

Orthodox America

Signs of the End Times

by Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose)

Thousands of people have read Fr. Seraphim's books, but relatively few people heard him speak. Some of his formal lectures, which he wrote out for the most part, have been published. The following, however, was an informal talk and, while slightly abridged due to space considerations, it has been deliberately left unedited to preserve its simplicity of style, which so well reflects Fr. Seraphim's unpretentious and unaffected character. He had a brilliant intellect, but, far from advertising the fact, his primary emphasis was on the need to develop an Orthodoxy of the heart.

The talk was given in Bright Week, 1981, to the St. Seraphim Orthodox Christian Student Fellowship at UC Santa Cruz, whose spiritual director, (now) Abbot Anastassy, kindly gave us permission to reprint the transcript from the "Journal of the Old Cathedral of the Holy Virgin Joy of All Who Sorrow," July-Sept. 1994.

I would like to speak on a subject tonight which is very relevant to our times: the end of the world; more particularly, about signs which are being fulfilled in our time, which point to the end of the world.

There have been a number of times in the past when this subject has become very interesting. In fact, you can even call them "apocalyptic" times. The Apostles themselves felt that their times were very apocalyptic. At various times—for example, in the West, around the year 1000—there was a great expectation of the end. In Russia near the 15th century again there was a period when the end was expected shortly. And many people in our own times have this same feeling that time is running out, that something big is going to happen. Often, this is bound up with the number 2000; that is, we have come to the end of two millennia of Christianity—and a millennium is itself a big thing, a whole thousand years and two of them mean that some great crisis must be approaching, and many people place this in terms of the end of the world.

Of course, that does not necessarily mean anything since we do not know the day or the hour or the year when the world is going to end. I will try, however, to go into what our attitude should be toward this expectation of the end.

Nowadays, when you think about "apocalyptic awareness" you think of Protestant sectarians of various kinds, who have definite ideas about what is going to happen at the end of this age. It is not only religious thinkers, however, but also ordinary secular philosophers who talk about the end of the world in a very bold way.

I will give you an example, one who should be very close to us because he is an Orthodox Christian writer: Alexander Solzhenitsyn. He has been outside Russia since 1974, and has written about life in the Soviet Union and especially in the Soviet slave labor camps, the infamous Gulag. He is not what one would consider a mystical or vague thinker, or someone who is up in the clouds; he is very down to earth.

Almost three years ago he gave a talk at the Harvard University commencement, and he boldly told the people of the West that their civilization is collapsing and is in danger of being overtaken by communism, that modern humanism is not deep enough to satisfy the human soul, and that it is no model that can be followed in Russia if Russia should overthrow communism. And at the end of his address he used the following words to express this idea of the depth of the crisis which is now occurring in the world:

"If the world has not come to an end, it has approached a major turn in history equal in importance to the turn from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance."

Here he speaks seriously of the possibility of the end of the world based on his observations that it is impossible for men to live long without deep spiritual roots, and these spiritual roots have been uprooted in the East by communism and in the West by worldly humanism.

In other writings, Solzhenitsyn, like many realistic thinkers today, speaks of specific reasons, quite apart from spiritual ones, why he thinks that such a great crisis period is facing humanity. And he mentions those things which you will not find in any kind of news magazine or serious analysis of today's news: namely, such things as the nearness of the exhaustion of the earth's resources if they are used at the present rates; the disastrous pollution of air and water, which is much worse in Russia than in America; the overpopulation of the world and the approaching disastrous shortage of food which is coming; and, of course, the development of weapons in the last few decades, which makes the virtual annihilation of human life possible. All this relates to the physical signs of an approaching great crisis: the end of the modern age, perhaps the end of the world itself.

Much more remarkable than these, however, are the spiritual signs that are multiplying in our times. This is what I would like to discuss for the most part tonight. First of all, I would like to ask a question: What should be the attitude of an Orthodox Christian towards this whole idea of the end of the world, and towards the signs which are preparing for it? Should we dismiss all this as some kind of superstition, hysteria and so forth?

No, we should not. We have, first of all, the answer given by Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself in the Holy Gospel. Just two days before He was to go to His Passion, His disciples came to Him on the Mount of Olives and asked Him: "Tell us, when shall all these things be?" That is, the destruction of the Temple, which He had just mentioned. And then they asked Him, "What shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?" /.../ In His answer, Our Lord gives the following main points. First of all, beware of deception, of following false Christ. Then there will be various signs, such as wars, famines, earthquakes, and all these are not the end but rather the beginning of the tribulation.

Then there will be the moral signs: the persecution of Christians; the increase of evil; the growing cold of love, which is one of the main signs that Christianity is dying, because the sign of a Christian, as Our Lord told us, is that he has love. Then another sign is that the Gospel is to be preached to the whole world, and then the end will come after that. Another sign is that there will be a terrible tribulation—apart even from all the things He mentions already, such as wars, famines and earthquakes. And the "abomination of desolation will be in the holy place," which we must understand according to the interpretation handed down by the Holy Fathers, which we will speak about.

And then He speaks of the fact that the days will be shortened for the sake of the elect. Then again He warns about false Christs and false prophets, and about "great signs and wonders, which if possible would lead astray even the elect." That is, not only terrible physical events will happen, but deceptions which are so subtle that even the elect themselves might be fooled.

Then the sign of the coming of Christ will be sudden, from above, and not like His First Coming. The signs at the very end are that the sun shall be darkened, the moon shall not give its light, the stars will fall from heaven, and then Christ Himself will appear in Heaven with the Sign of the Cross.

He tells us that the day and hour which is coming is not for us to know. Nonetheless, we should pay attention. He gives us the parable of the fig tree so that when we see the figs becoming green we know the summer is nigh. And, therefore, when we watch the signs and see these things beginning to happen, then we know that times are ripe and the end is drawing near.

