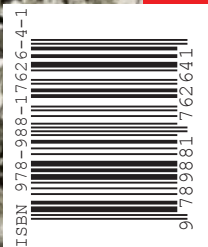
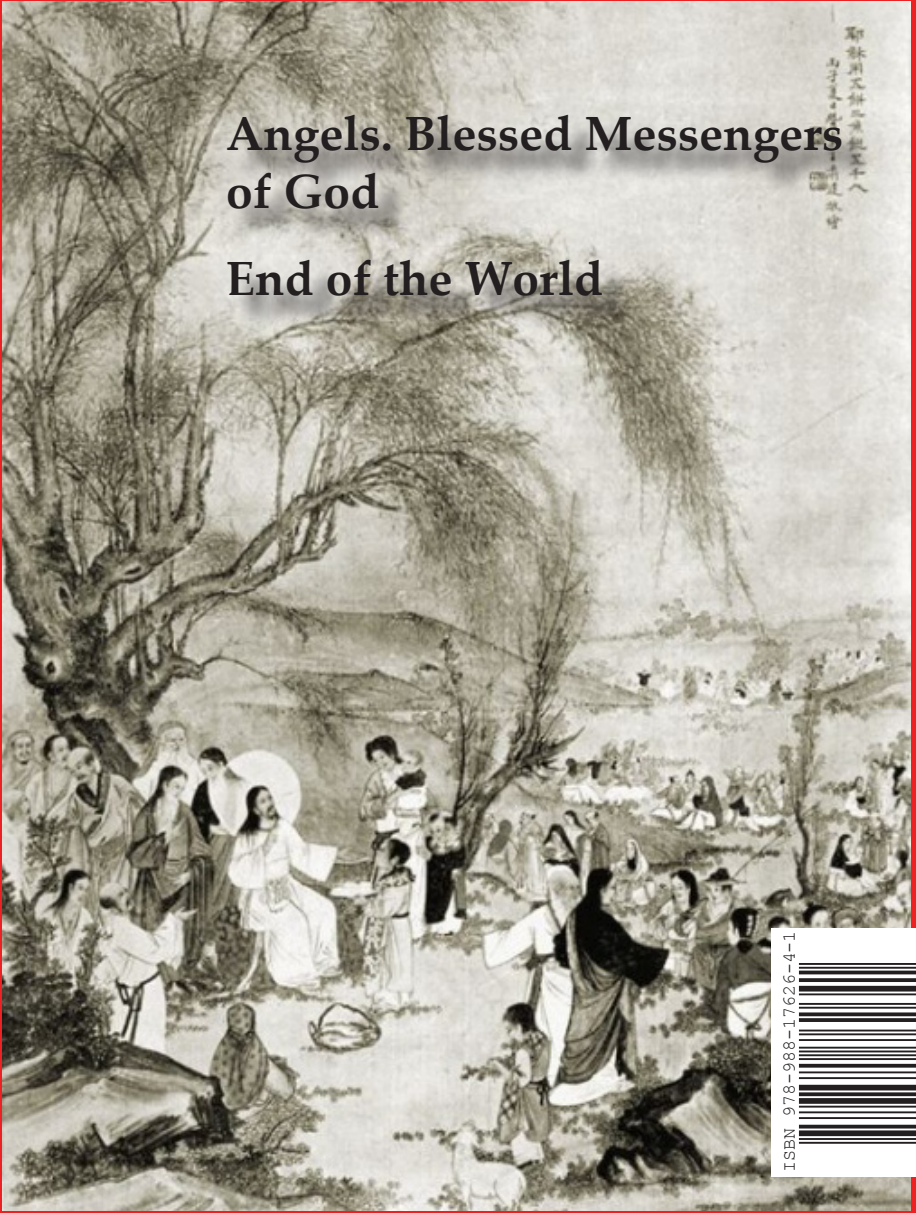




Missionary Leaflets

Angels. Blessed Messengers of God End of the World



Orthodox Brotherhood
Of Apostles
Saints Peter And Paul



Orthodox Fellowship of
ALL SAINTS OF CHINA

Missionary Leaflets

Bishop Alexander (Mileant)

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Orthodox Brotherhood Of Apostles Saints Peter And Paul
Orthodox Fellowship of All Saints of China
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Bishop Alexander (Mileant)

Angels
Blessed Messengers of God

Two Worlds — Physical and Spiritual

Our world would be utterly poor in content and dull if it consisted of only that which man can touch and feel. In such a world, without a meaningful past and without a superior purpose, where death unceremoniously cuts short all creative enterprise, all enthusiastic endeavors toward good and happiness, existence itself would be a tragic contradiction.

However, using his reasoning power and insight, man can perceive much more depth and mystery in the world than relying just on bodily senses. He can realize that, besides the physical, he is surrounded by a huge spiritual world. At the end of the last century and the beginning of this one, a materialistic attitude ridiculed the very possibility of different forms of life besides those existing on earth. However, thanks to the speedy progress of science during the last fifty years, modern man has considerably enlarged his scope of understanding. Now it is well known that the universe which we inhabit, although it be vast, is not unending. The very representation of the world has been greatly spiritualized. Scientists have come to understand that matter is not a hard, indivisible and unchanging substance, but it is rather one of the manifestations of energy. Energy can take other forms totally unlike the familiar atoms and molecules. Therefore, outside

the boundaries of the visible world there may exist other worlds totally different from ours. These discoveries, as well as space flights, have given birth to a whole new movement in contemporary literature as well as in the movie industry which touches upon encounters with beings from other galaxies and worlds. This interest in the alien and unusual, unfortunately, often intertwines with unhealthy fantasy and carries with it a semi-demonic character. Nevertheless, the gravitation toward the enlargement of the conception of the world by contemporary society is evident

Instead of these extravagances, the fantasies of theosophists and spiritists, the Christian faith gives contemporary man a clear and sound doctrine regarding the spiritual world. The Christian faith teaches that, besides our physical, there is a great angelic world. The angels, like human beings, possess intellect, free will and feelings similar to ours, but they are bodiless spirits. As a matter of fact, our visible world is but a drop in the ocean of God's creation.

The Nature of Angels — Their Hierarchy and Ministrations

According to the Holy Scriptures, the angels, human beings, and all nature were created by God. With the words, "In the beginning God created Heaven and earth"¹, we have the first indication that God created the spiritual world. Here, in contrast to earth, a substantial world, this world of spirits is called Heaven. The angels were already present during the creation of the starry skies, which is evidenced by the words of God spoken to

¹ Gen. 1:1

Job, "When the stars were created, all My angels sang praises to Me"².

On the creation of the angels, Saint Gregory the Theologian expresses the following thoughts: "Since for the goodness of God it was not sufficient to be occupied only with the contemplation of Himself, but it was needful that good should extend further and further, so that the number of those who have received grace might be as many as possible (because this is characteristic of the highest Goodness) — therefore, God devised first of all the angelic heavenly powers; and the thought became deed, which was fulfilled by the Word, and perfected by the Spirit ... And inasmuch as the first creatures were pleasing to Him, He devised another world, material and visible, the orderly composition of heaven and earth, and that which is between them."

Angel in Greek means messenger. This word denotes mainly their relationship to man. They, as our elder brothers, reveal to us the will of God and assist us in reaching salvation. Man, from the beginning of his state in paradise, knew of the existence of the angels. This fact is reflected in many ancient religions.

It is difficult for us to comprehend the life of the angels and the world in which they live because they are so different from us. It is known that the angels serve God, carry out His will, and glorify Him. Belonging to the spiritual world, they are usually invisible to us. "When angels, through the will of God, appear to those who are worthy, then they appear not as they are themselves, but in a transformed state, in one that is visible" — explains the blessed John Damascene. In the well-known book of Tobit (Old Testament), the angel

who was accompanying Tobit and his son says of himself: "All these days I was visible to you, but I did not eat or drink, and only by your eyes was this imagined"³. "Actually," according to John Damascene, "angels are called spiritual and incorporeal only in comparison with us. For in comparison with God all proves to be gross and material. For only the Divinity is truly immaterial and incorporeal."

Angels surpass man in all spiritual strength. However, even they, as created beings, bear in themselves the seal of limitation. Being fleshless, they are less dependent than men on space and time. However, only God is omnipotent and omniscient. The Holy Scriptures represent angels either descending from heaven to earth or ascending back to heaven. Angels are created immortal, as is witnessed by the Scriptures, teaching that they cannot die⁴. Nevertheless, their immortality is not a property of their nature, nor is it unconditional, but, just as the immortality of our soul, it depends wholly upon God's will and mercy.

Angels, as fleshless spirits, are capable of inward self-development to the highest degree. Their intellect is higher than that of man. By their might and power, as the Apostle Peter explains, they surpass all earthly authorities and governments⁵. Nevertheless, even their exalted attributes have their limits. Scriptures indicate that they do not know the depth of the Essence of God, which is known only to the Spirit of God⁶. Likewise, they do not wholly comprehend the mysteries of redemption into which they wish to penetrate⁷. They even do not know all of man's thoughts⁸. Finally, they cannot on their own perform miracles without the will of God.

³ Tobit 12:19

⁴ Luke 20:36

⁵ 2 Peter 2:11

⁶ 1 Corinth. 2:11 They do not know the future, which is also known only to God (Mark 13:32)

⁷ 1 Peter 1:12

⁸ 3 Kings 8:39

Note:
3Kings in
the Slavonic
Bible =
1Kings KJV

⁹ Daniel 7:10

¹⁰ Luke 2:13

The world of the angels is represented in the Sacred Scriptures as being extraordinarily vast. When the prophet Daniel saw God the Father in the form of the “Ancient of Days,” he also saw that “A thousand thousands ministered to Him; and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him”⁹. During the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem “a multitude of the heavenly host” extolled His coming to earth¹⁰.

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem says the following: “Imagine how numerous is the Roman population; imagine how numerous are other barbarian tribes existing today, and how many of them have died during one hundred years; imagine how many have been buried during a thousand years; imagine all the people, beginning with Adam, to the present day; there is a great multitude of them. But it is yet small in comparison with the angels, of which there are many more! They are the ninety and nine sheep of the parable, but mankind is only one sheep. For according to the extent of universal space, we must reckon the number of its inhabitants. The whole earth inhabited by us is like a point in the midst of heaven and yet contains so great a multitude; what a multitude must the heaven which encircles it contain! And must not the heaven of heavens contain unimaginable numbers? If it is written that ‘a thousand thousands ministered to Him; and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him,’ it is only because the prophet could not express a greater number.”

In view of such a multitude of angels, it is natural to suppose that in the world of angels, just as in the material world, there are various degrees of perfection and, therefore, various stages or hierarchical degrees of the heavenly powers. Thus,

the word of God calls some Angels and some Archangels¹¹.

The Orthodox Church, guided by the views of the ancient writers of the Church and Church Fathers, divides the world of the angels into nine choirs or ranks, and these nine into three hierarchies, each hierarchy having three ranks. The first hierarchy consists of those spirits who are closest to God, namely, the Thrones, Cherubim and Seraphim. Within the second, the middle hierarchy, are the Authorities, Dominions and Powers. In the third, which is closer to us, are the Angels, Archangels and Principalities. Thus, the existence of the Angels and Archangels is witnessed by almost every page in the Holy Scriptures. The books of the prophets mention the Cherubim and Seraphim. Cherubim means to be near; hence it means the near ones; Seraphim means fiery, or filled with fire. The names of the other angelic ranks are mentioned by the Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Ephesians, saying that Christ is in the heavens "far above any Principality, and Authority, and Power, and Dominion"¹².

Besides these angelic ranks, Saint Paul teaches in his epistles to the Colossians that the Son of God created everything visible and invisible, "Thrones, Dominions, or Principalities, or Powers"¹³. Consequently, when we join the Thrones to those four about which the Apostle speaks to the Ephesians, that is, the Principalities, Authorities, Powers and Dominions, there are five ranks; and when to these we add Angels, Archangels, Cherubim and Seraphim, then there are nine angelic ranks.

In addition, some Church Fathers expressed the opinion that dividing the angels into nine

¹¹ 1 Thess.
4:16; Jude
verse 9

¹² Ephesians
1:21

¹³ Colossians
1:16

¹⁴Apocalypse 1:4
¹⁵Apocalypse 1:21
¹⁶Joshua 5:13; Daniel 10:13 and 12:1; Jude verse 9; Revelation 12:7-8
¹⁷Daniel 8:16, 9:21; Luke 1:19-26
¹⁸Tobit 3:16 and 12:12-15; 3 Esdras 4:1 and 5:20; 3 Esdras 5:16
Note:
3 Esdras in the Slavonic Bible = 2 Esdras KJV, or 4 Esdras in Vulgate Appendix

choirs touched only upon those names that are revealed by the word of God but in no way encompasses other names and choirs of angels that have not been as yet revealed to us. For example, the Apostle John the Theologian mentions in the book of Revelation mysterious creatures and the seven spirits by the throne of God: "Grace be to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is coming, and from the seven spirits who are before His throne"¹⁴. The Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Ephesians writes that Christ resides in heaven far above the enumerated angels and "every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come"¹⁵. Thus he hints that in Heaven there are other spiritual creatures whose names are yet not revealed to mankind.

In the Holy Scriptures, some angels are called by their own names. For example, the prophet Daniel, the Apostle Jude, and the book of Revelation mention the archangel Michael¹⁶. The name Michael in Hebrew means Who is like God? In the Scriptures he is mentioned as the army of God and is depicted as the main fighter against the devil and his servants. Usually he is painted with a flaming sword in hand. The name Gabriel means strength of God. Both the prophet Daniel and the evangelist Luke mention Gabriel¹⁷. In the Scriptures he is represented as the messenger of God's mysteries. In icons he is painted with a lily in his hand. The Scriptures mention by name three more angels: Raphael — Assistance of God, Uriel — Flame of God, and Salathiel — Prayer book to God¹⁸.

What are the tasks of the beings of the spiritual world? Evidently they are designated by God to be the most perfect reflections of His greatness

and glory, with inseparable participation in His blessedness. If of the visible heavens it is said, “the heavens proclaim the glory of God,” then all the more is this the aim of the spiritual heavens. The prophet Isaiah was honored to see “the Lord sitting on the high extolled throne, the hems of His vestments filling the whole temple. Surrounding Him were the Seraphim, each having six wings; with two they covered His face, with two they covered His feet, and they flew with the other two. And they called to each other and said: Holy, Holy, Holy, the Lord Sabaoth! The whole world is filled with His Glory”¹⁹.

¹⁹ Isaiah 6:
1-4; Ezekiel
ch. 10

The Fallen Angels

Originally God created all angels as benevolent celestial beings. Nevertheless they, like humans, were endowed with a free will and could chose either to obey or oppose God, to opt between good and evil. Some of the angels, headed by Lucifer, one of the closest to God, misused that freedom and rebelled against God. They were expelled from heaven and established their own kingdom — hell. Lucifer, which means bearer of light, was later renamed Satan, which means antagonist. He is also called the devil (which means slanderer), the serpent, and the dragon. The words of the Savior, “I saw Satan, fallen from heaven as a bolt of lightning,” refer to this prehistoric event, the rebellion by Lucifer and other angels against God. This is described in the book of Revelation with the following details: “There occurred a war in the heavens. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought

against them. However they did not prevail, and there was no room for them in heaven. The great dragon was cast down, that ancient snake, known as devil and satan ... and his angels were also cast down with him"²⁰. From the initial words of chapter 12 of the book of Revelation, where it is said that the dragon drew after him one third of the stars in heaven²¹, some conclude that at that time Lucifer seduced one third of the angels. These fallen angels are called demons.

Having become malevolent, the fallen angels try to push men to the path of sin and thus to their damnation. Oddly, the fallen angels themselves fear the kingdom they have created — hell or the abyss. Indeed, when the Savior, healing a person possessed by demons, wanted to send them back to their abyss, they begged Him to allow them instead to enter swine²². The Savior calls the devil "murderer from the beginning and the father of lies," having in mind that moment in which, taking the form of a snake, he deceived our forbears Adam and Eve to break the commandment of God and by doing so deprived them of everlasting life²³. From that moment on, having the opportunity to influence the thoughts, feelings and acts of man, the devil and his demons endeavor to pitch him deeper and deeper into the mire of sin, into which they themselves have sunk: "He who sins is from the devil, because the devil himself sinned first ... Anyone who commits sin is a slave of sin"²⁴. The presence of evil spirits among us presents a constant danger. That is why the Apostle Peter extols us: "Be sober and watchful, for your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goes about seeking someone to devour"²⁵. The Apostle Paul expresses the same thoughts on discretion, saying, "Put on the

²⁰ Revelation 12:7-9

²¹ Revelation 12:4

²² Luke 8:31

²³ Genesis 3: 1-6; John 8:44

²⁴ 1 John 3:8; John 8:34

²⁵ 1 Peter 5:8

armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities and the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness on high"²⁶.

From these warnings of the Holy Scriptures, we should remind ourselves that our life is pervaded by a persistent battle for the salvation of our souls. Whether one wants it or not, every human being, from early childhood, is drawn into the battle of choosing between good and evil, between the will of God and the will of demons. The battle between good and evil began even before the creation of the world and will continue until the day of the final Judgment. Actually the battle in heaven is finished, with the complete defeat of evil. Now the site of the battle has been transferred into the world, more precisely into our minds and hearts. As we shall see, the good angels, and in particular our Guardian Angels, actively help us in our battle against evil.

