

## Apocalypticism

Beware your toxic obsession and pre-occupation with apocalypticism isn't deceiving you.

Do we honestly believe as Orthodox Christians who supposedly believe in and follow a God who is loving and merciful, that the Lord will not accept the repentance of those who were deceived?

Some misguided people think more about the end of the world than the end of their lives.

What does it mean to live in readiness for the Second Coming? It does not mean that we live in a state of high anticipation, waking up each day excited and expectant (and going to bed each night correspondingly disappointed that today was not the day). Neither does it mean looking for Reds (or Antichrists in this case) under the bed. Rather it means that we sit lightly on the things of the world, with a spirituality and an approach to life appropriate to people who are ready to leave this age behind at any moment.

The world is not out of control, but Jesus still reigns over it from the right hand of God the Father, and the world will end when and how He wills. The final word does not belong to ISIS, Al-Qaeda, or to Russia, or the United States, or to any of the 'sons of men who cannot save us.' The final word belongs to God alone. World events are important, but not ultimate, and we must not allow them to consume our attention, nor to let the fear which they can inspire fill our hearts. The rulers and generals, the terrorists and the politicians, all think that they know how history should unfold, and they are doing everything in their power to fulfill their plans to make that happen. We know how it will really unfold: with the last trumpet, and the voice of the archangel, and the resurrection of the dead, and the final triumph of Jesus, and the new Jerusalem descending out of Heaven from God like a bride adorned for her husband.

So how about all this rubbish that is being peddled about the end times, and that has been peddled really for the last 2000 years? About the potential evil behind bar codes, Neural-links, nanochips (on their own or supposedly in vaccines) and Artificial Intelligence and a million and one other things like this? And the reading of 666, the Beast, and the Antichrist into these things? The Orthodox Church teaches us that, up to the time of physical death, each person, by God's mercy, has the possibility to repent. Therefore, we would deny God's mercy were we to say that people who accept the mark of Antichrist will have no further possibility of repentance. While they are still alive, this possibility will be available to them. Even people possessed by demons have the possibility (and opportunities) to repent; whether it is of their own volition, somehow, when the attack is at a weak moment, or when a good brother or sister in Christ brings the demoniac to repentance via prayer (their own prayers for the demoniac as well as the community's collective prayers) and through the "sacramental" exorcism offered by the Church.

We are to look forward to the end of time with sober yet eager anticipation, as pilgrims seeking His eternal kingdom (Philippians 3:20; Colossians 3:1-4). A prayer by St Basil the Great says, "Grant us to pass through all the night of this present life with vigilant

heart and sober thought, in expectancy of the coming of the bright and manifest day of . . . our Lord.”

If a person is overcome by dread, and becomes despairing of these End Times — whether they are Christian or secular — then they have not been thinking about the Last Day in an Orthodox healthy way. The Last Day fills us with hope: if there is no hope, then we must have been tuning into the wrong station.

The apocalyptic texts are offered to Christians in every generation to encourage them in their struggles against sin, the principalities and powers of darkness in this world (Ephesians 6:12) and the fear of death. These writings assure us that even in the midst of the cosmic cataclysms and battles against evil powers occurring just before Christ returns — the time of “great tribulation” (Matthew 24:21) — the Lord will strengthen and guide His people (Matthew 28:20), bringing them to final victory over all forces of evil (Revelations 20:7-10).

So, the essential purpose of the apocalyptic writings (not the writings of orthofanatical crackpots, variously called orthocelebs, celebradox, and a term that Fr Seraphim Rose used: Crazy Converts) is to encourage the faithful to be full of hope and prepared to persevere to the end, no matter what happens (Matthew 24:3-13; Luke 21:25-28). All are inspired to look through the darkness of the present age and to behold the ultimate victory of Christ and the joyful consummation that awaits His Bride — the Church — who, through Her sacraments, has prepared herself for the coming of the Lord (2Peter 3:7-14; Titus 2:11-14). The closing words of the New Testament express this very sense of expectation: “Amen! Yes, come Lord Jesus” (Revelations 22:20). Christians do not await the coming of the Antichrist to fight against him, since we are already fighting against him. Christians await the coming of Christ who is already mystically present.

As Orthodox Christians, we believe in the Second Coming. As we say in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, “He shall come again to judge the living and the dead.” But the One who is coming is none other than the One in Whom I partake at every Eucharist. He is none other than the One Whom I am called to serve in the “least of these my brethren.” Better to serve Christ in the least of these than to waste time thinking about prophecy and the pattern of events at the end of the world, and waiting with eager anticipation for the next social media post or video or podcast to drop from orthofanatical conspiracy peddlers. The end will come as a thief in the night, anyway. And if we are not serving the Lord in the least of His brethren, we will be found to have no oil in our lamps much like the foolish virgins in the parable.

We end, as we began: Beware your toxic obsession and pre-occupation with apocalypticism isn’t deceiving you.

Do we honestly believe as Orthodox Christians who supposedly believe in and follow a God who is loving and merciful, that the Lord will not accept the repentance of those who were deceived?