Therefore, we are to watch not for a specific day or time, but rather for the signs of the end so that we can be prepared and especially prepared against deception, which is involved with the great events which are to happen at the world's end: the coming of Antichrist, which we will discuss shortly.

The answer to Christians, therefore, is to watch and be ready for that time. The twenty-fifth chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew is taken up with several images and parables about how we are to watch; that is, the five foolish and five wise virgins: those who have their wicks trimmed—that is, who have obtained the grace of the Holy Spirit, who are

practicing the Christian life rather than just learning the faith and then not doing anything about it. Another one is the parable of the talents....

The age of the Apostles and the first centuries were full of expectation that Christ would soon return. Though it is difficult for us to imagine today, the Holy Apostles were so filled with fervor for Christ that they went out to all the ends of the world, and they literally did. The Apostle Thomas went to India, and some say even as far as China; St. Andrew went north to Scythia, which is now Russia; Aristobolus and others went to England; St. Matthew and others went south to Abyssinia. The whole civilized world at that time was covered by the Apostles, because they had the idea that the world was coming soon to an end and they were to go out to all lands and preach the Gospel. Already by the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D., the Gospel had been preached to virtually all the known inhabited world. From that time on began the bringing forth of fruits in all those countries in which the seeds of the Gospel had been planted.

And we see, if we take any one particular country which received the Gospel, how over the centuries it brought forth fruits. It had saints, the lives of people were totally changed, and there was a total difference between the time that country was pagan and the time it accepted Christianity. If you take any country in the West, either Britain or France, or in the East-Byzantium, Syria, or Russia- you will see that this is the case.

There are a number of passages in which the Apostles mention the end. For example, in St. Paul's letter to the Hebrews (10:37) he quotes the Prophet Habbakuk: Yet a very little while and He that cometh shall come and shall not tarry. In Phillipians (4:5): Rejoice in the Lord always, for the Lord is at hand. St. John mentions in I John 2:18: Little children, it is the last hour. And at the end of the Apocalypse, Christ Himself says, Lo, I come quickly. Amen. /.../

And so, from that very time, those who were fervent Christians had a definite idea that the world was soon coming to an end. Of course, it has been since that time nineteen hundred years. Does that mean that the Apostles were mistaken; that anybody else who thinks this idea is simply mistaken; that we should put away all ideas that the end of the world is at hand, that Christ is coming soon? No, it does not mean this. It means that we must understand this in the right way, and the right way is a spiritual way. If we are ourselves leading and conducting a conscious spiritual life, conducting the unseen warfare-against our own fallen nature and against the demons who are against us-we will be constantly expecting the coming of Christ into our soul.

With our death, of course, we are to meet Christ. And anyone who has this kind of feeling in his soul, for him it is quite natural soon to expect the coming of Christ. The only danger is if you go overboard and begin to try to place dates, to calculate exactly when it is going to happen, to be too concerned about specific events which are occurring and too quick to place them into categories and chapters of the Apocalypse.

For example, a famous book which came out a few years ago is entitled *The Late Great Planet Earth*. In twenty years it will be outmoded, and all the things he talks about. He will have to make a new book and fit it into the new events. It does not pay to go overboard on these details. Our approach has to be a little broader, a little higher, but just as firm. Of course, the big mistake made by people who go overboard on these details occurs when they fall into the heresy of chiliasm: the expectation of Christ's coming to earth for a thousand years. This is a very troublesome heresy which was widespread even in the early history of the Church and which was condemned at the Second Ecumenical Council. That is when the phrase was put into the Creed: "...and His Kingdom shall have no end." The idea was-if you just read the text straight through without interpreting it, especially reading what the Holy Fathers have said about it-that since it says in the Apocalypse that the devil was bound for a thousand years and that Christ came and reigned with His saints, there must be a period of a thousand years somewhere between the First Coming and Second Coming of Christ. That means you have to have three different judgments. In fact, Protestants do: they have a "Great White Throne Judgment" and other kinds of judgments. It confuses the whole picture of Christian eschatology.

In the universal interpretation of the Orthodox Holy Fathers, there is no mystery about this. The whole idea of the "reign of Christ with His saints is occurring now. This is the Church. The life in the Church is such a blessed state-because we are with Christ, we have His grace, we have His Body and Blood within us-that this is like Paradise.

And this is what people call a millennium: this "thousand years" means a whole period. One thousand is a round number: 10x10x10 in symbolical language means the fullness of time between the First Coming of Christ and the Second Coming of Christ. If you expect a specific thousand-year period, then you are very anxious for this period to come and you begin to multiply all kinds of signs which you see, and with the slightest little thing that happens you begin to cry out: "This is a sign of the end . . ." And it may not be so at all. Or it may be one of those signs which occur throughout history, like, for example, the sign that there will be many Antichrists. St. John the Theologian says that even from the time when he was living there were already many Antichrists. And therefore, that is not the sign that the world is right now approaching its last ten years; it means, rather, that this is one of the spiritual signs which is preparing for the end of the world.

St. Paul himself, who was very filled with awareness of the coming end of the world and the coming of Christ, warns Christians even in his time not to be too excited about the end of the world. He says: Be not quickly shaken in mind or troubled, as though the day of the Lord is just at hand. Let no one deceive you, that day will not come except the falling away come first and the man of lawlessness be revealed, the son of perdition (II Thess. 2:1-4). This is a very important sign of the end: the falling away or apostasy and the coming of the man of lawlessness, which is Antichrist. And on this subject I would like to focus quite a bit of our attention. This concept of apostasy is a key one with which to understand the events of our own times. It is a very complex subject, difficult to go into completely. Briefly, however, a student of history looking at the whole past two thousand years of history, especially Western history, can see a continuous thread of development. And in the first nine hundred or thousand years, you can see the various

strands which go to make up our modern history and modern civilization. The civilization of today is shaped by the events and developments of yesterday.