The Angels' Sphere of Action in Relation to Man

In contrast to the malevolent spirits, the good angels feel compassion for us and often protect and help us. Regarding this, the Apostle Paul writes, "Are they not all ministering spirits sent for service, for the sake of those who shall inherit salvation"²⁷?

The Holy Scriptures are full of narratives regarding help by the angels. We will give just a few examples. Abraham sent his servant to Nahor, convincing him that the Lord would send with him

²⁶ Ephesians
6:11-12

²⁷ Hebrews
1:14

His angel and would arrange for him an advantageous journey. Two angels saved Lot and his family from the city of Sodom, which was destined for destruction. The Patriarch Jacob, returning to his brother Esau, was encouraged by the vision of a multitude of God's angels. Not long before his demise, while blessing his grandchildren, Jacob said to Joseph: "The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, shall bless the lads." The angel contributed to the rescue of the Jews from Egyptian bondage. An angel helped Joshua during the conquest of the Promised Land. Then the angel helped the Israelite judges in repelling the enemy. An angel saved the residents of Jerusalem from certain peril when he slew 185,000 of the Assyrian army surrounding the city. An angel saved the three children from fire when they were thrown into a fiery furnace and later saved the Prophet Daniel, who was thrown to the lions²⁸.

Appearances of the angels to men are often revealed in the New Testament. An angel announced to Zacharias the conception of St. John the Baptist. An angel announced to the Most Holy Virgin Mary the conception of the Savior and came to Joseph in his sleep. A host of angels sang praises and glorified Christ's birth and an angel gave glad tidings to the shepherds of the Savior's birth, and prevented the return of the seers to Herod. With the coming of the Son of God, appearances of angels have especially increased, a fact that the Lord predicted to the Apostles, saying that from here on heaven shall be open and they shall see "the angels of God, ascending and descending upon the son of Man." Truly, angels served Jesus Christ during his temptations in the desert, and an angel came to support Him in the garden of Gethsemane.

²⁸ Genesis 32: 1-2 and 48:16; Exodus 14:19 through 23:20; Joshua 5:13-14; Judges 2:1, 6:12 and 13:3; Isaiah 37:36; Daniel 3:49, 6:22

Angels told the myrrh-bearers of His resurrection and told the Apostles, at His Ascension into heaven, of His second coming. An angel freed the Apostles from prison, as well as the Apostle Peter, who was condemned to death. An angel appeared to Cornelius and instructed him to summon the Apostle Peter so that Cornelius might be instructed in the word of God²⁹.

The Lord Jesus Christ spoke of the angels on several occasions. According to His words, the angels bore the soul of the dead begger Lazarus to the bosom of Abraham. The angels rejoice even over one repenting sinner. They will come with Him before the end of the world and will separate the evil ones from the righteous. From the instructions of the Savior and from many biblical and daily examples, one sees that the angels constantly interact as kindly beings, concerned about our salvation and welfare³⁰.

At the same time, the angels are totally devoted to God. When man oversteps the laws of God, an angel holds him back and even punishes him. For example, during the banishment from Eden of the people who fell into sin, the Cherubim was placed with a flaming sword to protect the gates of Paradise. An angel with a sword stood before the prophet Balaam to impede his evil intention. An angel struck down Herod in Cesarea for his pride. The book of Revelation concurs that the angels punish sinners. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that the purpose of their punishments is always benevolent: to awaken repentance in sinners and to help them to turn to God³¹.

Actually, angels, through God's will, take part in the lives of whole nations more actively than most of us suspect. Through the vision of the

²⁹ John 1:51;
Acts 5:19,
12:7-15 and
10:3-7

³⁰ Luke 16:22
and 15:10;
Matthew 13:
39-41, 16:27

³¹ Genesis ch.
3; Numbers
22:23;
Acts 12:23;
Revelation
chs. 8-19
and 16:11

³² Daniel chs.
10–12

³³ St. Gregory
the Theolo-
gian,
“Mystical
Hymns,”
Homily 6

³⁴ Exodus
25:18-22;
3 Kings 6:23;
Joshua 5:15

³⁵ Matthew
18:10

prophet Daniel, it is known that there are angels to whom God has entrusted the overseeing of the fate of kingdoms and those inhabiting the earth³². On this subject the Holy Fathers have expressed the following thoughts: “Some of them (angels) stand before the Great God, others by their cooperation uphold the whole world”³³.

From ancient times, it has been a custom of the Church to address the angels by means of prayer. Even during the time of the Old Testament, the Hebrews had on top of the Ark of the Covenant, and later in the Holy of Holies, gold portrayals of Cherubim. The Jews used to pray before them. Between these two images of Cherubim, God spoke to Moses. The angels manifest themselves as bearers of God’s holiness; that is why it was commanded to Joshua when he saw an angel, “Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy”³⁴.

The Guardian Angel

An Angel of peace, a faithful guide and guardian of our souls and bodies let us ask of the Lord,“ we pray during services. The Orthodox Church believes every child receives from God a Guardian Angel. The Lord Jesus Christ said: “See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you, their angels in heaven always behold the face of My Father in heaven”³⁵.

The Blessed Augustine writes, “The angels, with great concern, and with untiring eagerness, reside with us at every hour and in every place. They help us, they foresee our needs, serve as mediators between God and ourselves, lifting up to Him our groans and

sighs ... Accompanying us in all our travels, they go in and out with us, attentively watching if we deport ourselves with piety and honor among the evil species, and with what effort do we seek the Kingdom of God." A similar thought is expressed by Basil the Great, "With every believer there is an angel, which, as a child's leader and pastor, directs his life." And in confirmation of this he quotes the Psalm that says about God that "He commands His angels regarding you to guard you in all your paths ... The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them"³⁶. Bishop Theophan the Recluse instructs in one of his letters, "We must remember that we have a Guardian Angel and turn to him in our thoughts and heart. This is good during peaceful times and especially so during turmoil. When such contact with the angel is missing, he has no means of influencing us. For example, if one approaches quicksand or an abyss, and has plugged his ears and closed his eyes, how can anyone help him?"

Thus should a Christian remember his good angel, who for the span of all his life concerns himself with him, rejoicing in his spiritual achievements, and grieves over his downfalls. When a person dies, the angel takes his soul to God. Having found itself in the spirit world, according to many accounts, the soul recognizes its Guardian Angel.

The following is a short morning prayer to the Guardian Angel (from the Russian prayer book):

Angel of God, my holy protector, given to me from heaven by God for my protection, I fervently beseech you: enlighten me and preserve me from all evil, instruct me in good deeds and direct me on the path of salvation. Amen.

³⁶ Psalm 91:
11, 34:7

Addendum
by Dr. Steven Bushnell

Counterfeit Angels

The first half of the 1990's saw an explosion of the number of books on angels. Many of these books contain touching accounts of the roles angels played in the salvation of people in their daily lives. Almost all these books advocate an openness to angels and a grateful acceptance of angels and their communications with mankind. Many of the authors encourage an angel-centered life and the hope for their regular influence and, at the same time, an awareness that angels sometimes appear in ways that are outwardly not very angelic.

Nearly all these books fail to consider that the devil and his legions of demons are fallen angels who can disguise themselves as angels of light to cause the destruction of our souls. From the letters of St. Paul³⁷ to modern times, the writings of the Church describe how these fallen angels masquerade not only as angels of light but also as saints, the Virgin Mary, and Christ Himself.

For example, in his discussion of the importance of discrimination, St. John Cassian recounts how one monk caused his own death and how, in another instance, another monk was prepared to murder his own son. In both cases, demons disguised as angels were the cause³⁸. In a different time and place, the Kiev Caves Paterikon records that a young monk named Nikita did reverence to an angel of light who told him not to spend time in

³⁷ 2 Cor. 11:14

³⁸ The Philokalia, vol. I

prayer, that the angel would do it for him because it was more important for Nikita to spend time reading. While the demon-as-angel prayed in his place, Nikita became clairvoyant. Soon he didn't even want to hear about the Gospels, preferring to become well versed in the Old Testament instead. His fellow monks, having finally perceived the demon, drove it away by prayer. Nikita repented and, through the grace of God, went on to become bishop of Novgorod, a shepherd to his flock, and a miracle-worker. We know him as St. Nikita the Recluse.

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles?"³⁹. "But the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts"⁴⁰.

To put into practice these words of Christ and St. Paul in discriminating between real angels and demons masquerading as angels is difficult in the face of human frailty, our sinfulness, our self-willed delusion, and the thousands of years of experience of the enemy of man and God. Remember that the deluded monks described above had dedicated their very lives to Christ. The Holy Fathers of the Church, in their great love for us, tell us to pray, to seek humility, and to seek the guidance of a spiritual Father. They clearly tell us not to seek visions of angels and to be very questioning and skeptical when we do receive such visions. They tell us that if we have the slightest doubt about a vision, to say, in fact, "I do not know," and to put

³⁹ Matt. 7:
15-16

⁴⁰ Gal. 5:
22-24

⁴¹ See the indices of *The Philokalia*, vols. I, III, and IV of the English edition, for some pertinent references.

it aside or simply to reject it. They tell us that God will overcome our actions if God is the source and that the angels will rejoice at our humility and sobriety⁴¹. What the Holy Fathers of the Church tell us is very different from what has been written by the authors of today's popular books.

The devil is a liar and a sower of confusion, and to accomplish his ends, he and his demons will lie to us not only by their words but also by masquerading as something they are not. Any otherworldly phenomena that are sources of confusion and distraction (so-called alien abductions being a modern example) might be such a masquerade.

Bishop Alexander (Mileant)

End of the World

Preface

It was God's mercy to make us witnesses of a major historical moment when, after a 70-year yoke, without any war or insurrection, the godless atheistic regime in Russia suddenly collapsed! The many horrors of communism, its sudden end, and the subsequent spiritual revival in Russia were predicted by several of the last elders of the Optina monastery and by other righteous men of pre-Revolutionary Russia¹. Another important detail in the predictions of these Elders is that these events in Russia were to occur close to the end of the world, although they did not specify any exact time frame for these events. Nevertheless, many current world processes such as the overpopulation of our planet, the catastrophic pollution of the environment, the depletion of the earth's resources, and the fulfillment of many prophecies of Holy Scripture hint that the last days of our world may truly be not so far away.

About two thousand years ago, when our Lord Jesus Christ cast out evil spirits, they often cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus the Son of God? You came ahead of time to torment us!" Amazingly, nowadays during attempts at exorcism, the evil spirits cry out quite different words, like, "Leave us, for the Lord is coming soon anyway!" This hints at the fact that they know about the end of the world better than we do! (We find a reference to this by Dr. Kurt Koch, a Protestant scholar who wrote several important

1 The Elder Anatoly (Potapov, 1922), the monk-priest Aristokly of Moscow (1918), the Elder Alexis (Zasimovsky), the Elder Nektary, and others.

books in the area of demonology, parapsychology and false miracles. See, for example, his books *Between Christ and Satan*, *Occult Bondage and Deliverance*, *Demonology Past and Present*. Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

In this article we will speak about the main characteristics of the approach of the end of the world and some features of the Antichrist's personality, and we will describe the Second Coming of Christ, the Resurrection of the Dead, the Last (or Universal) Judgment and eternal life, as taught in the Scriptures. In the conclusion we will stress the importance of being prepared to meet the Lord. In the supplement we will show the inconsistency of the sectarian teaching known as Chiliasm about the thousand-year kingdom.

Awaiting the Second Coming

The main purpose of our earthly existence is to prepare for eternity. Christian wisdom dictates that the precious gift of time be exploited to its maximum in order to inherit eternal life. Our Lord Jesus Christ in His many sermons called upon His followers to value time and to live in constant readiness to give account of our life: "Watch therefore, for or you do not know at what hour your Lord is coming"². See also the description of the Last Judgment in Mt. 25:31-46; the parables of the Lord about the wheat and the chaff³, about the workers awaiting for their master to come⁴, about the unjust steward⁵, about the great supper⁶, about the talents⁷, about the workers in the vineyard⁸, about the ten virgins⁹ and other sermons. Although most people fear death and avoid

² Mt. 24:42

³ Mt. 13:24-30

⁴ Lk. 12:35-40

⁵ Lk. 16:1-13

⁶ Lk. 14:16-24

⁷ Mt. 25:14-30

⁸ Mt. 20:1-16

⁹ Mt. 25:1-13

¹⁰ James 5:8-9

thinking about it, the apostles instruct Christians to meditate often about the impending meeting with the Lord because such thoughts lead them to a more alert and pious way of life. "Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near," wrote the Apostle James. "Behold, the Judge is standing at the door"¹⁰.

From the ancient Christian writings we conclude that the majority of the early Christians anxiously awaited the return to earth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their expectations were supported, on the one hand, by the atmosphere of constant persecutions and martyrdom which surrounded them. The intensity of these persecutions reminded the Christians of the Savior's predictions about the last days. No one could guarantee even a single day of safe existence. It is sufficient to remember the examples of the first martyr deacon Stephen, of the apostles Peter and Paul, the young sisters Faith, Hope and Charity, and their mother Sophia, the great martyr Barbara, the victorious Saint George, and other innumerable martyrs of the early Christian period in order to ascertain that the lives of believers in that early period were in constant peril. In Roman emperors like Nero, Domitian, Decius, Diocletian, and similar persecutors, Christians saw features in common with the apocalyptic beast. On the other hand, many Christians of the early period had such a burning faith and diligence towards a righteous life that the Second Coming of Christ was not regarded as a time of judgment and punishment but as a joyous meeting with their beloved Savior. They truly wished for the swift return of Christ.

With the end of persecutions and paganism in the beginning of the 4th Century, the faith of

Christians began to cool, and with this the expectations of the Second Coming of Christ became more serene and relaxed. A systematic study of the Scriptures convinced theologians that prior to the great Day of the Lord a series of significant spiritual processes and social changes must happen.

Signs of the Second Coming

Although Holy Scripture does not reveal any dates, it indicates a series of signs by which one can infer the relative closeness of the Second Coming of Christ. In concluding His sermon about the end of the world, the Lord Jesus Christ said: "Now learn this parable of the fig tree. When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near; at the very doors!" In other words, observe events because they will give hints to you about how close the end of the world is¹¹. In several of the sermons of Christ and in the preaching of the Apostles, we find the following signs of the Second Coming of Christ:

a) Global spread of the Gospel. Jesus Christ foretold that all nations will have the opportunity to believe in Him: "The Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world as a witness unto all nations; and then the end shall come"¹².

b) Extreme weakening of the faith. Although Christ's teaching will be generally known, people will become indifferent to it, so much so that "when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"¹³. According to Saint Paul, this

¹¹ Mt. 24:32-34

¹² Mt. 24:14

¹³ Lk. 18:8

¹⁴ 2 Tim. 4:3-4

will be the time “when people will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires they will choose teachers who will tell them just what they want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and go after fables”¹⁴. In other words, close to the end of the world people will become very cynical about Divinely revealed truths and absolute moral values. They will only listen to what sounds interesting or pleasing. This attitude will promote.

c) The appearance of many false prophets and false messiahs. These deceiving teachers will entice people to join all kinds of sects and wild cults catering to the low moral standards of the crowd. The Lord warns us about the danger of false teachings, saying: “Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying I am Christ; and shall deceive many. Do not follow them. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand”¹⁵. The book of Revelation describes some of the striking miracles of the last and ultimate false prophet and promoter of the Antichrist. The Apostle Paul explains to the Thessalonians that these will be not actual miracles but mere illusions and deceptions of the evil spirits¹⁶.

¹⁵ Mt. 24:5,
24; Mrk. 13:6

¹⁶ Rev. 13:13-
15, 2 Thes.
2:9

d) The turning to Christ of the Jewish people. As St. Paul predicts, the mass falling away from Christianity of many nations will coincide with the conversion of Jews to Christ: “For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:

‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob’ ... Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways paths beyond tracking out!’¹⁷.

It is significant to note that this prophecy of the Apostle Paul began to be fulfilled shortly after the Second World War. It started in New York where a Jew who was miraculously saved from a German concentration camp founded a Christian mission and started to preach Jesus Christ among his people. Being well-versed in Old Testament writings, he successfully proved that the historical Jesus Christ was indeed the Messiah promised by the prophets. As a result of his efforts, Christian Jewish communities began to appear in several large American cities so that by 1990 the number of converted Jews reached tens of thousands¹⁸.

e) Evil and lawlessness will increase greatly. As our Lord predicted: “Because iniquity will abound, the love of many will grow cold”¹⁹. The weakening of faith will lead to further moral decline and in turn, as in a chain reaction, that will weaken faith even more. In the following gloomy picture the Apostle Paul depicts the general moral decay prior to the end of the world: “In the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power”²⁰.

From the combined predictions of Holy Scripture, it should be concluded that by the end of the

¹⁷ Rom. 11: 25-33

¹⁸ More information on the Messianic movement can be obtained from the book Return of the Remnant, by Dr. Michael Schiffman, Lederer Publication, Baltimore, Maryland, 1992 and from Messianic Jews, by John Fieldsend, Marc Olive Press, Monarch Publications 1993. Several Messianic societies publish excellent books and magazines on this subject, for example: Jews for Jesus, 60 Haight St, San Francisco, CA 94102, tel.: (415) 864-2600

¹⁹ Mt. 24:12

²⁰ 2 Tim 3:1-5

world carnal desires and passions will suppress all noble and spiritual aspirations in people. Interest in Christ will cease, His teachings will be neglected and ridiculed, and everything related to Christianity — its customs and traditions, Church architecture and music, Christian feast days — will be considered ancient history. The general mood will be reminiscent of ante-deluvian times described in the book of Genesis: “And the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart ... for the earth is filled with violence through them”²¹. Similar conditions will prevail before the Second Coming of Christ.

