the less knowledgeable. In this vein, we read the Romanian elder Dionysus of Athos (Ignat) (1909-2004), a man of our own day:

This is the end. We entered the “eighth [final] century.” Know that the most terrible disasters begin now as the fathers say. We are waiting for the Antichrist. As long as Orthodoxy is at its best, they know that the kingdom of Antichrist cannot reign, and therefore they try to maximally contribute to the coming of Satan to guide mankind. . . One of the signs that we entered the eighth century is that evil has spread all over the world, virtue has become impoverished, and its doers, like all others, are waiting for the coming of the kingdom of Antichrist. So long as Orthodoxy preserves true doctrine, neither the kingdom of Antichrist will come, nor will it itself be able to bring us to its knees. What is now the last time, can be seen from the war that is being waged with Orthodoxy.

The condition of Orthodoxy is the key to history in our age. The “Absolute Knowledge” of Hegel is revealed in the New Eden of the Orthodox church. The “dialectical method” in overcoming the negative elements of the world is precisely our ascetic struggle. In this way, we perceive what evil really is and see the line between truth and falsehood more clearly.

The preservation of true doctrine is based on the symphony of powers, one that mirrors the doctrine of Chalcedon. The human and the divine are independent, but joined through mutual love, not coercion. The moment the balance shifts in favor of one side, the truth is shaken. The only beneficiary is the powerful. In turn, Roman law slowly defined the parameters of state action over time, but the content of this action came from the ethnos. Church canons were an integral part of Roman law, so this process was identical in relation to the symphony of Christ's two natures.

Israel fell as a unified monarchy due to the arrogance of Solomon. Dying an unrepentant heretic, he brought pagan statues into the Temple. He brought pagan commercial law into Israel

and adultery became the mark of initiation. Slave labor and exploitation was the inevitable result and, upon his death, Israel was torn into two parts, never to return except in Christ himself. In Solomon, the political and legal crushed the divine.

Centuries later, Peter, an open Satanist and initiate of the rites of Bacchus, did the same. The church was thrust aside and foreign, Gnostic movements imported that made the new “floating city,” named for Peter himself in a huge stroke of ego, the only power in Russia. Old Russian dress was banned in the city limits, and the church was broken into two parts. Like Israel, Russia two was cut in half, a schism that never fully healed.

In the west, the legal and commercial has crushed the spiritual and divine to the point where the separation of heaven and earth is total and complete. The Roman church crushed the political under the weight of its increasingly distorted conception of the divine, going in the opposite direction of Solomon. The church became an empire in itself and its bishops took coats of arms. In either case, the result was the final victory of the secular. The Reformation shook confidence in Rome, and, without a local tradition independent of Rome, secularism was the eventual result. William of Occam's nominalism provided the perverse ontology that served as its intellectual “false prophet.”

Solomon, the iconoclasts, Peter and the Reformers created the omnipotent state. In the west, it took the place of the theoretically omnipotent church. Justice is based on truth. Truth is based on symphony. Imbalance, therefore, is falsity. Personal freedom requires the heights of personal discipline. Only then can it function. Today, the system has introduced “personal freedom” with no discipline. The result is liberal totalitarianism. Once the secular world is granted the power formerly given to God, the omnistate of Solomon arrives. Only the state is a facade. It's private interests that come to rule using the state as its bodyguard.

The Monk St. Kuksha of Odessa (d 1964) also saw this:

The last times are coming. Soon there will be an false ecumenical council called “sacred and true.” But this will be that same “eighth synod,” which will be a gathering of the godless. In it, all faiths will be united into one. Then all hierarchical ideas will be abolished, monasticism will be completely destroyed, the bishops will no longer be monks, and a new calendar will be introduced in the Universal Church. Be careful. Try to visit God's temples while they are still ours. Soon it will be impossible to go there, everything will change.

Mass apostasy is the new normal. These men were writing about Orthodox countries, so how much worse will it be for Protestant countries. This is the essence of nominalism, egotism and apostasy. Protestantism is based on the will to power of the individual reading what he wants into the “Bible.” Without historical knowledge, radically separate from the context of the writing, the ignorant are to understand the truth of the Book of Leviticus or numbers. This is the insanity of Protestantism.

The Elder Philotheus Zervakos of Paros (1884-1980), a student of the Kollyvades fathers, spoke of the nature of institutions in our times:

All will bow: all authorities, and bishops, and ministers; officers, and priests, and monks, and soldiers, and educated, and illiterate, and rich, and poor, big and small, men and women. From this generation and from these people one should not expect progress or awakening, rather the negation of the future and the great wrath

that will come against the sons of perdition, the sons of disobedience. . . When the disciples asked Our Lord Jesus Christ, when the awesome signs of the Second Coming, when the love of many will grow cold, and the faith will disappear, the Lord said among other things: when women become men, and men become women. St. John Chrysostom, when asked when the Second Coming will be, answered: “When women lose their shame, then the day of the Last Judgment will be near.” These prophecies of Our Lord Jesus Christ and St. John Chrysostom, and other prophets, apostles, Holy Fathers, are exactly fulfilled today.