And when Solzhenitsyn speaks about the coming of a great world crisis, or even of the end of the world, he is referring to the fact that this historical current, which has been going on for the last thousand years at least, is now coming to an end. There is no place further for it to go: either it must change drastically or else destroy mankind.

Solzhenitsyn traces it back to the end of the Middle Ages. Actually, it goes back further. If you examine it historically, I think you can see that it traces back to just at the time when the local Church of Rome broke away from the rest of the Church; that is, in the year 1054, the middle of the eleventh century. Something happened in the West: the West chose to go its own way.

This breaking away on the part of Rome was the beginning of what can be called the mainstream of apostasy. Apostasy means "falling away," even a small falling away. If you look at Rome in the twelfth century, it was still fairly close to Orthodoxy; nonetheless, it had begun to deviate in its various new ideas about the importance of the Pope, and so forth. Once this movement of apostasy began, it went step by step very logically to produce the world which we see today. Rome broke off from the Church because worldly ideas of Church government-the Papacy-became dominant. And once independent from the Churches in the East, these innovations began to enter into the life of Rome until it became, over the centuries, increasingly different from Orthodoxy.

Worldliness in the Western world produced the pagan Renaissance, and the departures in the Roman Church from the true Christian practices of the earlier Roman Church-most notably the innovation of "indulgences" and especially the selling of them-produced the Protestant Reformation, which gradually threw out almost all of the ancient Christian traditions together with the various superstitions and false practices against which they were supposedly rebelling.

This, in turn produced the reaction which we know as the Age of Enlightenment, the eighteenth century, which threw out religion altogether and tried to base life on human reason or common sense. This is basically what civilization is trying to live on today. And this produced communism, out of which Solzhenitsyn came and against which he is protesting, which is the last and most consistent form of trying to make life on earth solely fitting human rather than divine ideas.

If Rome had not first fallen away from Orthodoxy and started this whole process, world history would have been much different. We can see even now that the Eastern Orthodox countries, like Greece and Russia, did not have a Renaissance, or a Reformation, or even an Enlightenment period, as did the West. And if they are now bound up with the same kind of worldview as the West, it is because they have in this last century or two finally accepted all these ideas and been poisoned by them and, therefore, become part of the whole world which is now involved in one single civilization, that is, Western civilization and its dying phase, as Solzhenitsyn rightly sees. In the same passage in which St. Paul

mentions the apostasy, in II Thessalonians, he gives a second name for this movement or process. He calls it the "mystery of iniquity," the "mystery of lawlessness." He says the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, preparing for Antichrist, who is the "man of lawlessness." As we look around in our twentieth century civilization, the word "lawlessness" or "anarchy" is perhaps the chief characteristic which identifies it.

A few examples here are appropriate. In modern art, by the beginning of the twentieth century, all various schools of modern art dissolved into what can only be called some kinds of lawless states: Cubism, Futurism, ending in some blocks on a canvass, or, like Jackson Pollock was doing twenty-five years ago: standing in the midst of a large canvas, he would become "inspired" and dip his paint brush in the pails and, based simply on whatever came into his hands, he would throw the paint upon the canvass. Sometimes it is very pleasing, with nice shapes, but it is not art. You cannot seriously call it art if the ancient masters are art, because they were meticulous and careful. There was a whole art and science to it. And therefore you would say it was a comparatively ancient art; modern art, however, is a kind of lawlessness, because the artists are letting themselves go and do what is against all the artistic laws. And now, of course, you can see "masterpieces" which are simply Campbell soup cans, "worth" \$20,000. . . .

In modern music, it is the same way. A historian of modern music, Albert Frankenstein, wrote a complete history of Western music, came to the twentieth century and stopped, saying: I cannot write any more because what comes from here on is no longer music which I know. That is, he appreciated that there was something there, but he said it does not obey the laws that music obeyed up until the end of the nineteenth century; therefore, it is something else; let someone else write about it. Because, again, some kind of lawlessness, a new principle entered into it.

Once you get this far, there is really no place else to go; that is the end. That is why Solzhenitsyn has this feeling that something is coming to an end, because you cannot keep going down; you cannot keep painting Campbell soup cans and call it art. Something else has to happen if there is no place else for it to go. There has to be either an explosion: a totally new principle has to enter in, like Christianity came in Roman times and totally transformed art, making a whole new art; or else, if something new does not happen, then the whole civilization simply winds down, and that is the end of it.

In the realm of moral teaching, it is quite noticeable, especially in the last twenty years or so, how lawlessness has become the norm. And even people in high positions within the clergy in various denominations of Catholics and Protestants, and so forth, are sometimes quite willing to justify all kinds of things which were previously considered immoral. Now there is considered something of a new morality, "situation ethics," and so forth.

Solzhenitsyn mentions specifically in his Harvard lecture what happened in New York City three years ago when the electricity was cut off. He said: "The center of your culture is left without electric power for a few hours only, and all of a sudden crowds of American citizens start looting and creating havoc. The smooth surface film must be very thin. Your social system must be quite unstable and unhealthy". . . . Forty years ago

in America, if the lights went out, people would have helped each other out, lit candles, and so forth. Now, instead, they go and break windows, loot, take everything they can get for themselves, kill people and get away with whatever they think they can get away with. Something has changed in a short time.