²¹ Gen. 6:5-11

f) Sorcery, the serving of evil spirits, and other pagan practices will become widespread. The minds of most people will be poisoned by all sorts of ungodly heresies, as the Holy Spirit expressly predicted through St. Paul: “In latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons”²². The Apostle John depicts the following gloomy picture about the overwhelming permeation of evil spirits into peoples lives: “And he [the Angel] opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. So the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit ... And they [the locusts which came from the pit] had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon.” Even though the Lord, by means of different punishments and calamities, will try to stop people from doing evil, they “would not repent of the works of their hands,

²² 1 Tim. 4:1

that they should not worship demons, neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts"²³. As mutual enmity and hatred grow.

g) Persecution of the faithful will escalate. Christians will be hated by people who reject any mentioning of God's authority and who trust only in the power of their intellect. And as believing in God becomes unpopular, any Christian wishing to retain his faith will feel more and more isolated from society. He will discover that even his own relatives have become his enemies, as the Lord predicted: "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake; and then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another." So that even "brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake ... But he who endures to the end shall be saved"²⁴. The general moral decay and hatred will produce.

h) Destabilization the very foundations of the social life. Bloody wars and various disasters will reach catastrophic proportions. People will become weary from the burden of suffering from disasters. They will be unable to overcome them through personal efforts; however, they will not turn to God for help due to their own disbelief. "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilence, and earthquakes in various places." But people

²³ Rev. 9:2-21,
16:13, 18:23

²⁴ Mt. 24:9-10;
Mrk. 13:12-13;
Lk. 21:16

²⁵ 2 Pet. 2:5-9

²⁶ Mt. ch. 24;
Mrk. ch. 13
and Lk. ch.
21

will become so hardened that even these calamities will not turn them to repentance. Ever increasing licentiousness, hatred, and mutual enmity will ultimately lead to the Last Judgment. Comparing the last times with the time before the deluge the Apostle Peter says: "As God did not spare the ancient world [in the time of Noah] bringing in the flood on the ungodly ... and [later] turned the cities of Sodom and Gomorra into ashes, then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment"²⁵. "And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; and men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken"²⁶. The concluding words of this prophecy evidently pertain to the end of the world. However, a few years prior to this, a more fearful event in the life of mankind will occur: the coming to power of the Antichrist.

The antichrist

In Holy Scripture the term antichrist has a twofold meaning. In a broad and general sense this word indicates every person hostile to Christ's teaching (the Greek prefix anti- signifies against). This is the meaning St. John the Theologian used to speak of many antichrists in his epistles. In a particular sense the name Antichrist signifies a definite person — the leading adversary of Christ who is to appear before the end of the world. The appearance of this definite Antichrist on the world

scene constitutes the final and decisive sign that the Second Coming of Christ is at hand.

All the growing aversion towards God on the part of mankind close to the end of the world will become, so to speak, concentrated in this definite man of sin, who will lead the final desperate battle against Christianity. Of the characteristics and actions of this Antichrist, we read in St. Paul's second epistle to the Thessalonians:

"Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God ... And now you know what is restraining (Divine Grace and Providence), which does not allow his appearance. that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness"²⁷.

A number of external factors will have to play a significant role in strengthening the power of

²⁷ 2 Thes. 2:
3-11

the coming Antichrist. Possibly, during his time the threat of nuclear and biological warfare, or the specter of a horrible political and economic crisis will hang over mankind. Governments will be on the verge of collapse, and nations in turmoil and revolt. Then, on the murky waters of a global cataclysm, a "brilliant" leader will surface as the sole savior of mankind. Backing him will be a formidable organization with the goal of global domination. With its support the Antichrist will emerge with a prepared program of socio-economic reforms, which will be actively supported and advocated by the mass media. What will be the secret of the Antichrist's persuasive power and his ability to direct world events? We can envision him as a gifted and inflammatory orator, like Lenin or Hitler. His ideas and propositions will be readily accepted because they will express the thoughts and feelings of the masses of his materialistic epoch.

One would think that many Jews, opposed to Christianity, will see in the Antichrist their long-awaited Messiah, while the majority of people will be inspired by hopes that he will put an end to wars and crises and will bring about a general prosperity. Having in mind such a blindness among people who fail to see the catastrophe hanging over their heads, St. Paul wrote: "For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape"²⁸.

The Antichrist will not be content with mere political authority and outward transformations. Praised by all, he will become so conceited that

²⁸ 1 Thes. 5: 1-6

he will regard himself as a superhuman endowed with divine power. He will proclaim a new worldview — a new religion and new morality in place of “outmoded” and “unsuccessful” Christian teaching. Possessed by delusions of grandeur, he will present himself as God and sit in the temple, (possibly in Jerusalem’s temple rebuilt where the King Solomon’s temple) used to be demanding divine worship.

According to St. Paul, the activities of the Antichrist will be extremely successful, being supported by satan, and accompanied by lying signs, false miracles, and all kinds of unrighteous deception of the perishing. By signs and miracles of the Antichrist we should understand not only the deceptive tricks aimed to delight the crowd but also the highest accomplishments of science, which will be exploited to strengthen his rule²⁹. The most sophisticated form of surveillance on people will be used to control their activities. Those wishing to buy or to sell anything will have to present official permission to do so³⁰. Radio, TV programs, and the press will strive to shape the most favorable image of the world Leader in order to strengthen his political power and admiration among people. Any person daring to question the genius of this Leader, or disagreeing with his measures, will be ridiculed, persecuted, and ultimately destroyed as a public enemy.

An image of the coming Antichrist is portrayed by the prophet Daniel in the appearance of a minor horn. Here the prophet describes the characteristics of the Syrian King Antioch Epiphanos – the cruel persecutor of the faithful Jews about 175-164 BC — as a prototype of the Antichrist. In the book of Revelation, the Antichrist is depicted as a beast,

²⁹ According to Rev. 13:15, the false prophet had the “power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed”

³⁰ According to Rev. 13:17, “no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name”

³¹ Daniel 7:11
and the first
2 books of
Maccabees;
Rev. ch 13,
19:19-21

coming out of the sea. Some of the characteristics of this monster remind us of the Roman emperors Nero and Domitian, fierce persecutors of Christians in the first century AD. These emperors were contemporaries of St. John who wrote the book of Revelation. To avoid confusion, one should bear in mind that in the book of Revelation the term beast applies not only to the personal Antichrist but also to the whole governmental machine of his anti-Christian empire³¹.

The distinctive features, personality and mode of operation of the Antichrist are described by St. Cyrill of Jerusalem in his Catechetical Letters (4 and 15) and by St. Ephraim the Syrian in his Homily on the Coming of the Lord and the Antichrist. The famous Russian philosopher Vladimir S. Soloviev attempted to depict the coming of the Antichrist in his Tale of the Antichrist, but his representation and occasionally joking style do not convey all the horror and utter gloom which will threaten mankind in its final period of existence. His tale is a naive idyll when compared to the horror which will dominate people who have lost God. Studying the historical prototypes of the coming Antichrist, like the king Antioch Epithanos, emperors Nero and Domitian, Lenin and similar "genius" rulers, certain general traits come to mind. All of them in general were worthless people, both in the intellectual and the governmental arena. They came to power not because of their exceptional talents or achievements but because of favorable circumstances. They were more conspirators than governors. All of them suffered from disproportionate delusions of grandeur; in their personal lives they were liars, immoral and cruel. One may speculate that

the final world Leader will be distinguished by similar traits.

If we take literally the time indicated by Holy Scripture regarding the rule of the beast, the activity of the Antichrist will last for about 3 1/2 years. It will end with the Second Coming of Christ, the General Resurrection of the Dead, and the Last Judgment³². The Revelation of St. John mentions the appearance of two witnesses, who will proclaim the truth, perform miracles, and, upon completion of their witness, be killed by the Antichrist. These witnesses have been foreseen by some Fathers of the Church to be the two righteous of the Old Testament period — the patriarch Enoch³³ and the prophet Elijah³⁴ — because only these two men did not die but were taken alive to Heaven. Presumably they will have to return to earth to complete their earthly mission, to suffer for the Word of God and to die as all mortals should.

In summary, such is the teaching of the Word of God about the approaching times, and the behavior and sentiments of the people prior to the Second Coming of Christ. Although these signs are overt and clear, the ability to see and realize them nevertheless will depend on a person's spiritual keenness. Most people, preoccupied with their material well-being, will be incapable of understanding what is happening before their eyes, or the point toward which the world is headed. For this reason the Savior warned His disciples: "Take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth"³⁵.

³² Daniel 7:25;
Rev. 11:2-3,
12:13, 13:5

³³ Gen. 5:23
³⁴ 2 Kings 2:11

³⁵ Lk. 21:34-36

The Second Coming

The spiritual gaze of Christians should be focused upon the approaching joyous event — the Second Coming of Christ on earth: “And when these things [the sorrows of the last days] begin to come to pass then look up and lift up your heads, for your redemption draws near”³⁶. The reality of His coming again was witnessed to by the Savior Himself, with the indication of some details, and was proclaimed by the Angels during the Lord’s Ascension, and often reminders were given by the Apostles³⁷. The Lord described His Second Coming as being sudden and obvious to all: “For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west; so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.” Prior to this, the “sign of the Son of Man will appear in Heaven,” and having seen it, “all the peoples of the world will mourn”³⁸. According to the Fathers of the Church, this will be the sign of the saving Cross of our Lord.

The Lord will descend in all His glory surrounded by innumerable angels: “Then they will see the Son of Man, coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, and all His angels with Him ... Then He will sit on the throne of His glory...”³⁹. From these words we should conclude that the Second Coming of Christ will look substantially different from the first one, during which He willingly humbled Himself and came in the semblance of an ordinary man. Then He lived in poverty and voluntarily suffered all kinds of humiliations. His Second Coming will also differ in purpose. First He came to give His soul for the salvation of many; then He will come to judge the

³⁶ Lk 21:28

³⁷ Mt. 16:27;
Mt. ch 24;
Mk. 8:38; Lk
12:40 and
17:24; John.
14:3; Acts.
1:11; Jude
14-15; 1 John
2:28; 1 Pet.
4:13; 1 Cor.
5:2-6 and
other places
³⁸ Mt. 24:30
³⁹ Mt. 24:30,
25:31, Mk.
13:26

world and recompense everyone according to his deeds⁴⁰.

⁴⁰ Acts 17:31;
Mt. 24:27

The Resurrection of the Dead

On the great day of the Second Coming of the Son of Man, the General Resurrection of the Dead will occur. All people will rise from their graves in a transformed state. The Lord thus describes this event: "Do not marvel at this: for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice [of the Son of God] and come forth; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation"⁴¹.

⁴¹ John 5:29

When the Sadducees expressed doubt as to the possibility of physical resurrection, the Lord reproached them, saying: "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God"⁴². The Apostle Paul expressed the importance of faith in the resurrection in these words: "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty ... For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive"⁴³.

⁴² Mt. 22:29

⁴³ 1 Cor. 15:
13-22

⁴⁴ John 5:29;
Acts. 24:15

⁴⁵ Mt. 13:43

⁴⁶ 1 Cor 15:53

The Resurrection of the Dead will be general and simultaneous for both the righteous and sinners: "And shall come forth — those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation"⁴⁴. But the appearance of the resurrected righteous will differ substantially from that of the resurrected sinners: "Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father"⁴⁵, said the Lord of the saved. Commenting on these words of the Savior, St. Ephraim the Syrian says that "the ones will resemble light, while the others will resemble darkness."

Carefully analyzing what the Scriptures teach regarding the General Resurrection, one must conclude that the resurrected bodies in their essence will remain the same as they were during their earlier existence: "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality"⁴⁶. But they will rise up transfigured and will become imperishable and immortal. After resurrection they will be absolutely free from physical exhaustion and from any weaknesses of our present life. They will become spiritual and heavenly, free from any physical needs. Life after resurrection will resemble the lives of the bodiless angels. As to sinners, their bodies will also, undoubtedly, arise in a transformed state; however, having received immortality, they will at the same time reflect in themselves all the hideousness of their moral decay.

To strengthen the faith in Christians regarding the forthcoming transfiguration of bodies, St. Paul refers to a generally known fact: "Someone may doubt — 'How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?' — Foolish one,

what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain; perhaps wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body"⁴⁷. Supporting the same idea, the Fathers of the Church point out the fact that in reality nothing is ever destroyed nor disappears, rather it is transformed into something with new properties, and certainly God has power to restore and transform everything that He created. Turning to nature, they found in it many similarities to resurrection, such as: the germination of plants from a seed, buried into the earth and decayed; the annual renewal of nature during the Spring; waking from sleep with renewed energies; the initial formation of man from the dust; and other similar phenomena.

Those people who will be living on earth during the Second Coming of the Lord, according to the teaching of the Apostle Paul, will undergo instantaneous transformation similar to the one which will occur to those who were dead: "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed; in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality"⁴⁸. Regarding the meeting of the faithful with the Lord, which will occur after this, St. Paul says: "I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word

⁴⁷ 1 Cor. 15:
35-38

⁴⁸ 1 Cor. 15:
51-53

⁴⁹ 1 Thes. 4:
13-17

of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord"⁴⁹.

A widespread error among contemporary Protestants is that of the rapture. Unheard of before the 19th century, this belief has it that during the "great tribulation" near the end of the world (either before or after the millennium, according to various versions), true Christians will be raptured into the air to escape the sufferings of those who remain on earth. It is based on the misinterpretation of 1 Thes. 4:17, which teaches that at the very end of the world believers will be caught up in the clouds together with the resurrected dead to meet the Lord Who is coming for judgment and the opening of the eternal Kingdom of Heaven. The Scripture is quite clear that even the elect will suffer on earth during the tribulation period and that for their sake this time will be shortened⁵⁰.

⁵⁰ Mat. 24:
21-22

In speaking about the Resurrection and everything that will follow it, we should remember that these are events which we are neither able to fully comprehend, nor imagine, as nothing of this nature was ever experienced by us. For this reason, we never will be able to solve all the related questions which often arise in inquisitive people's minds.

The End of the Physical World

As a result of mankind's fall into sin, all creation unwillingly submitted to "the slavery of decay, and groans and suffers till now"⁵¹. The time will come in which mankind and the entire material world will be purified and renewed. This will occur on the last day, following the Universal Judgment, and it will happen by means of fire. As the world that existed before the deluge was purified from sin by means of the flood, likewise "the present heaven and earth," St. Peter teaches, "are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men ... [On that] day ... the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up ... Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells"⁵².

The fact that the present temporary world will be transformed was predicted many centuries before Christ by the Psalmist who said: "Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You will endure; Yes, all of them will grow old like a garment; Like a cloak You will change them, And they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will have no end"⁵³. In other words, the end of the world will not be its destruction but its total renewal.

⁵¹ Rom. 8:22

⁵² 2 Pet. 3:7-13

⁵³ Ps. 102:
25-27

Universal Judgment

⁵⁴ See also:
John 5:22-29,
Mt. 16:27,
7:21-23,
11:22-24,
12:35-42,
13:37-43,
19:29-30,
25:31-46,
Acts. 17:31,
Jude 14-15,
2 Cor. 5:10,
Rom. 2:5-7,
14:10, 1 Cor.
4:5, Eph. 6:8,
Col. 3:24-25,
2 Thes. 1:6-
10, 2 Tim.
4:1, Rev.
20:11-15

⁵⁵ Rom. 2:5

Among numerous testimonies of the future Judgment, the most complete description of it we find in the Gospel of St. Matthew, 25:31-46: "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left ..." ⁵⁴

Through this pattern in Matthew one can learn about some particulars of the Last Judgment, namely, that it will be universal, extending to all peoples — both living and dead, of both good and evil — and will extend to fallen angels as well, as inferred by other scriptural indications. This Judgment will be solemn and open, as the Judge will appear before the face of the whole world in His Divine glory, surrounded by innumerable Angels. It will be stern and fearful, being accomplished in the entirety of God's justice, and it will be "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" ⁵⁵. It will be final and decisive, determining for eternity the fate of each individual. Its results will be perpetual retribution — either blessedness and bliss for the righteous, or rejection and torment for the condemned sinners.

Portraying in the brightest and most joyful details the eternal life of the righteous following the Universal Judgment, the Word of God speaks just as emphatically and assuredly about the eternal torment of sinners: "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and

his angels," will say the Lord on the day of Judgment. "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life"⁵⁶.

⁵⁶ Mt. 25:41-46

The place where sinners will be condemned after the Judgment is graphically represented in Holy Scripture as a place of horrible sufferings from unquenchable fire and the undying worm. The Lord called this place Gehenna, reminding the Jews of the dreadful valley to the south of Jerusalem in which evildoers were executed and in which the city's rubbish was constantly burnt. Similarly, St. Paul speaks of the "flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ"⁵⁷. In the book of Revelation this place of eternal sufferings is called the "lake of fire"⁵⁸. Evidently these and other similar vivid descriptions in the Scripture symbolically portray the severity of the punishments.