Many of the ancient and early medieval fathers spoke of transgenderism and pornography, but they did not have the means to express perversions so foreign to their own society. They did not have the vocabulary available to discuss the nature of deliberate psychological manipulation from media and educators.

Hieromonk Arseny Boka (1910-1989) says similarly in a letter:

I'm sorry that you are so weak in faith, you will fall out of fear, fear of the devil, and do not be afraid to save your souls. It will be very difficult times, but all by God, who is a companion, companion to everyone, from birth to death The elect will also fall, I'm sorry that you are the very last ones, they will sift you, put taxes on you, taxes and other laws.

Archbishop Theophanes (Bystrov) (1872-1940), confessor of Tsar Nicholas and Bishop of the ROCOR in France as a hermit

I do not speak for myself, but I am informing the revelation of the elders. And they told me the following: the coming of the Antichrist is very near. It might just be a matter of years or maybe decades. Before the advent of the Antichrist, Russia will recover for a short time and a Tsar, elected by the Lord Himself [will reign]. He will be a man of fiery faith, a great mind and an iron will. . . According to the testimony of the word of God, when the Antichrist reigns, laws will forbid entering the churches in secret, “canons” will be adopted that will change the nature of the Holy Liturgy and it will cease to be holy. . . Therefore, for us Orthodox, repentance is essential. [Through it] we will enter the Protection of the Lord, under the Protection of the Most-Pure Mother of God, under the protection of the saints.

Entering the church “in secret” means that it will only be the formal liturgies that will be permitted. This was the case in the USSR, where, in the few churches permitted to function, nothing occurred outside of the formal liturgical cycle, and this was highly truncated. This is another way of saying that the faith became a matter of formal adherence and not an aspect of cultural *sobornost*. The end times are signified by the introduction of blatant heresy into the canons of the church. This has been accomplished.

Whether the “Tsar” promised by the bishop above means a formally consecrated emperor or a strong ruler of another type is unclear. Today, as he was quite well aware, the factionalism of the church precludes the anointing of an emperor, since these fragments have anathematized each other in their rush to justify their schisms. When Vladimir Putin sat in the seat of the emperor at

Athos, the possibility that he is this promised “man of iron will” becomes real.

Orthodox Russia is the warrior of the end times, the bulwark against Antichrist. Kiev held the titles of New Jerusalem, New Tsargrad and New Israel. St. Hilarion connected Kiev and St. Vladimir to both Constantine and David. It was the church that unified Russia under Vladimir, destroying the local cults that separated Slavic tribes from one another. The national dynasty was consolidated under Vladimir and completed in Yaroslav, and it was most certainly ethnic since language and racial background were the foundations from which the church built. National independence, or so the Chronicles tell us, was a fundamental preoccupation of the new church and monarchy.

New laws were not passed. As the bishop says above, this is only for the end times. For Old Russia, only old laws were brought to their terminus. It was the prince that connected the mundane world to the eternal and he was responsible for the welfare of the commonwealth and the church. The church was not powerful and never sought power. No advantage of civilization is possible outside the national setting, since the alternative is tribal violence. Authority is from God, power rests in the nation.

The Chalcedonian symphony is the icon of truth and justice. The end times are the zenith of totalitarianism, whether from private or state sources, since only one source or power is recognized and only one source actually functions. As of today, the state is largely a fiction as banks and media conglomerates rule without mercy.

The end times is the temporary victory of evil over good. Evil is defined as that which resists God. Gregory of Nyssa says evil is “an unsown herb, without seed and without root.” Evil is precisely that, a lack. It is not a thing in itself, but the lack of a thing, an essence, a purpose. He writes:

One defines evil as nothingness. Certainly evil never exists by itself but only inside of Goodness. Evil is a pure negation, a privation or a mutilation. Undoubtedly evil is a lack, a defect, *dejectus*. But the structure of evil is rather antinomic. Evil is a void of nothingness but a void which exists, which swallows and devours beings. Evil is a powerlessness; it never creates but its destructive energy is enormous. Evil never ascends; it always descends. . . Evil is chaotic, it is a separation, a decomposition constantly in progress, a disorganization of the entire structure of being. But evil is also, without doubt, vigorously organized. Everything in this sad domain of deception and illusion is amphibolic and ambiguous.

God did not create evil. However, since free will exists, and God does not compel anyone to love him, evil remains a possibility. His summary above contains the entire concept. Yet, evil does have an “essence” of a peculiar sort. It is a void that destroys being. Being, essence, purpose, light, Logos, energy: these are all one and the same concept, the activity of God on earth (not his essence, which is unknowable).