All this is a sign of what St. Paul calls the "mystery of lawlessness." It is a mystery because a mystery is something which is not fully revealed in this world; it is something which comes from the other world. And the "mystery of righteousness" is the whole story of how Christ came from heaven and tried to save us. The mystery of lawlessness is the opposite: it is some kind of mystery coming up from hell, which breaks into this world and changes this world. Therefore, this mystery of lawlessness or anarchy is preparing for the coming of the man of lawlessness, who is Antichrist.

Even in politics and government-which make no sense at all unless you have the idea of order-this idea of lawlessness is entering in. If you look at how the world is divided: almost half the world now is in the communist camp. And communism, if you look at it objectively, is a very strange form of political and economic order, because it makes no sense: as far as politics is concerned it is tyranny, which the Communists claim to be against; as far as economics is concerned, it does not work, and yet the whole point of installing it is ostensibly to make it work better than capitalism.

Thus, from the point of view of those who introduced communism into world government, it makes no sense because it does not accomplish what it intends to accomplish and produces a slave state, as Solzhenitsyn writes about it very eloquently. And yet it takes over the world. And the rest of the world seems to be falling into it, powerless to stop the movement of communism.

What is the reason for this? I will now say a word about communism. It is not simply a system of politics or economics. Politically, it holds together only by terror, by the Gulag. And anyone who understands what is happening in the world today should and must read Solzhenitsyn's book, *The Gulag Archipelago*. That tells exactly what life was like in Russia for sixty years, in other countries for thirty years or less, and which is coming to the rest of the world. /.../

But how can people believe in this Marxist system? If you do believe in it, you have to admit that it is a very strange philosophy. It is not an ordinary philosophy that it is better to have the people vote, or that it is better to have one monarch over many people; it is not simple like that at all. It is like a dream world, a fantasy world.

It is exactly like the movements which were very common in the sixteenth century. They were called the Anabaptist movements: someone would proclaim himself to be Jesus Christ, or a prophet of Jesus Christ, and he would go out and people would begin to follow him. He would cause a big uprising, there would be a peasant revolt, and finally the prince would come along and chop them all down, and then everything would be peaceful again. But in the meantime, he had gotten the whole country excited, and people had felt that some kind of great religious thing was happening.

Communism has this same idea. If you examine it, it is actually a chiliastic idea-that Paradise is coming to earth, just ahead of us. It is very interesting to read about the beginning of the communist movement in the nineteenth century, because the writings of its early prophets, such as Fourier in France, is fantastic nonsense. He talks about the coming age of world peace and prosperity, when all the fountains will be overflowing with pink lemonade, when we will go and pick meat from trees, and all kinds of fantastic things.

How can people take this seriously? They did, and this is what inspired Marxism, in the beginning, until Marx finally became mature and saw that since this is all fairy tales, that he had to place it onto a "scientific basis," and so he developed what is called "scientific materialism." He then set forth the means of bringing this into reality, of overthrowing the bourgeois governments. . .

When he comes into power, however, what is his answer? He promises actually the same thing that these people were promising. In fact, even Lenin, at the foundation of Russian communism, had the idea that first of all there is revolution: change society, overthrow and kill all the kings; the middle class-take all their possessions; give power to the "workers," for the workers are the first ones to go to jail. You give power to the "people" somehow-though in fact it is only a few who take it over for them, holding it, as it were, in the bank for the time being, the people being unable to take care for it themselves-and after a certain number of years these so-called dictators of the proletariat are to wither away. Then people become peaceful, happy, contented, and there are no more problems. Someone even asked what is going to happen in case somebody has a religious idea, or wants to go back to the old-fashioned ways of doing things. They asked if a police department would at least be needed. And Lenin said there will be no need for a police department because the people themselves will be so changed under the new conditions of society that when anybody has a non-social idea he will be automatically squashed like a bug by the people themselves.

In other words, people would be so happy, those doing the squashing to begin with, that they will themselves do it, and there will be no need for police or armies or anything else. This is an absolute fairy tale. And this is what communist ideology is based upon. It is a very strange political philosophy. This means that it partakes of this same principle of lawlessness. It is a kind of lawlessness which pretends to be orderly. It is a forerunner of the coming of Antichrist.

The reason why communism takes over the world is not because it is so much "smarter" than capitalism or democracy, or anything of the sort. It is because in the West there is some kind of spiritual vacuum, and, when this vacuum is present, communism simply marches in and takes in one little territory after the other until, at present, it has conquered nearly half the world.

Communism, however, does not have the final answer because it is a very negative thing. In fact, if you see what has been happening in Russia in the last ten or twenty years, you can see that there is a full revolt, as far as the people's mentality is concerned; it is against

this whole system of communism. Although the dictatorship is just as strong as ever, in the last two years especially it has been putting more people in prison again, and the police are very strong everywhere. Nonetheless, the people more and more are rising up; that is, not in armed revolt but rather in elevating their minds and becoming independent, which means sooner or later the whole system is going to collapse.

So, communism does not have the answer; it cannot conquer the whole world and then bring peace and happiness as it claims it can. In the meantime, however, it is preparing for one very important thing which has to happen before the end of the world can come: there is to be one unified world government from which Christianity has somehow been kicked out. And that communism has been doing very successfully.

In order to supply people with a "spiritual" basis for one world government, there has to be something higher. And we see in the ideas of, for example, the United Nations, some kind of thing which looks like a "spiritual" answer. It claims to be for the foundation of one world government which will not be a tyranny, or based on any particular idea like communism. It is very vague with no particular Christian basis. There is a "meditation chapel" in the UN building which, when it was built twenty years ago, was greatly discussed as to what would be the object of worship in this room. If you place a Cross, you are quickly branded as Christian; you can't have anything Moslem or Hindu as you are already identified; it must be "above" all religions. They finally decided upon some kind of little black block. It is like bowing down before some kind of idol. This means a very vague kind of religious interest, because everybody does indeed have a religious interest. (You can't hide that. Communism is going to fall because of this.) Still, such a vague thing! This is exactly the kind of thing which the devil likes to grab hold of, for in any particular religious belief you may be mistaken, but at least you have put your heart to it, and God can forgive all kinds of mistakes; however, if you do not have any particular religious belief and you give yourself to some kind of vague idea, then the demons come in and begin to attack.