⁵⁷ 2 Thes. 1:8

⁵⁸ Rev. 19:20

"I know," writes St. John Chrysostom, "that many are terrified of Gehenna, but I think that the deprivation of the bliss of God's Kingdom is the worst of torments, even worse than Gehenna ... Many foolish people desire only to be delivered from Gehenna, but I think that he who is deprived of the Kingdom of Heaven should weep not so much over the torments of Gehenna as over being deprived of the good things of Heaven. For this alone is the cruelest of all punishments"⁵⁹.

⁵⁹ Homily 25
on Matthew
and
Homily 1 to
Theodore

Some ancient heretics (like the followers of Origen) claimed that demons and sinners will suffer in hell only up to a certain period and later will be restored to their previous pure state. This doctrine is known as Apokatastasis. However, the Church, basing itself on God's word, teaches that the torments of Gehenna will be eternal and un-

ending. The Fathers of the Fifth Ecumenical Council officially rejected the false teaching of Apokatastasis. Attempts to understand the torments of Gehenna in the relative sense of a certain period, perhaps lengthy but finite, reappear from time to time. Some sectarians go as far as to entirely deny the reality of infernal torments. In support of their views they bring logical considerations like the disharmony between torments in hell and God's infinite love, the seeming discrepancy between temporary misdeeds and eternal punishments, or the discrepancy of these punishments with the ultimate purpose of the creation of mankind, which is blessedness in God.

In considering these and similar arguments we should remember that it is not for us to determine the boundaries between the unutterable mercy of God and His absolute justice. We know the Lord "wishes that all will be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth." However, man, through his own free will, is capable of rejecting God's mercy and all His means of salvation. St. John Chrysostom, explaining the depiction of the Last Judgment in the Gospel of Matthew, remarks: "When the Lord spoke of the Kingdom, He said: "Come you blessed ones, inherit the Kingdom," and added, "Which was prepared for you from the beginning of creation. "But when He spoke of the fire, He didn't use the same words; instead He said that it was prepared for the devil and his angels. Thus He made the Kingdom for you, but the fire not for you, but for the devil and his fallen angels." (From the sermon on the gospel of Matthew). In the book of Revelation St. John calls the condemnation at the Universal Judgment the second death.

We do not have the right to take the Lord's words as only a threat or as a certain pedagogical method used for the rehabilitation of sinners. Bishop Theophan the Recluse explains: "The righteous will enter eternal life, and the satanized sinners into eternal punishment in community with the demons. Will these torments end? If satanism and becoming like satan will end, then torments may end too. But is there an end to satanism and becoming like satan? We will behold and see this then. But until then we shall believe that just as eternal life will have no end, so eternal torment that threatens sinners will also have no end. What did satan not see after his fall! How he himself was struck by the power of the Lord's Cross! How up to now all his cunningness and malice are defeated by this power! But still he is incorrigible; he constantly opposes; and the farther he goes, the more stubborn he becomes. No, there is no hope at all for him to be corrected! ... This means that there must be hell with eternal torments."

However, the concept of anger in relation to God is conditional and pictorial, as we learn from the teachings of Blessed Anthony the Great. He says: "God is benevolent, dispassionate and unchangeable. Now some who think it reasonable to affirm that God does not change may well ask how in that case it is possible to speak of God as rejoicing over the righteous and showing mercy to those who honor Him, while He rejects the evil doers, is angry at sinners, and when they repent He shows them mercy. To this one should say that in reality God neither rejoices nor grows angry, as gladness and anger are human passions. It is improper to think of God as becoming good or bad on account of a human's deeds. God is good and

⁶⁰ Philokalia
v. 1

only does good. He does not harm anyone, and always remains the same. And we, when we are kind, enter into communion with God, due to likeness with Him, and when we become evil, then we move away from Him due to unlikeness with him ... Therefore, to say God turns away from evildoers is the same as to say that the sun hides itself from the blind"⁶⁰.

Many writings of Christian ascetics explain that the higher someone rises morally, the keener he recognizes his responsibility before God and the stronger his hope for God's mercy and love towards Him.

Kingdom of Glory

With the transformation of this world into a new and better one, the eternal Kingdom of God will begin. Then the earthly Kingdom of Grace — the militant Church on earth, to which we belong — will merge with its heavenly counterpart — the Kingdom of Glory. Then the Son of God will reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and "His Kingdom shall have no end," as the Angel Gabriel proclaimed to the Virgin Mary⁶¹. Cyril of Jerusalem comments about this, saying: "For will not He who reigned before overthrowing His enemies, reign all the more after He has conquered them?"⁶²

⁶¹ Lk. 1:33

⁶² Cathetical
Lectures

Then death will lose all its power over the righteous: "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death ... So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory,"

states St. Paul⁶³. The book of Revelation predicts that then time will cease to exist. Apparently in that eternal spiritual world not only will the sensation of the flow of time disappear, but also the very concepts of space and time will be drastically different from what they are now.

Chapter 21 of the book of Revelation vividly depicts the blissful state of eternal life: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, as the previous heaven and earth have gone, and the sea is no more." In the Kingdom of Glory all will be spiritual, immortal, and holy. Most importantly, those attaining eternity in communion with God will become partakers of that perfect union with Him Who is the ultimate Source of all life and happiness. In particular, the new members of God's Kingdom share with the Angels the honor and happiness of seeing their Creator and Benefactor. They will contemplate His glory, not as if through dim glass, not conjecturally, but face to face — and not only contemplate but also partake in His Divine Life, shining like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. They will become co-heirs with Christ and will share with Him His glory⁶⁴. As the book of Revelation describes: "they shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." It will be as the prophet Isaiah summarizes: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him"⁶⁵.

Blessedness in God will be more desirable in that it will have no end: "and the righteous will

⁶³ 1 Cor.
15:26 and 54

⁶⁴ Rev. 3:21;
2 Tim. 2:11-12

⁶⁵ Rev. 7:16-
17; Is. 64:4; 1
Cor. 2:9

enter life eternal." Nevertheless, according to the Fathers of the Church, even glory in God has its levels proportional to the spiritual level of each person. This belief is based on the following explicit statements of Holy Scripture: "In my Father's house are many mansions ... God will give to everyone according to his deeds ... There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory"⁶⁶.

⁶⁶ Is. 64:4;
1 Cor. 2:9;
John 14:2,
Mt. 16:27,
1 Cor. 3:8,
15:41

St. Ephrem the Syrian explains this as follows: "Just as everyone enjoys the rays of the sensual sun according to the purity of his power of seeing, and just as when a lamp illuminates a large room, each ray is perceived as coming from that same source, similarly it will be in the future age: all the righteous will share inseparably of a single joy, but each in his own degree will be illumined by the single spiritual Sun, and to the degree of his worth he will draw in joy and rejoicing as if in a single atmosphere and place. No one will see the degrees that are higher or lower, lest looking on the surpassing grace of another and upon his own deprivation, he will thereby have some cause for sorrow and disturbance. This cannot be there, where there is neither sorrow nor sighing. But there everyone will rejoice inwardly according to the grace proper to him, while outwardly all will have a single contemplation and a single joy"⁶⁷.

⁶⁷ Sermon
On the
Heavenly
Mansions

Conclusion

Many Christians live carelessly and even in sin because they do not take seriously enough the upcoming Universal Judgment; it seems to them a

very remote and uncertain event. To improve our spiritual life, we should remind ourselves that prior to that final and ultimate Judgment there constantly occur particular Divine judgments. Indeed, throughout all of history we see cases of particular Divine judgments over individuals, places, and even whole nations. Vivid examples of this are the global deluge at the time of Noah, the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, the repeated ravages of Israel, the fall of ancient Assyria and Babylon, the sudden destruction of the immoral Pompeii, and the fall of the Roman Empire and other mighty kingdoms. Even large Christian nations such as Byzantium and Russia did not escape God's judgment when their people deviated from the Christian life. It always happens as Jesus explained about the particular judgment: "wherever there appears a carcass [moral decay], there will the eagles be gathered together"⁶⁸.

⁶⁸ Matt. 24:28

In order to forewarn us about moral decay and inspire us to renew our spiritual life, the Savior kindly warned us: "Be prepared, for in the hour which you don't expect, the Son of Man will come." Therefore, we should be attentive to our spiritual state. We should strive that the lamp of our faith does not stop shining and the that garment of the soul remains clean. Then the coming of Christ on earth will become a desirable event, as it was for the Christians in apostolic times. This Second Coming will be perceived as the end to all wrong doing, crimes, and calamities and the beginning of a new life in the renewed world.

Among the already fulfilled signs of the end of the world we should mention: a) the spread of the Gospel message over the whole globe; b) the intensifying process of moving away from the

faith by peoples who were Christians from the early centuries; c) the beginning of the return to Jesus Christ of many Jews; d) the increasing number of false prophets and wild cults and; e) the fall of moral standards, with the increase of horrible crimes, witchcraft, and satanism.

As to the contemporary decrease of moral standards, we know that people were always sinful to a larger or smaller degree. But in the past they used to recognize their wrongdoing and attempted to correct it. A peculiarity of our time is that sinful deeds are declared to be okay and even raised on a pedestal. For example, supporters of abortion and groups of homosexuals organize mass demonstrations and demand special rights for themselves. Gazing at them, one remembers the words the Prophet Isaiah said before the destruction of Jerusalem: "The look on their countenance witnesses against them, and they declare their sin as Sodom. They do not hide it. Woe to their soul! For they have brought evil upon themselves"⁶⁹. The other gloomy peculiarity of our time is the obtrusive intrusion of all kinds of depravities and vulgarities in those spheres of life which traditionally were expressions of the most bright and noble aspects of mankind's spirit — music, art, and literature. Evaluate from the Christian standpoint popular rock music and heavy metal, full of cacophony and crude and voluptuous yelling; some modern ugly paintings and sculptures; and the many movies full of violence and vulgarity. And with alarm we observe how the growing spiritual void in people is being filled by a dark alien force, which is leaving its imprint upon the affairs of daily life and even the appearance of people.

⁶⁹ Is. 3:9

Seeing all these foretold signs, we still cannot predict the exact time at which the world will end. Nevertheless, it should not be very far away. Predictions by our Optina elders and other pre-Revolutionary righteous people of Russia give us reason to think that with the downfall of communism and the beginning of spiritual rebirth in Russia, the next to the last page of world history has been turned, following which will be the coming of the Antichrist and the fulfillment of the predictions in the book of Revelation.

May the merciful Lord guide and protect all of us in the coming times of trial. Amen!

The Inconsistency of Chiliasm

There is presently a teaching about the thousand-year kingdom of Christ on earth prior to the Universal Judgment that is gaining increased acceptance among different Christian denominations. This teaching is known as chiliasm, from the Greek *chiliasmos*, meaning “a thousand years.” The essence of this teaching is as follows: Long before the end of the world, Christ will once again return to earth, defeat the Antichrist, resurrect the righteous only, and establish a kingdom on earth in which the righteous, as a reward for their struggles and sufferings, will reign with Him for a period of thousand years, enjoying all the good things of temporal life. After this, another resurrection will follow in which the rest of the people will be raised from the dead. Then the Universal Judgment will take place, and God will reward the righteous and punish the sinners. The defenders of this teaching base their arguments on the vision of the Apostle John in the 20th chapter of the book of Revelation.

There it is said that an Angel descended from heaven and bound satan for a thousand years and that the souls of those beheaded for their witness of Jesus Christ and the word of God came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. “This is the first resurrection,” says the book of Revelation⁷⁰. “When the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations”⁷¹. Soon there follows the judgment of the devil and of those who were deceived by him. The dead will be raised up

⁷⁰ Rev. 20:5

⁷¹ Rev. 20:7-8

and judged according to their deeds: "... And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire ... This is the second death"⁷². Upon those who have been resurrected in the first resurrection, however, the second death will have no power.

⁷² Rev. 20:
14-15

Chiliasm views in antiquity were spread chiefly among heretics. The Second Ecumenical Council in 381 AD., condemning the heretic Apollinarius, condemned his teaching about the thousand-year Kingdom of Christ. To put a stop to further attempts at introducing this teaching, the Fathers of the Council inserted into the Creed the words about Christ: "His Kingdom shall have no end." In other words, when Christ's reign begins there will be no interruptions in His eternal Kingdom. In more recent times, chiliasm views were resurrected in some Protestant sects. As has been indicated, in this teaching there are proposed two future resurrections and two judgments: one for the righteous and later another for sinners; and there are two future comings of the Savior. There is a purely earthly reign of Christ with the righteous ones as a definite historical epoch. Formally, this teaching is based on an incorrect understanding of the expression first resurrection, while inwardly its cause is rooted in many contemporary sectarians' loss of faith in eternal life and in the blessedness of the righteous in Heaven, with whom they have no communion in prayer. Another cause is to be found in utopian dreams hidden behind religious ideas and inserted into the mysterious images of the book of Revelation.

It is not difficult to see the inconsistency of the chiliasm interpretation of the 20th Chapter of the book of Revelation. Parallel passages in Sa-

⁷³ Eph 5:14;
Col. 3:1 and
2:12; Eph. 2:
5-6

cred Scripture clearly indicate that the first resurrection signifies spiritual rebirth into eternal life through baptism. Here are some typical passages in apostolic epistles: "Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light ... You are risen with Christ"⁷³. Proceeding from this, by the thousand-year reign we must understand the period of time from the very beginning of the Church of Christ until the end of the world. In the 20th chapter of Revelation, St. John consoles the faithful with the thought that those who were killed for Christ did not perish. Instead, they reign in Heaven with their Savior.

The second death signifies the condemnation of sinners after the Universal Judgment. It does not concern "the resurrected in the first resurrection." This means that those spiritually regenerated in Christ and cleansed by God's grace will not be subject to Condemnation but will enter the blessed life of Christ's Kingdom.

It is important to understand that the 20th chapter of the book of Revelation does not introduce any new teaching about the end of the world and the Second Coming of Christ. Its purpose is to summarize the battle between the devil and the Church which permeates the whole history of mankind. The devil is defeated twice: first spiritually, by the redemptive death of the Savior, and at the end of the world, completely and finally, when he will be thrown into the lake of fire. Christian martyrs began to celebrate their victory over satan immediately following their death for Christ.

The Inconsistency of the ‘Rapture’

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Some of our evangelical or pentecostal neighbors occasionally speak about “the Rapture” as one of the events leading up to Christ’s Second Coming. By this they mean the physical removal from earth of the true believers in Christ in preparation for the “Great Tribulation,” a seven-year period of unparalleled calamity which will herald the end⁷⁴. The Rapture’s purpose, according to its advocates, is to safeguard the righteous during that horrible time. Its most familiar champions are Hal Lindsey (author of *The Late, Great Planet Earth* and other books), John T. Walvoord (of Dallas Theological Seminary), and the late Cyrus Scofield (author of *The Scofield Reference Bible*).

These ideas are popular with groups who are enchanted, even obsessed, with speculation about the Second Coming and who have convinced themselves that they see in current events signs that His return is near. These speculations form part of a broader ideology called “dispensationalism.” Dispensationalists come in all shapes and sizes and what we say about one may not apply to all. Still we can list some general characteristics which virtually all dispensationalists share. The name comes from their division of history into eras or “dispensations.” They believe that the

⁷⁴ A few advocates say that the Rapture will follow the Tribulation. Most who believe in it, however, contend that it precedes the Tribulation.

Bible outlines the whole course of mankind's religious history. Each stage in God's program is a dispensation, and in each dispensation God relates to the world and His chosen peoples in a different way. Some dispensationalist schemes encompass all human history; others include only Christian history since the time of Christ. Most often these systems are based on a symbolic interpretation of the "letters to the seven churches" of Revelation 2 and 3, with each church standing for the Christianity of a particular period. Dispensationalism presents a detailed program of events leading up to the Second Coming. Two of the events in this master plan are the Rapture and the Great Tribulation.

Proponents of the doctrine of a pre-Tribulation Rapture claim that it rests on Scripture and has always been a part of Christian teaching. The truth is that it dates from about 1830 and was largely the creation of John Nelson Darby, a one-time Anglican priest and founder of a sect called the Plymouth Brethren. He contributed much to the dispensationalist scheme, and in particular he was the first to include the Rapture among the catalogue of phenomena of the last times. The Rapture's recent origin is one of the things which should make us skeptical. Neither the Apostles nor the Fathers expounded any such teaching. Even Darby's circle, although they claimed to find support for their teaching in the Bible, did not maintain that they had arrived at this doctrine through study of the Scriptures, but that they had received it through a revelation. According to its supporters the pre-Tribulation Rapture is an extremely important part of the Christian message. Yet it was unknown before 1830.

The Rapture's supporters derive their opinions ultimately from a single Scripture verse, I Thessalonians 4:17, "Then we who are left alive will be carried off together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord." Less popular but often cited is Matthew 24:40-42, "Then there will be two in the field. One will be taken and the other left. Two will be grinding at the mill. One will be taken and the other left. Therefore, be vigilant, for you do not know on what day your Lord will come."

The paragraph which contains the first verse quoted above, I Thessalonians 4:17, forms the Epistle reading for funerals in Orthodox worship. The passage begins with 4:13. In preceding verses St. Paul has spoken of the necessity for holiness of life and for brotherly love among Christians (4:1-12). With verse 13 he turns to another topic, the fate of Christians after death. Misunderstandings on this issue had apparently caused needless distress and apprehension in the church at Thessalonika. It seems that some people believed that Christians who died before Christ's return would somehow miss out on that glorious event. St. Paul seeks to calm their fears (vs. 13). He points out that as Christ returned from the dead at His Resurrection, so also, at the end of time, His followers who have died in the interim will be restored through resurrection (vs. 14). At the Second Coming, the Christian dead will be raised (vs. 16). Then they and the faithful who are still alive will be caught up into the clouds to welcome Christ as He descends (verses 15,17). Paul then discusses other matters relating to the Second Coming, beginning with the date it will occur.