First of all, it is a lack of reality. Demons use images, fantasy pictures, to tempt people into sin. Images are not real, though they are taken from parts of reality, put together in a way that is meant to pervert or invert its purpose. The rule of Antichrist and the False prophet will rely on media for their rule.

Second, it is destructive. It does not create. Images are nothing but composite fantasies

that lead people to believe that some satisfaction exists in some perversion. Demons cannot create, they can only rearrange what has been created. Third, it is chaotic. As we said above, the goodness of creation could be found in its delicate and complex order and balance. Yet, since creation is contingent, this balance can be upset.

Fourth, it is the separation of the thing from its true essence, meaning and purpose. It is the taking of a good thing and using it wrongly, for all the wrong reasons. For Augustine, it's just a matter of error: we truly believe that sex and marriage will make us happy. We find out that it is far more work than we expected. We suffer. Eventually and ideally, this brings us to the knowledge that God and God alone is the only thing worth reaching for. Everything else, due to its contingency, brings death and decay. So here, you have freedom (we desire a lesser good) and ontology (nature is not a machine, it can be perverted in certain ways).

Finally, evil is illusion and deception. This is similar to the understanding of images. Images are not real, though they often contain enough reality to make us think they are. We fantasize about punching our boss in the face, of meeting a more beautiful mate, of being wealthy and popular. We then go out and do whatever is necessary to work out those fantasies. Of course, none of it works out: rich people are not happier than anyone else, they have more problems; punching people might be temporarily satisfying, but soon, you are in serious trouble. In your pursuit of a more beautiful mate, you angrily divorce your spouse of many years, and so on.

Evil is the taking of image for reality. Appearance is mistaken for essence. This is a matter of will: we take the appearance for reality because we want to. We want the pleasure of being wealthy and popular, even though we know that it is very difficult, leads to endless problems, and after all, we will soon die no matter how lucky we are in the world. Knowing evil helps us recognize it when it comes to us under the guise of good.

St. John of Kronstadt writes in his Spiritual Diary:

As the Holy Trinity, our God is One Being, although Three Persons, so, likewise, we ourselves must be one. As our God is indivisible, we also must be indivisible, as though we were one man, one mind, one will, one heart, one goodness, without the smallest admixture of malice - in a word, one pure love, as God is Love.

Here, the trinity is seen in its moral aspect. Evil is division. The trinity is unity in diversity. Three beings, each independent, containing a single essence which defines them all. They differ only in the matter of their manifestation. The son is generated from the father, while the Spirit proceeds from Him. All comes from the Father, all from the One.

For humanity, we are called to the same thing: integrity. All of our functions should proceed from the same source and deviation from this source is evil and sin. All should be referred to God in the sense that God alone is the only rational end of human action. All else fails, is temporary, is mixed with pain and brings death.

The opposite of this unity is double mindedness. This is a quality of demons: say one thing and mean another; use language to confuse rather than to present; appearances are reality and reality is only to be found in our perceptions and feelings. Demons cannot directly appear to us in their full identity, we would be repulsed. So demons appear to us as fantasy images, holy figures and charismatic leaders. It's all deception, it's all image and no substance. Substance belongs entirely to God.

In his *Enchiridion*, St. Augustine writes:

By the Trinity, thus supremely and equally and unchangeably good, all things were created; and these are not supremely equally and unchangeably good, but yet they are good, even taken separately. Taken as a whole, however, they are very good, because their ensemble constitutes the universe in all its wonderful order and beauty.

And in the universe, even that which is called evil, when it is regulated and put in its own place, only enhances our admiration of the good; for we enjoy and value the good more when we compare it with the evil. For the almighty God, who, as even the heathen acknowledge, has supreme power over all things, being Himself supremely good, would never permit the existence of anything evil among His works, if He were not so omnipotent and good that He can bring good even out of evil.

The Father is the source. The Son is the manifestation, and the Spirit the power and presence of God on earth. Think of it this way: Speech and words we use. The father is the mind, the Son is the word, and Spirit is its meaning and context. Are these different? They all come from mind, and yet are three. They are one in that they are one thought or phrase.

Evil, of course, is not Trinitarian, but it can be referred to in these terms. The Son is the faithful image of the Father. It contains all that the Father has. The opposite of this is to be unfaithful, to reject what we have been given and demand something better. The spirit manifest the Father's power on earth, in action. The same can be applied to us: when we refuse to perform the good, we tend to follow images and falsehood. Dostoevsky says in his *Brothers Karamazov* that "if man ceases to believe in God, he does not believe in nothing, he believes in anything." Ideologies, science, machines, entertainments: all are meant to take the place of meaningful and purposeful action in the spirit.

The trinity is perfect faithfulness. Perfect honesty and revelation. The opposite is dissimulation. If we are sons of God by adoption, then we too, must follow Christ as the image of the Father, and possess all that he has. In that case, it is through the Spirit. Hence, our moral goodness is Trinitarian, and any deviation from this comes from either the inability to faithfully be the image of the Father or take action in the world as the spirit guides us.