Another sign of the times of the end which is approaching is the present state of the Jews in Israel, in the city of Jerusalem. According to the prophecies of Scripture and the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church, Jerusalem will be the world capital of Antichrist. And there he will rebuild the temple of Solomon, in which he will be worshipped as God. This is one of the events which comes near the very end of the world. Of course, it is very significant that only since 1948 has Jerusalem been once more in the hands of the Jews. Only since 1967 has the place where the temple was, beneath the Mosque of Omar, been in the hands of Jews, because that was in the part which was held by the Moslems.

If you were to ask anyone who is aware at all of political events in the world a question as to what would be the ideal city to have as the world capital, if there is going to be a world empire, it is obvious what the answer would be. It cannot be New York, because it is the center of capitalism. It cannot be Moscow because it is the center of communism. It cannot even be Rome, because Roman Catholicism is still some kind of limited tradition. The logical place is Jerusalem, because there three religions and continents come together. It is the logical place where there can be peace, brotherhood and

harmony, all of which will seem to look good but unless they have a solid Christian foundation they are not God-pleasing. Those things which can be used by Antichrist. Another aspect of the Jewish question is that many young Jews are becoming interested in Christianity, because among the Jews also there is the same kind of religious seeking and problems which occur among other people, and some of these Jews are being converted to Christianity; some are coming even to Orthodoxy. This is already a sign and preparation for the fact that at the end of time the Jews will be restored to Christianity. /
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We should now say a word about Antichrist. He is not simply a cruel dictator who is anti-Christian. I think most people, when they think of Antichrist, think of someone like Hitler, who was a persecutor, or Stalin, who persecutes Christians and is against religion. But that is not Antichrist, though he has that aspect. "Anti" means not just "against," but also "in place of." He will be someone who will come and take the place of Christ; it says quite clearly that he will be worshipped as God in the temple of Jerusalem.

You don't go and worship some kind of ordinary dictator, and the whole world could not very easily do that. But he will come as a world dictator who is accepted as God, as something and someone very positive; thus he will do everything possible to imitate and take the place of Christ. Therefore, the Apostles always emphasize very strongly in their warnings about the end of the world that we must be aware of deception. St. Paul says that the coming of the lawless one, by the activity of Satan, will be with all power and signs and lying wonders. God shall send-that is, allow-a strong delusion that men should believe a lie. That is, it will be something very deceptive; in fact, so much so that the elect themselves might be deceived if the times were not cut short.

Christ Himself warns, in speaking of the last days, that false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders so as to lead astray if possible even the elect. And in the Apocalypse, St. John states that the last times will be characterized by demonic spirits working wonders. Thus, one of the signs of the coming of the end is the multiplication of demonic signs and wonders; that is, false miracles, and things of that sort.

By such things I mean in particular, for example, the increase in the last several decades of outright satanism-satan worship, which only in this last twenty years or so has achieved such openness and notoriety; people who openly call themselves witches; the greatly increased interest in Eastern pagan religions, which in these last two or three decades have become tremendously fashionable so that there are now Western-born, American and English gurus and Zen masters, and so forth.

And people take it quite seriously, bowing down to the ground before Maharaji, who declared himself to be God-something which was quite unheard of until the last two or three decades. It is occurring among ordinary, idealist Americans-just ordinary people bowing down on the ground before Maharaji.

In Western Christianity-because the element of the true worship of God which Orthodoxy has preserved has been lost-there has come a reaction which takes the form of "searching after signs." It is very strong in the so-called "Charismatic Movement." There are quite a number of spectacular things which happen: people "speak in tongues"; they give so-called "prophecies"; there are some kind of "healings," and a number of remarkable things occur.

These are not in accordance with what we Orthodox Christians know of real spiritual life. It is a whole false outlook on spiritual life, causing people to seek these things and obtain them. Of course, all this seeking of "peace," such as in transcendental meditation, gives a more or less this-wordly feeling of contentment which has nothing to do with true spiritual striving.

Then one could name all kinds of occult and paranormal phenomena which are so prevalent in our times: various kinds of research into ESP is very strong in the Soviet Union, much more so than in America, where people who claim to be atheists allow and even promote research into things like mental telepathy, hypnotism, faith healing, prophecies, auras of plants and humans, photographs of the boundaries between matter and psyche, the action of mind over matter. One contemporary psychic, Yuri Geller, of whom you have heard, is able to bend spoons without touching them, and he claims he gets his power from "beings from outer space."

Some people laugh, of course, when they hear about this, and think it is very funny when people are so stupid as to think things like that, but the phenomena which are occurring are quite real. The explanations which people use to explain them have a remarkable similarity to what we know in the ancient Lives of Saints.

That is, all the phenomena which are told by people, for example, who claim to be abducted by a UFO spacecraft, and so forth-whatever you might think about the story-is exactly what we have read described in the Lives of Saints as the way in which the demons operate. That is, their very remarkable ability to switch from matter to psyche, instantly to vanish or appear, or to move quickly from one place to the other. This is the way in which the demons operate. It is precisely the way these so-called "space beings" operate also. It is very interesting that the demons come back into modern history through this means.

All these are signs of occult and strange spiritual attitudes, which produce today what cannot but be described as miracles; that is, something which does not accord with the normal way of natural processes. This is just what is needed when Antichrist comes with great deception and demonic miracles and wonders, in order to deceive people.