When we look at verse 17 in context, it is easy to see that it does not really support the doctrine of the Rapture. There is no reference to a Great Tribulation or to any other events preceding Christ's Return. The verse refers to something that will happen as part of the Lord's Coming. The course of events St. Paul presents is simple and straight-forward. At the time of the Second Coming, the dead will be raised, and all the faithful — the dead now restored and those still alive now transfigured — will ascend to be with Him as He comes down. This is the universal interpretation of the Fathers who see the verse as referring to the last days.

Why does St. Paul speak of an ascension of the righteous? The Fathers suggest at least three answers to this question. St. Gregory of Nyssa says that the ascension is a natural consequence of the purity of the transfigured resurrection body: "... this change which takes place...when the resurrection trumpet sounds which awakens the dead in an instant transforms those who are left alive to incorruptibility according to the likeness of those who have undergone the resurrection change, so that the bulk of the flesh is no longer heavy nor does its weight hold them down to earth, but they rise up through the air..."⁷⁵

St. John Chrysostom and others say that it is to provide Christ with a proper escort for His appearance on earth and to demonstrate His favor toward the faithful. "If He is about to descend, why shall we be taken up? For the sake of honor. When a king enters a city, those who are in his favor go out to meet him, but the condemned await their judge inside. Or, when a loving father comes, his children, and also those worthy of being his

⁷⁵ "On the Making of Man" 22,6

children, are taken out in a chariot to see and kiss him, but the servants who have offended him remain indoors. So we are carried out upon a chariot to our Father...See how great our honor is? As He descends we go out to meet Him, and what is more blessed, we shall be with Him always"⁷⁶.

Let us summarize what we have found so far. St. Paul does speak of a sort of rapture, in the sense of a carrying up into the sky of the righteous at the time of the Second Coming. The Fathers generally agree on that. But St. Paul and the Fathers see this as an event which accompanies Christ's return and immediately precedes the Judgment and the establishment of the Kingdom. The Rapture which Darby and Scofield taught and which Lindsey, Walvoord, and others still teach, is different from that. They talk about it as a separate happening, part of a decades long program of events leading up to Christ's Coming. The dispensationalists see the Rapture as the disappearance of the faithful from the earth before the Great Tribulation and many years before the Judgment. This is foreign to the Apostle and to the Tradition. St. Paul mentions no period of affliction and persecution following the Rapture.

In an effort to forge a link between the Rapture and the Tribulation, supporters turn to Matthew 24:40-42, quoted above⁷⁷. Certainly we have here references to a time of horror and suffering. Matthew 24 and 25 comprise a long discourse by Jesus. The occasion for this teaching is the first days of Holy Week, when Christ and His disciples were in Jerusalem on that last visit which ended in His death and resurrection. The Lord and His entourage have been in the Temple. As they leave, one of the company remarks on the structure's splendor

⁷⁶ Homily 8
on Thessaloni-
ans

⁷⁷ in part 1,
September's
Dawn

and grandeur (24:1-2). Jesus replies by prophesying its coming destruction, which took place some 40 years later (70 AD). The group proceeds to the Mount of Olives, across the Kedron Valley from the city. They halt at a place which even today offers an admirable panorama of the Old City and the Temple site. The disciples, perhaps alarmed by Christ's words, ask when "these things," meaning the Temple's destruction, will happen and what will be the signs of Christ's return.

Christ's sermon is His response to these questions. In order to understand it properly we must remember that there were two questions, one about disasters which would befall Jerusalem during the Roman-Jewish War of 66-72, the other about the end of time. Parts of the speech address one concern, some the other. Much of what Christ says is intended to keep His followers from confusing the two events, taking the horror of the Jewish War as a sign of the Second Coming. We see this in the warnings He gives: that the Gospel must be preached in the whole world before the end comes (vs. 8), that many deceivers will arise claiming to be Him (verses 23-26), that no one knows "the day or the hour" except the Father (vs. 36), and many more. Christ is concerned that His followers not confuse the impending disasters in Judea with the cataclysms of the end. To make His point clear He emphasizes the suddenness and unpredictability of His return.

We must interpret 24:40-42 in light of Christ's insistence that He will return "at an hour you do not expect" (24:44). It would seem strange if Christ were to make this point over and over in the early verses of chapter 24, then in verses 40-42 describe an occurrence which would certainly tip

everyone off that something was about to happen, and all the more peculiar if that tip-off were to happen seven years before His appearance, as the dispensationalists assert. The key to understanding the passage is the Greek word normally translated "taken." The word ("paralambano") has two meanings. The first we might render "to take," but not in the sense of "to lift up," the meaning which the dispensationalists give it. It means instead "to bring along," as in English we might say that someone takes a friend to the movies. That does not seem to fit the use of the word in Matthew 24, so we turn to the second meaning, "to accept" or "to choose." Either of these words would be better in these verses than the imprecise "take." This second meaning fits with what the Lord has been saying in the passage in question, that His followers must be ready for His coming lest they be caught off-guard like the world, unprepared for the Judgment. Some will have heeded His commandments, will face the Judgment in confidence, and will be "accepted" into the Kingdom. Others, though living and working with the first group, day by day, will not have lived the life of the Gospel and will not be chosen or accepted by Christ when He returns. These verses form part of Christ's exhortation to all who hear Him to respond to His message and thereby avoid condemnation at the End. The verses do not supply the idea of the Rapture.

Conclusion:

As we have seen, neither of the two passages upon which advocates of the Rapture rely mean what they say they do. Both refer to Christ's final return. Those who support this doctrine neglect the context of the verses they use, distort the meanings of words and verses, and, in one case, take advantage of a loose translation. We must approach the Bible with more reverence. We must avoid pulling verses out of context. Instead, look at the surrounding verses to see what the Biblical writer is talking about and how that may affect your interpretation of a problem verse.

Beware, also, of interpretations which disagree with or attack the Tradition of the Church. As we saw in our discussion of 1 Thessalonians 4:17, the Fathers of the Church pointed the way to the proper understanding of the verse. We must investigate the origin of ideas which other groups advocate, especially when they seem to contradict Orthodoxy. The concept of the pre-Tribulation Rapture only appeared in England about 150 years ago. Orthodox Christians of great piety and learning have been reading the Scriptures for 2000 years. Would an important doctrine have escaped their notice? Very often these new doctrines do not really come from a careful reading of the Bible but from "special revelations"; their adherents have then ransacked the Scriptures for difficult or obscure verses which they can use to support them. Sometimes they arise when a reader tries to make sense out of hard-to-understand passages and does not succeed. Orthodox Christians have the living witness of the Holy Spirit who, as Christ said, will guide us to all truth

(John 16:13), and we also have the tradition of the Fathers to help us in our search. These are not two different sources but one and the same thing. The Fathers knew and listened to the voice of the Spirit; they affirm that the Spirit lives in the Church even up to the present day; they are one of the ways the Spirit has chosen to continue His work of teaching and guiding. Trying to make the Bible support one's own preconceived notions or insisting on one's own limited understanding without seeking the guidance of Holy Tradition will not lead us to a true appreciation of what the Bible says or of what God says to us through it.

We must keep our perspective and not give less significant doctrines an importance they do not deserve. Dispensationalism generally places the greatest importance on the time-table of the Second Coming and on determining the order of events leading up to it.

This is not what is important to the New Testament authors or to Christ Himself, as His own words testify. Recall the passage discussed above from Matthew 24 and 25. Christ stressed that no one could predict when He would return. His primary concern was to exhort His followers (us) to be ready for His return. We must resist anything such as speculation about the end which distracts us from our salvation. Christ spoke often of the last days, but always with one purpose: to incite us to repentance and to encourage us to grow in His Gospel and to persevere in the Faith. If we respond to His exhortation, then, when He returns, we will go to meet Him in the clouds, escort Him to His Judgment Seat, and stand at His Right Hand with the prophets, the apostles, the martyrs and all the saints, ready to enter the glory of His Kingdom.

我们得要笃信自己的观点，无须对相对次要的教义给予不必要的关注。时代论者普遍极端重视基督重降的时间表，对确定其前出现的事件顺序也极为关注。

这对新约的作者们和基督本人来说并不是重点，这点有他的话为证。回顾前面所讨论的玛特泰福音（太/玛）第二十四章和二十五章，基督强调的重点是无人可预测他回返世间的时间。他最为关注之处还是恳劝他的追随者（我们）为他的来到做好准备。我们要注意抵制任何类似于猜测世界末日的事，因为这样的事会使我们从救赎上分心。基督常常提及末日，但是他从来只有一个宗旨：号召我们悔改、鼓励我们在他的福音中成长，让我们永远坚持自己的信仰。如果我们响应基督的号召，那么，当他归来之时，我们将会云端和他见面，护送他坐上审判台的宝座，站在他的右手边，和先知、使徒站在一起，和为主殉难的人站在一起，和全体圣人站在一起，准备好进入上帝的国度，和上帝共享荣耀。

待圣经，心中必须带着更多的敬意。绝对不能断章取义。要结合上下文，看清楚圣经作者到底在说什么，这又将如何影响你所关注经节的理解。

同时，当圣经解释和教会传统不一致，甚至冲击教会传统的时候，就要当心了。如在我们对致德撒洛尼基人书一（帖前/得前）⁸⁸的讨论中，教父指出恰当理解该节的道路。我们须要找出其他教派所主张观点的来源，当他们的观点和东正教信仰相悖时尤应如此。灾前受提的概念在约150年前才在英国出现。虔诚博学的东正教徒对圣经的阅读已2000年。会不会有什么重要的教义逃过了他们的法眼呢？通常这些新发现的教义并非真的是通过仔细阅读圣经得来，而是通过一些「特别启示」；然后其支持者翻遍圣经找寻那些晦涩难懂的章节用以支持这些观点。有时当读者试图理解难懂的章节却未能成功之时，这些新的教义就会出现。东正教徒有圣灵活生生的见证，如基督所说，圣灵会引导我们明白一切的真理⁸⁹，我们亦有教父传统帮助我们找寻真理。圣灵和教父传统并无不同，其实是同宗同源的。教父认得并聆听圣灵的声音；他们确认直至今日圣灵也仍然生活在教会之中；教父也是圣灵为继续引导教育世人而选择的一种方法。要在圣经中找出内容支持我们先入为主的观点，又或是固执自己有限的理解却不寻求圣传的引导，我们就不能真正理解圣经所言，也不能理解上帝通过圣经要对我们说的话。

⁸⁸ 约安福音 /
约 / 若 16:13

个词有两个意思。其一我们可以解释为「提」，但其与时代论者所说的「提升」并不一样。它的意思是「带」，就像英文中我们会说某人带朋友去看电影。这和玛特泰福音（太/玛）第二十四章中的用法似乎并不一致，那我们就来看第二种意思，「接受」或是「选择」。两者在这些经节中理解起来都比含糊其辞的「提」更为合适。第二种意思适合于主在我们提到的篇章中所讲论的内容，即上帝的追随者要准备好迎接他的到来，以免遇见他们像其他世人一样不警醒，对最后审判的到来毫无准备。有人会留心到上帝的诫命，满心笃定地面对审判，并会被接入天国。另有人日复一日和前一群人一起工作和生活，却没有过遵照福音的生活，基督重降时也不会为其所拣选或接纳。这些章节是基督劝诫的一部分，这劝诫是给所有聆听他的声音，回应他的讯息得以避免世界末日来临之时的刑罚之人的。这些经节并未提出「被提」思想。

结论：

我们已经看到，支持者所依据的这两段经文意义都与他们说的大不相同。两段经文都是指基督「最终回返世间」。支持此论点的人忽略了他们所用经节的前后文，曲解了词语和经节的意义，在其中一段经文中还利用了一个不精确的翻译。我们对

凯德伦山谷，行至了橄榄山。他们曾停步的地方，现在还可以一睹旧城和圣殿的壮观全景。使徒或许是为基督的话而惶恐，问到「这些事」——意指圣殿的毁灭——何时发生，何为基督回返世间的征兆。

基督的讲道即是对这些疑问的回应。为了对其有正确的理解，我们须要记得有两个问题，其一有关 66—72 年罗马犹太战争时降临在耶路撒冷的灾难，其二有关世界末日。讲道中两者皆有涉及。基督所说中有许多是为了让他的追随者不要混淆此二者，反而把犹太战争的恐怖当作基督重降的征兆。我们可以在他的警告中看出这一点：世界末日来临之前，福音必传遍全世界（第十二节），许多骗子会起来自称基督（二十三节至二十六节），除去天父，无人知道「那日子那时辰」（第三十六节），以及其他许许多多。基督关心的是他的追随者不要把即将发生在犹太的灾难和世界末日的巨变相混淆。为表明要旨，我强调了回返世间的突然性和不可预测性。

基督坚称他会「在你们想不到的时候」（24：44）回返世间，我们应据此解释 24：40—42 之内容。如果基督在二十四章前半部分的经节中反复强调这一点，又在 40—42 节中描述一个大事即将发生前的征兆，那就很奇怪了，如果如时代论者所言，这个征兆警示将在基督重现的七年之前发生，就更为怪异。理解本章的关键在于理解通常被译为「被提」的希腊文「παράλambano」。

我们乘着马车去见我们的父……我们有多荣耀啊！基督下凡时我们可以出去迎接，更有福的是，我们将永远与主同在」⁸⁰。

让我们总结一下我们到目前为止得到的知识吧。圣帕弗罗的确说到某种被提，即基督重降之时义人被提上天。这是教父们普遍同意的一点。但是圣帕弗罗和教父们都认为这是伴随着基督归来发生的事情，就在最后审判和建立天国之前。达尔比和苏格菲曾宣讲的被提，以及林德赛、华夫德和其他一些人仍在宣讲的被提却是另外一码事。他们把被提作为独立的一件事，作为在基督重降之前几十年中所要发生的事情的一部分。时代论者将被提看作是大灾难前、最后审判多年之前，信徒从世上的消失。这不是使徒和圣传的原意。圣帕弗罗并未提到被提之后有苦难和迫害时期。

为了铸造被提和大灾难之间的联系，支持者们上面所引用的玛特泰福音（太/玛）24:40—42中寻找依据。⁸¹当然这里我们可以看到圣经中提及了一段恐怖苦难的时光。玛特泰福音（太/玛）第二十四章和第二十五章中有基督一段长长的论述。这段宣讲时值圣周的第一日，其时基督和他的门徒正在耶路撒冷，这次耶路撒冷的最后一行以基督的死亡和复活而告终。主和他的随同曾到圣殿。他们离去之际，一位随同谈论到其建筑的恢宏壮观（24:1—2）。作为回答，耶稣预言了圣殿将会遭到的毁灭，这毁灭在约四十年后（公元七十年）发生了。这队人从耶路撒冷出发穿过

⁸⁰ 关于致德撒洛尼基人书（帖一得）的讲道八

⁸¹ 第一部分，《九月的开端》

如果我们结合上下文来看第十七节，很容易可以看出该节实际上并不支持被提理论，其中也并未提到大灾难或是基督回返世间之前会发生的任何事件。该节谈到的是这些事情都是我主降临的一部分。圣帕弗罗所述的事件过程相当简单而直接。基督重降之时，死者将复活，所有信徒——包括复活的死者和变化了形象的生者——将会升上天去，与主同在。这是教父们的一致解释，他们都认为此节是关于末世。

为什么圣帕弗罗会提到义人的升天呢？教父们认为这问题至少有三种答案：尼撒的格列高利说到改变了形象的复活之体是纯洁的，升天就是其必然的结果：「……当复活的号角吹响，在瞬间惊醒死者……所发生的变化……使生者像那些复活的人一样成为不朽，肉身不再沉重，其重量不能再将人留在地上，她们会穿越空气，飞升上天」¹⁹

金口的圣约安和其他一些教父认为，这些人飞升上天是为了护送上帝来到世间，亦是为显明上帝对信徒的恩惠。「若我主即将下凡，为何我等又要被提呢？乃是为着荣耀的缘故。王入城之时，受他恩惠的子民都要出城迎接，而受罚者则在城内等候审判。又或是，当一位慈爱的父亲归来，他的孩子们，还有那些够格成为他孩子的人会坐在马车上出来见他，亲吻他，而那些曾冒犯过他的仆人却要留在室内。所以

¹⁹ 《造人》第

二十二章、
第六章

被提理论的支持者根本上是从圣经中的一节中推出他们的理论，即致德撒洛尼基人书一（帖前／得前）4:17，「以后我们这活着还存留的人，必和他们一同被提到云里，在空中与主相遇。」另一理论来源虽然不如前者广泛但也经常地被引用，即玛特泰福音（太／玛）中24:40—42，「那时，两个人在田里，取去一个，留下一个。两个人推磨，取去一个，留下一个。所以你们要警醒，因为不知道你们的主是哪一天来到。」

以上所提到的第一节——即致德撒洛尼基人书一（帖前／得前）4:17——所属的那一段落，是东正教葬礼中所诵读的书信。该段落始自致德撒洛尼基人书一（帖前／得前）4:13。在前面的几节中圣帕弗罗谈到生活圣洁和信徒间兄弟爱的必要性。（4:1—12）在第十三节中他转向另一话题，即基督徒死后命运如何。对该问题的误解很明显在德撒洛尼基的教会中引起了不必要的忧伤和恐惧。似乎有人相信在基督再临前死去的基督徒或会错过这样的荣耀盛事。圣帕弗罗想方设法平复他们的恐惧（第十三节）。他指出基督复活时从死者中归来，同样在世界末日之时，他的信徒若在此之前死去，亦可在复活时复活（第十四节）。基督重降时，信基督的死者将会复活（第十六节）。之后他们和仍活着的信徒必被提到云端，迎接主的降临（第十五、十七节）。帕弗罗接着谈论了其他和基督重降有关的事情，首先讲到了其发生的日期。

所描述的特征也许不足以放诸四海而皆准。但是我们还是可以列出所有时代论者都共有的一些普遍特征。其名因其信奉者把历史分为时期或「时代」而来。他们相信圣经勾勒出了人类宗教史整个轨迹。上帝计划中的每个阶段都是一个「时代」，每个时代中上帝与世界和他的选民都有不同相处方式。某些时代论者的理论中包括了整个人类历史在内；另有一些只包括耶稣降临之后的基督教历史。在启示录二三章中提到了「给七个教会的信」，时代论的思想体系常常就是建立在对这些信象征性的解释上，认为各教会分别代表不同特定时期的基督教。时代论向我们展现了一个详细的基督再临前的事件程序。在此总规划中的两大事件就是被提和大灾难。

灾前被提的支持者声称该理论来自圣经中，一直以来都是基督教教义的一部分。实际上该理论约自1830年始，其主要创始人约安·尼尔森·达尔比曾是圣公会的牧师，也是普利茅斯弟兄会的发起人。他为时代论理论贡献良多，最为卓著之处是他首次将被提列入末世的迹象当中。被提理论起始于近代，这应该使我们怀疑它的可靠性。从来没有任何一位使徒或是教父阐述过这种教导。即便是达尔比的派系，虽然声称他们可以在圣经中找到理论支持，但却主张他们并非通过对圣经的研读得出该理论，而是通过一次启示得出。据其支持者说，灾前被提是基督教讯息中很重要的一环。然而在1830年之前竟无人知晓一星半点。

「被提」理论的矛盾之处

迪弥特里·克孜比神父

大圣安托尼传教团

德克萨斯州，圣安东尼奥市

某些基督教中的福音派和五旬节教派时而提及「被提」，并认为这是基督重降前的事件之一。也就是说，基督的虔诚信徒肉身离地为「大灾难」做好准备。「大灾难」是指为期七年空前绝后的苦难，之后世界末日就会来临。（少数该理论的拥护者称被提应是在大灾难之后。而其他大部分相信「被提」的人却认为是在大灾难之前。）据其拥护者说，被提的目的乃是为在那个可怕的时期保护义人安全。我们最熟悉的「被提」论支持者是哈尔·林德赛（曾作《已故的伟大星球，地球》及其他著作）·约安·华夫德（来自达拉斯神学院）以及已故的居鲁士·苏格菲（《苏格菲注释圣经》作者）。

这些观点为那些热衷于猜测基督重降、甚至为之如痴如醉的人所广泛认同，亦为那些深信在现状中可见上帝即将回返世间迹象的人所广泛认同。这些推测是一种名为「时代论」的更为广义的思想的一部分。时代论者形形色色，我们就其中一种

你了……你将和基督一同升天」⁸²。由此出发，我们必须将千年王国理解为基督教会开始直至世界末日来临的这段时间。在启示录第二十章中，圣约安用这样的信念劝解信徒：为基督受害的人不会死亡，他们会和救世主一起在天国为王。

第二次死亡指的是罪人在普世审判之后受判。此次死亡与「在第一次复活中复活的人」无关。亦即是说，那些在基督里获得属灵新生并被上帝的恩典洁净的人将不会受罚，他们将进入天国蒙福的生活。

启示录第二十章中关于世界末日和基督重降并未提出任何新的教导，明白这一点尤为重要。其主旨在于总结教会和恶魔之间的战争，这场战争贯穿了整个人类历史。魔鬼两次战败：第一次是属灵意义上的，由于救世主为拯救世人而死去；第二次是在世界末日的终极彻底失败。这一次他将被扔进火湖。在殉道者为基督死去之后，立即就开始庆祝他们对撒旦取得的胜利。

⁸² 致艾弗所人书／弗

5:14；致科

罗西人书／

西／哥 3:1

与 2:12；致

艾弗所人书／

弗 2:5—6

接着就是审判魔鬼和被他所欺骗的人。死者复活，照他们所行的受审判：「……若有人名字没记在生命册上、他就被扔在火湖里……这火湖就是第二次的死」¹ 然而对于那些在第一次复活中得复生的人，第二次的死在他们身上没有权柄。

旧时千禧年一说主要在异端当中流传。公元381年举行的第二次大公会议上，谴责了异端阿颇利纳里斯，批判了他关于基督千年王国的学说。为遏止该学说的继续传播，大公会议上的教父在信经中加入如下有关基督的语句：「他的国度没有终结。」亦即是说，神国是永恒的，一旦开始，绝无中断。到近代，千禧年的说法又在某些新教教派中复活。如前面所提，在该学说当中有两次复活和两次审判：复活一为义人，后有另一为罪人；救世主降临世间亦有两次。有一段基督与义人共同为王进行的纯俗世统治，这是一个特定的历史时期。形式上来看，其理论基础是对于第一次复活的不正确理解，而深层次来看，其渊源根植于许多当代教派的教徒不再相信永生，也不相信义人在天堂的福乐，他们与义人在祈祷中没有共融。另一渊源在于隐藏在其次教信念背后的乌托邦式幻想，这种幻想被带进了启示录的神秘意象中。

在千年至福论对启示录的第二十章的解读中不难看到矛盾之处。圣经中的相关章节清楚地表明，第一次复活指的是经过浸礼灵性复活得永生。以下是使徒书信中的几段典型章节：「你这睡着的人，当醒过来，从死里复活，基督就要光照

¹ 约安之启

示录／默

20:14—15

千年至福论的矛盾之处

目前有一种教导说在普世审判来临之前，基督耶稣的千年王国会出现在世间，这种教导在基督教不同教派中得到越来越多的认同。这一理论被称为千年至福论，源于希腊语的 χιλιετος /chiliasmos 一词，其意为「一千年」。该教导主旨如下：在世界末日来临很久之前，基督耶稣会再度降临世间，打败敌基督，并且仅仅使义人复活，同时基督将会在世间建立王国，为嘉奖义人曾经忍受过的挣扎和苦痛，他们将和基督共同统治一千年，尽享人间美事。之后余者由死里复活。接着普世审判就会来到，上帝将嘉奖义人，惩罚罪人。支持者的理论是基于启示录第二十章中使徒约安所见的异象。

其中说到有天使由天国降下，将撒旦捆绑千年，那些因为给耶稣作见证、并为上帝之道被斩者的灵魂纷纷复生，与基督一同作王一千年。「这是第一次的复活」，启示录中说到⁷⁵。「那一千年完了，撒旦必从监牢里被释放，出来要迷惑地上四方的列国」⁷⁶。

⁷⁵ 约安之启示

录 / 默 20:5

⁷⁶ 约安之启

示录 / 启

20:7—8

即便看到上述预言了的征兆，我们仍是不能预测世界末日来临的准确时日。但是，世界末日应已相去不远矣。奥普提纳的长老及俄罗斯革命前其他的义人都有所预言，使得我们有理由相信：共产主义完结，俄罗斯开始灵性重生，世界历史的倒数第二页已经由此翻开，此后人们就会看到敌基督的来临，启示录中的预言成真。

慈爱的主啊，愿您领导我们，保护我们，度过将来那试炼的年代吧。阿门！

基督重降会终结一切的邪行、罪恶和灾难，开启新世界中的新生活。

在世界末日业已到来的诸多标志之中有几个是我们应该提到的：甲）福音传遍全球；乙）之前信教的基督徒越来越多地抛弃信仰；丙）许多犹太人开始重返耶稣我主怀抱；丁）伪先知与异教徒数量大增；戊）道德沦丧，怵目罪行更为猖獗、巫术魔道更为盛行。

说到当今的道德沦丧，我们知道人类都是有罪的，差异只在多少而已。过去人常知己过，竭力改正。今时不同往日，事情变得怪异，罪恶的行径被宣称为合理，甚至登上了台面。堕胎支持者和同性恋团体组织大型集会游行、要求取得特权即是一例。看到他们我们就记起先知伊撒依亚（以赛亚，依撒意亚）在圣城耶路撒冷毁灭之前所说的话：「他们的面色证明自己的不正；他们述说自己的罪恶，并不隐瞒，好像所多玛一样。他们有祸了！因为作恶自害。」²⁴ 另外一让人忧心的古怪之处就是，传统上用来表现人类灵魂最光辉最高贵侧面的生活领域，如音乐、美术和文学，受种种堕落污俗之事强暴侵扰。在基督教看来，流行摇滚和重金属充满了噪音和粗俗挑逗的嘶叫；某些丑陋的现代绘画与雕塑和许多电影都充满暴力、俗不可耐。我们警醒地看到，人们越发发精神空虚，黑暗的异势力正无孔不入地填塞这种空虚，在人们的日常生活事务甚至他们的外貌中留下烙印。

²⁴ 伊撒依亚书
／ 赛／ 依 3:9

结论

许多的基督信徒都过着轻率甚至罪孽的生活，因为对即将来到的普世审判不够在意：对他们来说这事看似既不确定，又过于遥远。为了提升我们的灵修生活，我们须得时时提醒自己最后审判之前还常有上帝的个别审判。事实上，纵观历史，其间不乏对某人某地，甚至是整个国家的个别审判。许多事例都生动地证实了这一点：如诺亚时期的全球大洪水，罪恶之城所多玛和俄摩拉的毁灭，以色列城反复受劫掠，古亚述和古巴比伦的倾覆，不义之城庞培的突然毁灭以及罗马帝国和其他大王国的覆灭。即便像拜占庭和俄罗斯这样的基督教大国，当他们的人民偏离了基督徒的存活轨道，也未能逃过上帝的审判。个别审判总是恰当时，如基督解释：「尸首（道德沦丧）在那里，鹰也必聚在那里。」⁷³

为警示我们道德莫要沦丧，激励我们更新属灵生活，救世主善心告诫我们：「要预备。因为你们想不到的时候，人子就来了。」因此我们须得时刻注意自身的灵魂状态。我们要努力，让我们的信仰之灯永远发光，让我们的灵魂衣袍永远清洁。则基督之来将成为所望之事，正如在使徒时期众基督徒期待基督的来临一样。我们将认为，

⁷³ 玛特泰福

音／太／玛

24:28

上帝的赐福因其永无尽头而尤为可贵：「义人得永生。」尽管如此，教父却说，上帝赐人的荣耀亦因各人的属灵程度而有所不同。在圣经上有清楚地论述支持这一论点：「在我父的家里，有许多住处……他要照各人的行为报应各人……日有日的荣光、月有月的荣光、星有星的荣光。这星和那星的荣光、也有分别。」¹²

叙利亚的圣艾弗冷解释道：「就像每个人的视力不同，感受太阳的光线也有所不同，就像一盏照亮大屋的明灯，人感知到所有的光线都来自同样的源泉，将来的日子里也将与此相仿：义人彼此不可分离地共享同一欢乐，但各自被这同一个属灵的日头照明的程度是不同的，他们将按着自己配得的程度仿佛从同一个空间同一个地方汲取欢乐喜悦。无人可见高于或低于自身的程度，以免看到他人更高的恩典或自己所未得，若是这样，人就有了苦痛和烦忧的缘由。这在那里是不可能发生的，因为那里没有忧伤与叹息。在那里人各按适于他的恩典享受内在欢愉，而外在皆是同样凝视，共享同一喜乐」¹²。

¹² 伊撒依亚

书／赛／依

64:4；致科

林托人书一／

林前／格前

2:9；约安福

音／约／若

14:2；玛特

泰福音／太／

玛 16:27；

致科林托人

书一／林前

／格前 3:8；

15:41

¹² 有关天上居

所的讲道

那时死亡已无力辖制义人，如圣帕弗罗所说：「尽末了所毁灭的仇敌，就是死……这必朽坏既变成不朽坏的。这必死的，既变成不死的。那时经上所记，死被得胜吞灭的话就应验了。」⁶⁸ 启示录预言那时时间将不复存在。显然，在永恒的属灵世界里，不单感觉不到时间的流逝，就连空间和时间的概念与现在相比也大为改观。

启示录第二十一章中生动描述了永生的极乐状态。「我又看见一个新天新地。因为先前的天地已经过去，海也不再有了。」在荣耀的国度里，一切都是属灵的，不朽的，神圣的。最重要的是，那些在与上帝的共融中获得了永生的人将共享与上帝的完全联合，上帝乃是一切生命和欢乐的源泉。尤其是神国的新成员们将得见他们的创造者和恩主，和天使齐齐分享这样的荣耀和喜悦。他们将凝视他的荣耀，这样的凝视并非如同水中观月，亦非无端臆测，而是面对面的——不单是凝视，他们也亲身参与到他神圣的生命中去，在父的国度中像太阳一样闪耀。他们将与基督一同承受神国，要和他一起分享荣耀。⁶⁹ 正如启示录中所说：「他们不再饥，不再渴。太阳和炎热，也必不伤害他们。因为宝座中的羔羊必牧养他们，领他们到生命水的泉源。上帝也必擦去他们一切的眼泪。」亦如先知以赛亚总结道：「上帝为爱他的人所预备的，是眼睛未曾看见，耳朵未曾听见，人心也未曾想到的。」⁷⁰

⁶⁸ 致科林托人

书一 / 林前

／格前 15:26

及 54

⁶⁹ 约安之启

启示录 / 默

3:21；致提

摩泰书二 /

提后 / 弟后

2:11—12

⁷⁰ 约安之启

启示录 / 默

7:16—17；

伊撒依亚

书 / 赛 / 依

64:4；致科

林托人书一 /

林前 / 格前

2:9

改易的人很可能会问，上帝若是如此，那他又怎么会有诸多变化：喜见义人，敬他的人就赐予恩慈，拒绝作恶的人，对罪人义愤填膺，而当这些人改邪归正又赐予他们恩慈。对此我们应该说，实际上上帝无悲喜嗔痴，因为此乃人之激情。认为上帝因人的作为而行善恶是不合适的。上帝是善的，只做善事。上帝绝不伤害任何人，且恒常如是。而吾等为善之时，则得与上帝共融，因肖似上帝，而当吾等为恶之时，则远离上帝，因亏缺了他的形象……因此若有人说上帝厌恶避开罪人，就像说太阳避开盲人一样」⁶⁵

许多基督教苦修者的论著中都说到，一个人的德行越高，他就越清楚认识到自己对上帝负有何种责任，也就越热切渴望上帝的恩慈和爱。

荣耀的国度

这个世界变得更更新更好，与此同时，永恒的神国也就此开始。接着是世间恩典的国度——世上争战的教会，我们所属的教会——将和她天上的同伴——荣耀的国度——合并。接着圣子会与天父和圣灵共同执政，而「他的国也没有穷尽」，正如天使伽弗里尔向童女玛利亚所说。⁶⁶耶路撒冷的基里尔亦对此作出评论：「灭敌之前已统大权的人，灭敌之后岂不更应一统天下么？」⁶⁷

⁶⁵ 慕善集五，
第一章

⁶⁶ 路喀福音 /
路加 1:33

⁶⁷ 讲道集

特泰福音中关于最后审判的描述时评论道：「我主言及天国，则说：『你们这蒙我父赐福的，可来承受国。』他补充说，『那创世以来为你们所预备的国。』但当我主言及永火时，言语又大有不同，他说那是为魔鬼和他的使者所备。因此上帝的天国是为你所创，但火不是为你所造，是为魔鬼和堕落天使所造。」²²在启示录中，圣约安称普世审判中的定罪为第二次死亡。

我们无权只将主的话当做威胁或是教导罪人从善的方法而已。闭关者圣德奥梵主教解释说：「义人得永生，成魔的罪人将与魔鬼为伍，永远受罚。这样的苦难可有尽头？如果撒旦崇拜和恶魔化的行为结束，那么刑罚也可能终结。但是撒旦崇拜和恶魔化的行为是否有尽头呢？我们还是到那时拭目以待吧。在那之前，我们还是应该相信永生是无尽的，同样让罪人胆怯的永恒惩罚也是无尽的。撒旦堕落之后什么惩罚没有见过呢！我主的十字架的权能是么有力量地打击了恶魔！撒旦的一切阴谋诡计又是怎样至今一直被这大能击败！然而他依旧执恶不改，他持久反叛，罪恶的道路走得越远，越是顽固不化。不，他是绝无可能痛改前非的！……亦即是说，永恒苦难的地狱是存在的。」

然而，上帝的愤怒这一概念是条件性的、描述性的，我们从蒙福者大安东尼的教导中可以知道：「上帝是仁爱的，上帝是无激情、不改易的。那些认为可以确信上帝不

道第二十五章

及德奥多若讲

道第一章

²² 摘自关于玛

特泰福音之

讲道

「我知道」金口的圣约安写道，「许多人都很害怕欣嫩子谷，但我认为得不到神国的极乐才是最大的折磨，比欣嫩子谷还要可怕……多少愚人只愿远离欣嫩子谷，然而我认为不能进天国的人定然更常是为失去天国的美福哭泣，而非为在欣嫩子谷所受之苦而哭泣。因为单单丧失天国的欢乐就已经是最残忍的惩罚了。」⁶³