Many followers of the Charismatic Movement, who do not believe in occultism, and in fact are very much against it, nonetheless take their very strange "charismatic" phenomena as being in the Christian context. Many people like these believe that what they are seeing is an "outpouring of the Holy Spirit." Their name for it is the "Coming of

the Third Age of the Holy Spirit," or the "New Age of the Holy Spirit." And they think that this is a sign that Christ is coming soon.

The actual prophecies, however, in the Holy Scriptures, as well as in the writings of the Holy Fathers of the early Church especially, indicate exactly the opposite. Christ Himself said in Luke 8:18: *When the Son of Man returns, will He find faith on the earth?* That is, the true flock of Christ at the end will be very small, and most Christians, or people who call themselves Christians, will follow Antichrist.

This idea of the "New Age of the Holy Spirit" is, again, a chiliastic idea, looking forward to some kind of a worldly adaptation of Paradise. And it has been troubling the Western world since the twelfth century and appeared for the first time in Francis of Assisi.

All these are very negative signs, and, of course, a Christian is supposed to be prepared for the most negative things possible. Nonetheless, we should also be prepared to look for the positive signs of the end of the world. First of all, one of the positive signs is Israel. Of course, the state of Israel is a totally different matter, but the very fact that it looks as though there is beginning in the Jewish people some kind of stirring, as though the process of coming back to Christ may be beginning—that is a very hopeful, very positive thing, because this is the thing which St. Paul said, that he would rather be in hell for the sake of his people if only they would awaken and see Christ, Who came for them first of all. And when they finally see, that means that is the very end of the world, because all the peoples have been called in, and they are the last ones to come back.

Then there is the movement of conversion to Orthodoxy in many parts of the world. In Africa, for example, in the last fifty years there has been a tremendous movement of conversion of people in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, the Congo, and other countries. They often write to us the simplest kind of letters, very "evangelical," about "rejoicing in the Lord," and they have Scriptural texts and are very pious and faithful to Orthodoxy; they are just the kind of simple-hearted people Christ wants. These people are coming into the Orthodox Church now.

The same thing is happening in other countries; in fact, right here in America we see more and more people are awakening, and often for no apparent reason they are finding out that Orthodoxy is the real Church. This is happening also in Western Europe and in other countries. Then there is suffering Russia, and this is a subject which deserves many talks by itself. But it is certainly a remarkable thing that this country, which for sixty years now has suffered under communism, under atheism, has endured, and according to all the communist laws—since religion is only a superstitious remnant of the past, and all the old ladies are dead—there should be no more religion left, but now after sixty years, when all the old ladies are dead, religion is coming back stronger than ever.

Something is therefore wrong with their idea, and the "something" that is wrong is that they do not realize that the soul wants God, wants Christ; and thus, these people for sixty years endured this yoke of atheism, which is a very powerful thing, with the whole of society based upon Godlessness. People have endured this, they have literally stuck it out,

and they are coming back to believe in God. Solzhenitsyn says of Russia and other countries which have endured communism: "Through intense suffering our country has now achieved the spiritual development of such intensity that the Western system in its present state of spiritual exhaustion does not look attractive to us. A fact which cannot be disputed is the weakening of human beings in the West, while in the East they are being firmer and stronger. Six decades for our people, and three decades for the people of Eastern Europe. During that time we have been through a spiritual training far in advance of the Western experience."

Father Dimitry Dudko, especially, says very similar things and here makes a very important point also, that when someone once told him how much better it was to be in the West, because there they have freedom and are able to practice their Christianity in freedom. And he answered that there they have spirituality with comfort, whereas here we have spirituality with suffering, and, therefore, it is deeper. And on the basis of our sufferings and martyrdom, there can come a seed of Christianity, because the blood of the martyrs is the seed of Christianity. That is why something very deep is happening in the Russian people and those who have suffered under communism.

And besides this hopefulness coming from Russia, which is awakening to its Christian roots, we also have a very practical lesson: that is, Russia in these last sixty years has gone through the experience of living in catacombs, under persecutions, under torture chambers and refined techniques of the modern Gulag, and the people have survived. And we have records of how they survived, and we know how they were tortured and how they got through it. Therefore, if this persecution comes here to America, we already have a beginning, something to rely on; we already have more hope that we can endure the same thing which they endured.

Finally, the entire outlook of Orthodox Christianity is a positive one. Even in the earliest times, when the whole Roman world was against the Church and simply hunted out Christians from the catacombs and took them to torture and death. And Christians went to their death singing.

Of course, today, we have more than ever before the experience of all the past centuries of Orthodox saints, Holy Fathers, martyrs, ascetics: all those who have lived for Christ in this world from all the different lands-west, east, north and south. This experience is ours to know, much of it is in English, and it gives answers to basically all the contemporary questions which arise.

And if we have this living contact with the saints of all ages and with those who are suffering today for Christ, especially people like Father Dimitry Dudko, the many people who are in prison camps. . . You should read the publication *Orthodox America*. Each issue has articles on the people who are suffering in prison camps, and it is very encouraging to see how they do not give up in the midst of all kinds of tortures, and while sometimes they sort of give in a little bit you can understand that it is very difficult for them; still, they are really extremely courageous-this gives courage and inspiration to us. And for us, in the condition of freedom, there is no excuse for us not to be offering our

struggle to God. Well, that is the basic talk. Perhaps we can raise questions and discuss further things

Orthodox America

Questions and Answers

From a talk given by Father Seraphim Rose in 1994 on Signs of the End Times
[The Talk](#)

Question: *Are the Jews going to destroy the Mosque of Omar and set up the temple? Will they return to the use of the book of Leviticus and return to all the laws?*

Fr. Seraphim: Well, it is their problem what they will do with the temple. Human intentions are one thing; the second thing is how God wills it to come out. They tried before to build the temple, and did not succeed. As far as Leviticus is concerned, I do not know; I would, however, think they will try to do as much as possible. If the whole idea of building the temple is to get back to that old religion, I suppose they would try to imitate it as closely as they could.