一些古代的异端（如奥利金的信徒）声称魔鬼和罪人在地狱受苦亦只是有时限的，之后就会恢复他们起初纯洁的状态。这一理论被称为普救说。然而，教会素来以上帝所言为立身之本，她宣讲在欣嫩子谷所受的苦难是永恒无尽的。参加第五次大公会议的教父们正式拒绝了普救说这样的伪学说。而历史上人们也不断试图以一种相对的意义理解在欣嫩子谷所受的苦难，即认为其是有定期的，虽然可能漫长但也有尽头。有些分裂分子甚至彻底否认了在地狱中所受的苦难的真实性。为了证实他们的观点，他们还提出了许多逻辑思辨：地狱的苦难和上帝无尽的爱背道而驰，一时失足和永远受罚看似矛盾，而这些惩罚和创造人类的根本目的即上帝的赐福之间亦矛盾重重。

思考这些及类似的论点时，我们要记得判断上帝无可言喻的的大慈大悲和绝对公正之间的界限并非我们的能力所能及。我们知道我主「愿意万人得救，明白真道」。但是人有自由的意志，可以拒绝上帝的恩慈和他的多方救赎。金口的圣约安解释玛

1:6—10, 致

提摩泰书二 /

提后 / 弟后

4:1: 约安之

启示录 / 默

20:11—15

⁶⁹ 致罗马人书

2:5

⁶⁸ 玛特泰福

音 / 太 / 玛

25:41—46

⁶⁷ 致德撒洛

尼基人书二 /

帖后 / 得后

1:8

⁶² 约安之启示

录 / 默 19:20

⁶³ 玛特泰福音

(太 / 玛) 讲

这一点可以从圣经的其他线索中推断出来。这是一次庄严公开的审判，因为审判者我主将带着上帝的荣耀出现在全世界面前，无数天使都围绕在他的身边。这是一个严酷可怖的审判，由上帝以其完全的公义施行，这是「积蓄忿怒、以致上帝震怒、显他公义审判的日子」。⁸² 这是具有决定性的最终审判，每个人的命运从此一锤定音。审判的结果是永远的善恶各得其所——义人被保佑得极乐，罪人被抛弃受苦痛。

上帝圣言说到最后审判之后善恶各自的命运，既详细描述了义人无限光明喜乐的永生，也同样断然肯定地说到罪人永远苦痛的生活：「你们这被咒诅的人，离开我，进入那为魔鬼和他的使者所预备的永火里去。」主在审判之日要说。「这些人要往永刑里去。那些义人要往永生里去。」⁸³

圣经中生动地描绘，罪人受刑的地方是一个受可怖痛苦的地方，那里有永不熄灭的烈火，永不死去的蠕虫。我主称此处为欣嫩子谷，借此提醒犹太人耶路撒冷以南那个可怖的山谷，那是一个作恶者受处决、一直焚烧垃圾的地方。同样地，圣帕弗罗说到「燃烧的烈火要报应那不认识上帝、和那不听从我主耶稣福音的人」。⁸⁴ 在启示录中，这个人在其间永恒受苦痛的地方叫做「火湖」。⁸⁵ 很明显，所有这些和圣经上其他类似栩栩如生的描述都象征性地描写了惩罚的严苛性。

／宗 17:31;
儒达书信 /
犹 14-15;
致科林托人
书二 / 林后
／格后 5:10;
致罗马人
书 2:5-7;
14:10; 致科
林托人书一 /
林前 / 格前
4:5; 致艾弗
所人书 / 弗
6:8; 致科罗
西人书 / 西
／哥 3:24-25;
致德撒洛尼
基人书二 /
帖后 / 得后

圣咏的作者们在基督来到这世上许多世纪之前就有预言，如今这个暂居的世界将有翻天覆地的变化：「你起初立了地的根基，天也是你手所造的。天地都要灭没，你却要长存。天地都要如外衣渐渐旧了，你要将天地如里衣更换，天地就改变了。惟有你永不改变，你的年数没有穷尽。」⁵⁷ 亦即是说，世界末日并非世界的毁灭，而是世界的完全更新。

普世审判

关于将来审判的证词浩如烟海，其中最详尽的描述要数圣玛特福音（太／玛）25:31—46 的描述。「当人子在他荣耀里，同着众天使降临的时候，要坐在他荣耀的宝座上。万民都要聚集在他面前，他要把他们分别出来，好像牧羊的分别绵羊山羊一般。把绵羊安置在右边、山羊在左边……。」⁵⁸

从玛特福音的这一描述上我们微中见著，看到最后审判的某些特点。详细来说，这是一次普世的审判，及之每人——无论生死善恶——甚至包括堕落天使在内，

⁵⁷ 圣咏 101:

24—26 / 诗篇

102:25—27

⁵⁸ 圣咏 101:

24—26 / 诗篇

102:25—27

⁵⁸ 亦见于约

安福音 / 约

／若 5:22—

29, 玛特泰

福音 / 太 /

玛 16:27;

7:21—23,

11:22—24;

12:35—42;

13:37—43;

19:29—30;

25:31—46;

使徒行实 / 徒

末日之际，我主为最后审判及开创永恒的新天国而来到世间。信基督者将与复活的死者一同被提到云里，与主相遇。圣经中说得很清楚，大灾难期间即便选民也要在地上受苦，为他们的缘故受苦的时间将会缩短。⁵⁴

说到复活以及之后发生的一切，我们须要记得，这都是我们决不可能完全理解，充分想象的事情，因为这种事是我们不曾经历的。正是因为这样，我们也永没办法解决好奇的人们心中常现的所有相关的疑问。

物质世界的尽头

因为人类堕入了罪恶的深渊，一切受造之物也无可奈何地屈服于「败坏的辖制，一同叹息劳苦、直到如今。」⁵⁵ 人类和物质世界的万象万物得到净化更新之日将要来到。在最后一日，普世审判之后，这一切都将藉由火的方法得以实现。大水前的世界籍由洪水泛滥而洗去罪恶得到净化，如今的天与地也是一样。圣裴特若教导道：「但现在的天地，还是凭着那命存留。直留到不敬虔之人受审判遭沉沦的日子，用火焚烧。……那日天必大有响声废去，有形质的都要被烈火销化，地和其上的物都要烧尽了。……但我们照他的应许、盼望新天新地、有义居在其中。」⁵⁶

⁵⁴ 玛特泰福音 / 太 / 玛 24:21—22

⁵⁵ 致罗马人书

8:22

⁵⁶ 裴特若书

信一 / 彼前 /

伯前 3:7—13

复苏；长睡过后精力复原；人皆成形自于尘土……此类等等。

据使徒帕弗罗所说，基督重降之日，世上的活人将和死者一样，同时经历霎时间的改变：「我如今把一件奥秘的事告诉你们：我们不是都要睡觉、乃是都要改变、就在一霎时、眨眼之间、号筒最后一次吹响的时候。因号筒要响、死人要复活成为不朽坏的、我们也要改变。这必朽坏的、总要变成不朽坏的。这必死的、总要变成不死的。」⁵² 此后信徒与主相会，有关于此圣帕弗罗说到：「论到睡了的人，我们不愿意弟兄们不知道，恐怕你们忧伤，像那些没有指望的人一样。我们若信耶稣死而复活了，那已经在耶稣里睡了的人，上帝也必将他与耶稣一同带来。我们现在照主的话告诉你们一件事。我们这活着还存留到主降临的人，断不能在那已经睡了的人之先。因为主必亲自从天降临，有呼叫的声音和天使长的声音，又有上帝的号吹响。那在基督里死了的人必先复活。以后我们这活着还存留的人，必和他们一同被提到云里，在空中与主相遇。这样，我们就要和主永远同在。」⁵³

一个在当代新教徒中广泛传播的错谬是「被提说」。在十九世纪之前这种信念是闻所未闻的，其意指在世界末日来临之前那段「大灾难」的时期（千禧年之前或之后，各版本皆有不同说法），真正的基督徒将被提到空中，逃离留在地上者的所有苦难。这是源于对帖撒罗尼迦前书第四章第十七节的误解，在该节中写到，正当世界

⁵² 致科林托人书一／林

前／格前

15:51—53

⁵³ 致德撒洛

尼基人书一／

帖前／得前

4:13—17

要发出光来、像太阳一样。」⁴⁹ 得救之人的主如是说。叙利亚的圣艾弗冷就此有所评论：「有的相似于光，有的相似黑暗。」

若仔细分析圣经里关于普世复活的教导，我们必然可以知道，复活的躯体与之前在生时的躯体在本质上是一样的，经中说到：「这必朽坏的、总要变成不朽坏的。这必死的、总要变成不死的」⁵⁰。但躯体复活之际，形骸已不同往日，也必将成为不朽不坏。复活之后，他们的躯体将永无疲惫之可能，亦将远离我等今世生活的病弱。它们将变得属灵、属天，不再受制于任何肉体的需要。复活后的生活将如同没有肉体的天使。而罪人的身体，毫无疑问，复活之际也将大为改观，虽则不朽，却要显出他们道德堕落的丑陋不堪。

为让基督徒笃信复活之际肉体变形 圣帕弗罗提出了一个众所周知的事实：「或有人问、死人怎样复活，带着什么身体来呢？无知的人哪！你所种的、若不死就不能生。并且你所种的、不是那将来的形体、不过是谷粒、即如麦子、或是别样的谷。但上帝随自己的意思、给他一个形体、并叫各等种子、各有自己的形体。」⁵¹ 教父亦执同见，他们让我们看到事实：其实并无任何事物遭到毁坏或是消失，而是被变成新物，有了新的特性。上帝绝对有权能重建、改变自身所造之物。在大自然中，教父们看到许多和复活的相似之事，如种子入土而腐，植物由之萌芽；万物年年春日

／若 5:29

⁴⁹ 玛特泰福音 /

太 / 玛 22:29

⁴¹ 致科林托人书

一 / 林前 / 格前

15:13—22

⁴⁸ 约安福音 / 约

／若 5:29；使

徒行实 / 徒 / 宗

24:15

⁴⁹ 玛特泰福音 /

太 / 玛 13:43

⁵⁰ 致科林托人书

一 / 林前 / 格前

15:53

⁵¹ 致科林托人书

一 / 林前 / 格前

15:35—38

死者复活

人子重降大日来时，死者尽都复活。所有的人都改变了形象从坟墓中起来。主如此描述这一事件：「你们不要把这事看作希奇，时候要到，凡在坟墓里的，都要听见他的声音，就出来。行善的复活得生，作恶的复活定罪。」⁴⁵

撒都该人曾质疑肉身复活是否可能，主指责曰：「你们错了，因为不明白圣经，也不晓得上帝的大能。」⁴⁶使徒帕弗罗说出了信仰复活的重要性：「若没有死人复活的事，基督也就没有复活了。若基督没有复活，我们所传的便是枉然，你们所信的也是枉然……因为死人若不复活，基督也就没有复活了。基督若没有复活，你们的信便是徒然：你们仍在罪里。就是在基督里睡了的人也灭亡了。我们若靠基督、只在今生有指望、就算比众人更可怜。但基督已经从死里复活、成为睡了之人初熟的果子。死既是因一人而来，死人复活也是因一人而来。在亚当里众人都死了，照样，在基督里众人也都要复活。」⁴⁷

正邪死者都将复活，且将会同时复活：「无论善恶，都要复活。行善的得重生，作恶的要受罪。」⁴⁸复活的义人与罪人的外表大有不同：「那时义人在他们父的国里、

／彼前／伯前

4:13；致科林

托人书一／林前

／格前4:5；致

德撒洛尼基人书

一／帖前／得前

5:2-6 及他处

⁴⁵ 玛特福音／

太／玛 24:30

⁴⁶ 玛特福音／

太／玛 24:30，

25:31；玛尔克

福音／可／谷

13:26

⁴⁷ 使徒行实／徒

／宗 17:31；玛

特泰福音／太／

玛 24:27

⁴⁸ 约安福音／约

基督再临

基督徒须全心关注即将到来的乐事——基督再临世间：「一有这些事（末世之痛），你们就当挺身昂首，因为你们得赎的日子近了」⁴⁰。救主亲自见证了他的再临，并指明了某些细节，耶稣升天之际天使也宣报了他的再临，使徒亦常常提醒⁴¹。上帝自述其再临乃是突如其来、万民都显而易见：「闪电从东边发出，直照到西边。人子降临，也要这样。」此前「人子的兆头要显在天上」，一旦得见「地上万族都要哀哭」⁴²。而据教父所言，这即是我主救生十字欲来之象。

我主降临之时，有无数天使簇拥，荣光无限：「他们要看见人子有能力，有大荣耀，驾着天上的云，同着众天使降临……要坐在他荣耀的宝座上……」⁴³。根据这些我们可以得出结论，耶稣重降与其初降相比大相径庭，初降之时他心甘情愿纾尊降贵，来时取了凡人的形象。后亦身居贫困，欣然忍受种种屈辱。再临与初降目的也不同。初来之时他为拯救众人而献出灵魂，再来之时他将按公义审判天下，按各人行事赏罚分明。⁴⁴

⁴⁰ 路喀福音 / 路加 21:28

⁴¹ 玛特福音 / 太 / 玛 16:27 ;

玛特福音 / 太 / 玛第二十四章 ; 玛尔克福

音 / 可 / 谷音 / 可 / 谷

8:38 ; 路喀福音 / 路加 12:40

及 17:24 ; 约安福音 / 约 /

若 14:3 ; 使徒行实 / 徒 /

宗 1:11 ; 儒达书信 / 犹 14 -

15 ; 约安福音 / 约 / 若 2:28 ;

裴特若书信 -

家矣。以上一千人皆为妄自尊大之辈：私生活中他们谎话连篇，道德败坏，残忍成性。可以推断，在最后的世领导敌基督身上亦可见到类似品质。

若按字面理解经上所记被兽统治的时间，敌基督得势维持将有三年又半年。此后，耶稣再临、死者复活、最后审判之时，亦是敌基督告终之日。³⁶ 圣约安在启示录中提到将出现两位见证人，他们传讲真理，施行奇迹，使命完成之时，又惨遭敌基督杀害。一些教父预见这两位见证人是旧约时期两位义者，一为先祖以诺（哈诺客）³⁷，一为先知伊利亚（以利亚，厄里亚）³⁸——惟有此二人未尝死味就被接入天堂。他们或许仍要回到尘世，完成在人间的使命，为上帝圣言受难，所有凡人都是必死的，他们也要如此。

总的来看，以上就是上帝圣言就将来之世以及基督再临之前人们的行为思想的教导。尽管这征兆如此明显突出，能否看到想到却取决于个人属灵的敏锐度。多数人太过关注物质享受，他们无力理解亲眼所见的预兆，不明白世界将变成何样。正因如此，救世主警告他的门徒：「你们要谨慎，恐怕因贪食、醉酒，并今生的思虑累住你们的心，那日子就如同网罗忽然临到你们。因为那日子要这样临到全地上一切居住的人。」³⁹

³⁶ 达尼伊尔书 /

但 / 达 7:25；

约安之启示录

／默 11:2—3，

12—13, 13:5

³⁷ 起源之书 / 创

5:23

³⁸ 众王传四 / 列

下 2:11

³⁹ 路喀福音 / 路

加 21:34—36

先知但以理用小角的出现描绘了敌基督的形象，先知描述了叙利亚王安提约古厄丕法乃的特征（公元前175年至164年残忍迫害虔诚犹太教徒者）以此作为敌基督的预像。在启示录中，敌基督被描画成来自海中的兽。这只怪兽的某些特征让我们想起罗马皇帝尼禄和多米提安，两者都是公元一世纪疯狂迫害基督教徒的大刽子手。以上诸王皆是启示录作者圣约安同时代之人。为避免混淆，须要记得，启示录中兽一词不单指那个敌基督，亦指其反基督王国的整个国家机器。³⁵

耶路撒冷的圣西里尔在其教牧书信中（第四封和第十五封）描述了敌基督的显著特征、品性和行为模式，叙利亚的圣艾弗冷在其关于基督降临与敌基督的布道中亦有提及。著名俄罗斯哲学家弗拉迪弥尔·S·索洛维耶夫在其《敌基督故事》中欲就敌基督的到来做出描述，然而其陈述及偶尔诙谐的口吻并未充分传达此事之可怖和委实堪忧，乃至将在人类命运之终威胁其生存。他的故事和失去上帝庇护的人类将会遇见的种种惨状相比，听来一派天真如田园诗。通过对历史上敌基督预像的研究，如叙利亚王安提约古厄丕法乃、罗马皇帝尼禄和多米提安、列宁及类似的所谓天才统治者，我们看到若干共同特征。他们在学术界和政界皆一无是处。他们所以得势，非为他们有过的才能或是成就，乃是时势造人。他们实乃阴谋家，非政治

³⁵ 达尼伊尔书

／但／达7:11、
玛喀维传前一二
书（加上下书）、
约安之启示录／
默13、19:19—
21

没有看到大难临头，圣帕弗罗写道：「因为你们自己明明晓得，主的日子来到，好像夜间的贼一样。人正说平安稳妥的时候，灾祸忽然临到他们，如同产难临到怀胎的妇人一样，他们绝不能逃脱。」³²