Of course, in modern times they would undoubtedly find they would have to change all kinds of things. And when Antichrist himself comes to sit there, he will have his own ideas, to make it acceptable for everybody else. It is difficult to see how the exact form might come out. But when it is all fulfilled, you will see it is exactly the way it was prophesied. If men, however, try to do something before the time when God wants it to be done, then it simply will not work.

There was the attempt of Julian the Apostate to build the temple to prove that Christ was wrong when He said that "one stone will not be left upon another." And Julian commanded the Jews to begin building the temple, and they began to build. And it is a very well-authenticated historical fact in several of the early church historians, that they would build, and at night everything would fall down, and everyone would see balls of fire coming out from the earth. Nowadays, historians say they must have been digging oil wells, or something. . . Obviously there was something there preventing this project from going on, and they finally gave up. Julian himself was killed, and the whole thing stopped.

The times were not ripe, in other words, for that to happen. Of course, today the times are much more ripe. There were two saints of the Old Testament who did not die: Enoch

was translated, and he was not found; and Elijah went up to heaven in the fiery chariot, and therefore they will come back as the two witnesses and preach against Antichrist.

In fact, there are traditions about St. John the Theologian returning in the last times. Then there is the prophecy of St. Seraphim of Sarov that he should come back at that time, though he died, and so he will come back resurrected. The two mentioned in the Apocalypse, however, are Enoch and Elijah.

Question: *Are they going to tell the people at that time that this is the Antichrist and not Christ?*

Fr. Seraphim: According to tradition, they have two functions: Elijah will speak to the Jews. It says in the Gospel that they asked Jesus if Elijah had come yet, some saying that John the Baptist was Elijah, to "reconcile the fathers to the children." And Our Lord said that, in a certain sense, he had come; that is to say, in a spiritual sense he had come.

But most people would not accept this, therefore, the real Elijah comes at the end of time to reconcile the fathers-the Jews, to the sons-the Gentiles. Enoch will speak to the rest of the people. In other words, it will be quite clear at that time who Antichrist is and that these are the two prophets speaking and exposing him as Antichrist.

Question: *If Antichrist and the mystery of iniquity will produce imitations of Christ's revelation, then surely Antichrist will have his "Church"-only it will not in any way be like the Church of Christ. How do you see the World Council of Churches-the Council of the Churches of this World?-as part of this mystery of iniquity?*

Fr. Seraphim: Well, it is trying to prepare for that. It is the religious equivalent to the United Nations, trying to build up a religious unity which is not on the basis of Christ.

Question: *The vagueness of that UN obelisk of which you spoke-I was there in 1976. It is a dark, black rock. It kind of reminds me of the "least common denominator deity" that ecumenism is producing: we all believe in "Christ" in Whom we have no common opinion whatsoever.*

Fr. Seraphim: And even beyond Christ, because now they welcome non-Christian groups, dialogue with non-Christian religions, including any sort of any kind of religious belief, which, while in a certain sense it is true, you cannot make anything positive out of that. Therefore, Antichrist will come to offer some kind of catalyst to gel all the elements together, and all will bow down to him since he supplies what they want. The Russian writer Soloviev-a very interesting man, though a little crazy in some ways-at the end of

the last century, in his last few years became very changed. In fact, he said he felt very strange going to church because he felt that the age of the catacombs was about to return. And he felt he should be going underground to church. While he was under this impulse in the last year or two of his life, he wrote a book called *Three Conversations of Antichrist and the End of the World*, in which he sets forth like a novel the coming of Antichrist.

He places it in the twenty-first century, with world wars, in which a great man-leader arises who first becomes President of Europe and by acclamation is made the President of the World for life, and then World Emperor, and he reunites everyone on the basis of the Roman Empire, and decides that he has to have a religious unity also. So he calls a world Ecumenical Council in Jerusalem, and there he offers to all people all that they ever desired if only they will sort of acknowledge and bow down to him.

For the Protestants he opens a kind of special Academy to explore the Scriptures from all different points of view and Biblical criticism; for the Roman Catholics he creates some kind of Papal institute or some such; and to the Orthodox he offers, in a restored Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, a museum of all possible Orthodox antiquities, in which every kind of beautiful thing which Orthodoxy ever had will be placed in the museum. And this is supposed to satisfy the Orthodox people. Therefore, everyone will be satisfied and will all bow down and worship him. Of course, that means that you will be satisfied with this external thing, which, from an external point of view, represents your religion. Anyone who is attracted merely by glittering censers, incense and beautiful vestments, he, first of all, will fall down before Antichrist.

Question: *How do you view the Orthodox presence in America, which has more or less produced the World Council of Churches?*

Fr. Seraphim: You mean the apocalyptic significance of Orthodoxy in America? I don't think there is anything more significant about America than any other country, like Uganda, but I think it is definitely significant that people are awakening to it, those who have never had any relationship to Orthodoxy, simply because they heard the word preached, began to wake up, especially in a country which is supposedly totally Christianized, seeing that all which is called Christianity is not really Christianity, and therefore they want Orthodoxy. That could very well be one of the signs of the end.

Of course, there are different kinds of ends. When a country comes to its end, as before communism came to Russia, there was a great spiritual revival occurring: they had great saints, such as St. John of Kronstadt, the elders of Optina Monastery, and many holy monks and bishops living at that time. And many people who were very fervent. But the whole society, though, was against it: it had become so Westernized and almost anti-Christian. So the revival was finally submerged.

But if you look at it from the point of view of spiritual revival, there was definitely a spiritual revival going on, and therefore, the more you see that kind of thing happening here, you begin to wonder whether it isn't coming to an end or something similar for us, too. And that may very well be bound up with the end of everything, because things right now seem to be stepping up their tempo, both in Russia and in America, the whole world situation. It looks as though we are heading for some momentous events quite close in the future.

We should not, of course, get carried away by historical events, for Christianity is to save your soul, and, therefore, each person finds out about the truth and starts right here and now starting to live according to the commandments of the Church. That is the first thing which we should have in mind. And if somebody next year also finds out about it, perhaps somebody down the street, after which there is a whole group of people, that is all the better, inspiring you to struggle more yourself.

I think, though, that there is not much difference as to the end result: the Gulag, and whatever else happened in Russia, the aim was destroy Christianity, and to a large extent it succeeded, because it is with great difficulty that people find out about Christianity now; and in the West all this indifference, tolerance, freedom and prosperity also helps to destroy any kind of strong Christianity. The end result, as Solzhenitsyn says, in the East they become stronger; after communism they became stronger than we in the West who have all this freedom. But we should not be satisfied being weaker; we should offer to God our struggle.

Question: *Are there any references made to the government using a stamp on the hand or forehead with which to purchase food or necessities? Do you think that would go along with the coming of the one world government?*

Fr. Seraphim: It has been done before. In 1812, when Napoleon invaded Russia, when they returned there was no food, and so everyone was stamped on the wrist or top of the wrist with a number, and without that number they could not get any food. And Adolph Hitler also did something like that, though I think it was not a number but rather some kind of a sign. That idea has already been practiced. It is, in a sense, a natural thing. If you are short of papers, or no means of identification, you would have to mark a person on the forehead or hand, or something like that.

Question: *Could you tie in the ideas of monastic life with the apocalyptic vision?*

Fr. Seraphim: On the most simple level, a monk is one who is supposed to be expecting death, the end. therefore, he takes seriously the words: "Behold, I come quickly," and prepares himself to be in such a state that when Christ comes, he is ready. In that sense, monasticism is apocalyptic. Of course, everybody is supposed to be like that if you are a

Christiam. We should not think that only the monks are responsible for living a Christian life; such an idea is not true; a monk is just like everyone else. Everyone must wake up. If you look at the early Church, there was no distinction as to who was a monk and who was a layman—they all recognized the truth and they saw that it was urgent, to be lived immediately.

Question: *Could you address some aspects of science fiction that you had a chance to write about in your book, *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*?*

Fr. Seraphim: Yes, anything in particular?

Question: *Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov writes that modern man expects an "encounter" of one sort or another; and of course, we get that in the titles of these movies: *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, whose creatures you describe in your book as ". . . barely disguised demons." Could you tie in this aspect of the mentality of supposedly atheistic modern man as a "sign of the times"?*

Fr. Seraphim: Well, I think that things like science fiction—which is only one aspect of it—is the way through which totally atheistic, unbelieving, man can come back to religion, (which, how-ever, is not the religion that saves your soul, that requires your soul to repent) to some kind of vague religious interest, which are perfectly in harmony with the spirit of the times, with worldliness, and therefore that belongs to Antichrist. It is remarkable if you look at many of the Star Trek series, the things which are performed by these space creatures are merely demonic tricks, which you can read in the lives of the saints. And it is interesting that if you read to them from the lives of the saints they would laugh at you; but not so if you read them in science fiction stories. They might not take it entirely seriously as reality; nonetheless, that is the way it begins. First, you sort of accept it as a fantasy and, if not you, then the next generation begins to take it more seriously as reality. Thus, it finally enters into the atmosphere as something quite plausible.

Question: *Now we see such an outpouring of ideas and attitudes which are not Christian and are even anti-Christian, and some of the things of which we may not be consciously aware but are still in the air, what are some practical things which Orthodox Christians can do to resist these and become more aware of them?*

Fr. Seraphim: Well, we should be reading more Orthodox literature, such as the lives of the saints and the writings of the Fathers, on the more practical side, especially, on Christian life, so that we will have an idea of what are the basic kinds of temptations which come to people who are conducting a Christian life. And that will help us even in

new kinds of situations as we fit it into the type to which it belongs. And the more you are doing that, the more you are prepared to face temptations which are happening.

Another thing is to try to look at the things which go on in the world around you with a critical point of view; that is, not simply accepting whatever is in fashion-in fact, if it comes into fashion since the times are always evil and now more than ever, there is bound to be some kind of a wrong reason for it to be in fashion. Therefore, you should instantly distrust some kind of new fashionable thing, and do not give your entire trust to it.

That does not mean you have to be entirely sour about everything, just cautious. As St. Paul says, you have to be walking circumspectly, redeeming the time for the days are evil. If that was true during his time, it is so much more the case now when evil has built up so much. Since we live in a civilization which is very advanced in the sense of providing instant comfort and all kinds of convenient things, there is a certain kind of paralysis which can come over one, a certain kind of hypnotism. You must be aware of anything which makes you extremely passive; for example, television: if you watch television too much it produces this kind of feeling of passively waiting for the next thing which will come to you. It is spiritually a very dangerous state. I think you must be aware of anything that can produce some kind of passive state in us which can lead to hypnosis or hypnotic suggestions. I think if you are doing those things, plus leading a normal Christian life and saying prayers according to the prayer book, attending church when you can, making prostrations, venerating icons; that is, the normal things which Orthodox Christians do. All these help guard against all the evil which is in the air.