仅有政权的统治和外部的改变是绝不能满足敌基督的。因受万人称颂，他自负不已，以至以为自身天赋神力，超乎常人。他提出新的世界观——新的宗教和道德观来取代「不合时宜」、「失败至极」的基督教导。他自觉伟大，为这样的幻觉而心醉神迷，他将自显为神，高坐神殿（或即是在索洛蒙（所罗门，撒罗满）神殿遗址上所重建之耶路撒冷神殿），以命万民参拜。

据圣帕弗罗称，敌基督的行为将得到撒旦的支持，幻象幻迹随之而生，折堕之辈亦同时进行各种不义的欺哄，凡此种种使其成功非常。我们应该明白，敌基督的幻象神迹不仅是指那些旨在取悦大众的魅惑伎俩，而且包括那些被用来强化其统治的科学领域的最高成就。³³最严密的监视被用来控制民众的行为。买卖必示官准而后方可行。³⁴电视台报界诸媒体极尽能事，以塑造出这位世界领袖极得人心的形象，以此壮大其政权，提高其威信。若有人胆敢质疑该领袖的天才，又或对其手段不以为然，将遭到耻笑，迫害，终成人民公敌，身败名裂。

³² 致德撒洛尼基人书一／帖前／得前5:1—6

³³ 据约安之启示录／默13:15，

假先知有「杈柄赐给兽像，叫它有生气，并且能说话，又叫所有不拜兽像的人都被杀害。」

³⁴ 据约安之启示录／默13:17，「除了那受印记、有了兽名或有兽名数目的，都不得做买卖。」

到那拦阻的被除去，那时这不法的人必显露出来，主耶稣要用口中的气灭绝他，用降临的荣光废掉他。这不法的人来，是照撒旦的运动，行各样的异能、神迹和一切虚假的奇事，并且在那沉沦的人身上行各种出于不义的诡诈，因他们不领受爱真理的心，使他们得救。故此，上帝就给他们一个生发错误的心，叫他们信从虚谎，使一切不信真理、倒喜爱不义的人都被定罪。³¹

若干外在因素定会使将来的敌基督力量大增。也许那时，核武与生化战争一触即发，政经危机阴魂不散，如鬼魅笼罩人类。政府统治摇摇欲坠，国家深陷混战叛乱。举世巨变，天地混沌之际，一位「英明」领导浮出水面，扮演人类仅有的救世主。在他身后必是意欲统治全球的强大组织。在该组织的支持下，敌基督有准备有计划地展开社会经济改革，而此举也将得到媒体的支持和拥护。然而敌基督既有说服力，又能指挥世事，他这神秘的力量来自何处呢？我们可以想象他是一个天赋秉异而极具煽动性的演说家，一如列宁或是希特勒。人们乐于接受他的主张和建议，因为它们表达了那个物质至上的新纪元中人们的心声感受。

我们可以想到，许多反基督教的犹太人会把敌基督看作他们长久盼望的救世主，而其他人大多心怀希望，望他能结束战争与危机，带来举世繁华。因为人们盲目，

³¹ 致德撒洛尼基人书二／帖后一

得后 2:3—11

敌基督

在圣经中敌基督有双重意义。广义上说该词指任何对基督教持敌意的人³⁶。这是神学家圣约安在其书信中多次提到敌基督时所指的意义。而敌基督这个词在特别的情况下是指一个特定的人——世界末日来临之前出现的反基督敌人之首。该特定敌基督在世上出现是基督即将再临的决定性终极标志。

临近世界末日之时，人类对于上帝的憎恶之情愈见其烈，其中尤以这个特定的罪人为甚，而正是这个人将引领反基督的终极之战。在圣帕弗罗致德撒洛尼基人书二（帖后/得后）中，我们可以读到这个敌基督的特点及行为：

人不拘用什么法子，你们总不要被他诱惑。因为那日子以前，必有离道反教的事，并有那大罪人，就是沉沦之子，显露出来。他是抵挡主，高抬自己，超过一切称为上帝的和一切受人敬拜的，甚至作在上帝的殿里自称是上帝……现在你们也知道，那拦阻他的是什么（乃是神恩与天意啊），是叫他到了的时候，才可以显露。因为那不法的隐意已经发动，只是现在有一个拦阻的，等

³⁶ 希腊文中

“*ovri\anti*” 这个前缀指的就是反对

要把你们陷在患难里，也要杀害你们；你们又要为我的名被万民恨恶；那时，必有许多人跌倒，也要彼此陷害，彼此恨恶。」因此甚至「弟兄要把弟兄，父亲要把儿子，送到死地，儿女要起来与父母为敌，害死他们。并且你们要为我的名被众人恨恶……惟有忍耐到底的，必然得救」²⁷ 大众的道德堕落和仇恨将会导致

(八) 社会生活根基的动摇。血战、灾难，种种惨状终成大祸。在苦难的重压之下人们精疲力竭，人力无法战胜困难；但是由于不信，他们也不会求诸上帝。「你们也要听到打仗和打仗的风声，总不要惊慌：因为这些事是必须有的，只是末期还没有到。民要攻打民，国要攻打国，多处必有饥荒、瘟疫、地震。」然而人类变得如此硬心，经过这样的灾难还是执迷不悔。人们日益放荡不羁，敌意恨意、彼此为仇日渐升级，这样下去最后的审判终要到来。对比末世与大洪水前的时代使徒裴特若说道：「也没有宽容上古的世代（诺亚时期），曾叫洪水临到那不敬虔的世代……又判定所多玛、蛾摩拉，将二城倾覆，焚烧成灰，主知道搭救敬虔的人脱离试探，把不义的人留在刑罚之下，等候审判的日子。」²⁸「日月星辰要显出异兆，地上的邦国也有困苦，因海中波浪的响声，就慌慌不定。天势都要震动，人想起那将要临到世界的事，就都吓得魂不附体」²⁹。这一预言结尾处的说法显然关乎世界末日。然而在世界末日来临之前的若干年，人类生活中将出现与之相比更为可怕的事件：敌基督当道。

／默 9:2—21;

16:13; 18:23

²⁷ 玛特泰福音 /

太 / 玛 24:9—

10; 玛尔克

福音 / 可 / 谷

13:12—13; 路

喀福音 / 路加

21:16

²⁸ 裴特若书信

1 / 彼前 / 伯前

2:5—9

²⁹ 玛特泰福音 /

太 / 玛第二十四

章、玛尔克福音

／可 / 谷第十三

章及路喀福音 /

路加第二十一章

视和嘲笑，所有与基督教有关的事物——传统习俗、教堂建筑、教会音乐、宗教节日——一切皆将被当成古代历史。总体的氛围令人想到在创世记中描述的大洪水前的时代：「耶和華見人在地上罪惡很大，終日所思想的盡都是惡，耶和華就後悔造人在地上，心中忧伤……世界在上帝面前敗壞，地上滿了強暴。」²⁶ 耶穌再臨之前此象亦會盛行。

(六) 巫術盛行、邪靈受尊、其他異教崇拜亦大行其道。多數人將受各種不敬虔的異端邪說思想毒害。聖靈通過聖帕弗羅所做的明確預測：「在後來的時候，必有人離棄真道、听从那引誘人的邪靈、和鬼魔的道理。」²⁵ 以下是使徒約安（約翰，若望）描述的黑暗景象，從中我們可以看出邪靈將不可救藥地弥漫在人類生活中：「他（天使）開了無底坑，便有烟从坑里往上冒，好像大火爐的烟。日头和天空都因这烟昏暗了……他们（由无底坑而出的蝗虫）有无底坑的使者作他们的王。按着希伯来话，名叫亚巴顿，希利尼话，名叫亚玻伦。」²⁴ 虽有我主以各种惩戒及灾祸欲阻止人类行恶，人类却「不悔改自己手所作的，还是去拜鬼魔，又不悔改他们那些凶杀，邪术，奸淫，偷窃的事。」²⁶ 人们之间怨恨日增，

(七) 对信徒的迫害也逐步升温。基督徒为人所恨，这些恨人之人拒绝听到提及上帝权柄的只字片语，只信自身才智的力量。世人信神者日渐稀少，想要保持信仰的基督徒感到逐渐被孤立。信徒会发现自己众叛亲离，一如我主预言：「那时，人

书籍和杂志，其

中就有《犹太人

归回耶稣》，加

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²² 玛特泰福音 /

太 / 玛 24:12

²³ 致提摩泰书

二 / 提后 / 弟后

3:1-5

²⁴ 起源之书 / 创

6:5-11

²⁵ 致提摩泰书 1

/ 提前 / 弟前

4:1

²⁶ 约安之启示录

弗家的一切罪恶。』……深哉！上帝丰富的智慧和知识。他的判断何其难测！他的踪迹何其难寻！」²⁰

值得注意的是，使徒帕弗罗的预言在二战后不久就开始兑现了。此事始于纽约，一个靠神迹从德国集中营获救的犹太人创建了基督传教团，开始在犹太人中宣讲传道。他精通旧约，成功地向人们证明历史上的耶稣基督正是先知们许诺终会到来的救世主。由于他的努力，美国的几个大城市开始出现犹太基督教团体，到1990年，归化了的犹太人已是数以万计。²¹

（五）罪行恶状大幅增长。如我主预言：「只因不法的事增多，许多人的爱心才渐渐冷淡了。」²² 信仰薄弱必然走向更深层次的道德败坏，反过来，又会进一步削弱信仰，周而往复。以下是使徒帕弗罗关于世界末日到来之前，普遍道德败坏的惨状所做的描述：「世间必有危险的日子来到。因为那时人要专顾自己，贪爱钱财，自夸、狂傲、诽谤、违背父母、忘恩负义、心不圣洁、无亲情、不解怨，好说谗言、不能自约、性情凶暴、不爱良善、卖主卖友、任意妄为、自高自大、爱宴乐、不爱上帝，有敬虔的外貌，却背了敬虔的实意」²³

综观圣经中所有关于世界末日的预言，我们可以得出结论：届时情欲和偏情将掩盖人类一切高贵的、属灵的追求。对于基督的兴趣不复往日，基督的教导普遍遭漠

²⁰ 致罗马人书 11:25—33

²¹ 关于救世主

运动的更多资料可参见弥哈伊尔·施芬尼博士所著《遗民归来》，兰德出版物，马里兰巴尔的摩，1992年，以及约安·菲尔森所著《信仰弥赛亚的犹太人》，玛尔克奥立弗出版社，帝国出版社，1993。若干信仰弥赛亚的团体就这一主题都发行过很出色的

(二) 信仰极端微弱。虽然基督的教导将遍传遍知，人们却将对其渐渐漠然，以至「人子来的时候，遇得见世上有信德么？」¹⁵ 圣帕弗罗说道，这时刻「人必厌烦纯正的道理，就随从自己的情欲，增添好些师傅。并且掩耳不听真理，偏向荒渺的言语。」¹⁶ 也就是说，世界末日将来之时，人们将变得愤世嫉俗，不听上帝授真理，不接受绝对道德观。他们将只听自己爱听或取悦于他们的东西。这样的态度将促使

(三) 伪先知伪救世主大行其道。这些师傅只知骗人，诱骗人们加入形形色色的教派和异教，这些都迎合了大众的低级道德水准。主告诫我们警惕伪学说的危险：「你们要谨慎，免得有人迷惑你们。因为将来有有些人冒我的名来，说『我是基督』，并且要迷惑许多人。切莫跟随他们。因为假基督，假先知，将要起来，显大神迹，大奇事。倘若能行，连选民也就迷惑了。看哪，我预先告诉你们了。」¹⁸ 启示录中描述了末世伪先知和敌基督发起者的一些大奇事。使徒帕弗罗（帕弗罗·保禄）告诫德撒洛尼基（帖撒罗尼迦，帖撒罗尼迦）人，这并非真实的神迹，不过是幻象和恶灵的骗术罢了。¹⁹

(四) 犹太人求诸耶稣。正如圣帕弗罗所预言，各国众基督信徒背宗判教之时，恰是犹太人转信基督耶稣之时：「弟兄们，我不愿意你们不知道这奥秘（恐怕你们自以为聪明），就是以色列人有几分是硬心的，等到外邦人的数目添满了，于是以色列全家都要得救。如经上所记：『必有一位救主从锡安（熙雍）出来，要消除雅利

¹⁵ 路喀福音／路

加 1:8-9

¹⁶ 致提摩泰书

二／提后／弟后

4:3-4

¹⁸ 玛特泰福

音／太／玛

24:5, 24；玛尔

克福音／可／谷

13:6

¹⁹ 约安之启示

录／默 13:13—

15；致德撒洛

尼基人书二／帖

后／得后 2:9

学家已经相信，在耶和華的大日来临之前必有一连串的重大灵性变革进程和社会变革发生。

基督再临之象

虽然圣经中并未透露耶稣何时重降的天机，但其指出大日临近之时必是异象连连。耶稣曾就世界末日来临而布道，末了曰：「可以从无花果树学个比方：当树枝发嫩长叶的时候，你们就知道夏天近了。这样，你们看见这一切的事，也该知道人子近了，正在门口了。」¹⁵ 换句话说，就是要观察你周围的事物，因为从中可以得知世界末日的远近。通过耶稣的布道及其十二使徒的传道，我们可以得出耶稣再临若干征兆：

(一) 福音传遍世间。耶稣预言世间各国皆将得时机，信仰我主耶稣：「这天国的福音要传遍天下，对万民作见证，然后末期才来到。」¹⁶

¹⁵ 玛特泰福音 /

太 / 玛 24:32—

34

¹⁶ 玛特泰福音 /

太 / 玛 24:14

乃因思及即将与我主见面，可以引导教徒过上更为警醒虔诚的生活。「坚固你们的心，因为主来的日子近了，」使徒雅科弗（雅各，雅各伯）写道。「看哪，审判的主站在门前了」¹⁰。

从基督教古文献中我们可以得出结论，大部分早期的基督徒急切等待基督耶稣重降人世。一方面，因为他们所处的环境中屠戮迫害与殉道事件频频发生，让基督徒想起救世主关于世界末日的描述，这就更加印证了他们的期待。没人可以担保哪怕多过一天太平日子。想想基督教早期受难者的遭遇吧：首位殉道者辅祭斯提梵（司提反，斯德望）、使徒裴特若（彼得，伯多禄）和帕弗罗（保罗，保禄）、年轻的菲斯（信）¹¹、昊普（望）¹²、夏丽缇（爱）¹³、三姐妹及其母索斐亚、大殉道女瓦尔瓦拉、得胜的圣人格奥尔吉……事例数不胜数，这些足以让我们确定早期信徒的生命常处险境。在罗马大帝尼禄、多米提安、德修和戴克里先等大迫害者身上，基督徒都可以看到启示录中所提之兽的特点。另外一方面，许多早期基督徒信念火热、兢兢业业，要过正直的生活，这样耶稣重降对他们来说就不是最后审判和终极惩罚，而是和深受他们爱戴的救世主进行愉快的会面。他们诚心期望基督耶稣速速归来。

随着公元四世纪初宗教迫害和异教信仰的结束，基督徒的信仰热情开始平静下来，因而对于耶稣重降的期望也变得平静放松了。而经过对圣经的系统研读，神

¹⁰ 雅科弗书信 / 雅 5:8-9

¹¹ 希腊语：彼斯提斯，俄语：维拉

¹² 希腊语：埃尔德斯，俄语：纳德志达

¹³ 希腊语：阿伽彼，俄语：琉博弗

本文将提到世界末日来临的主要特征和敌基督的一些性格特征，还会描述圣经所教导的基督再次降临、死者复活、最后审判（全球审判）及永生不朽。结尾处本文强调了为上帝降临做好准备的重要性。附录中本文指出千年至福论（亦即耶稣重临世界为王一千年之说）的前后矛盾之处。

等待基督再临

我们所以在尘世生活，主要乃是为永生不朽作准备。基督教智慧指示我们要尽全力利用宝贵的时间，以承继永恒不灭的生命。吾主耶稣传道时多次号召信徒要珍惜时光，随时准备着为我们的生活交账：「所以，你们要警醒，因为不知道我们的主是哪一天来到」²。关于这一点亦可参照玛特福音（太／玛）25：31-46关于万民受审判的部分，以及主所讲到的种种寓言：如稗子和麦子的比较³，如等候主人归来的仆人⁴，又讲到不义的管家⁵、大筵席⁶、按才受托⁷与在葡萄园做工的比喻⁸、十童女的比喻⁹及其他。人多畏死避而不思，十二使徒则教导基督教徒要常细细思量，

² 玛特福音 /

太 / 玛 24:42

³ 玛特福音 /

太 / 玛 13:24-30

⁴ 路喀福音 / 路

加 12:35-40

⁵ 路喀福音 / 路

加 16:1-13

⁶ 路喀福音 / 路

加 14:16-24

⁷ 玛特福音 /

太 / 玛 25:14-30

⁸ 玛特福音 /

太 / 玛 20:1-16

⁹ 玛特福音 /

太 / 玛 25:1-13

绪言

吾等幸蒙上帝怜，得以见证如此重大时刻：俄国无神政权经过其长达70年的统治，在既无战争亦无暴动的情况之下忽然崩塌。共产主义的万千惨状，其戛然而终，俄罗斯继而迎来宗教复兴，凡此种种，无一不在奥普提那修道院的几位末代长老以及俄国革命前几位义者的预言之中。（阿纳托利长老（波塔波夫，1922），莫斯科的修士司祭阿里斯托克莱神父（1918），阿莱克西长老（扎西莫夫斯基），奈克塔里长老及其他。众长老的预测之中还有一个重要的细节——虽然他们并未指出这些事件在俄国发生的具体时间，但是他们指出其与世界末日来临的时间十分接近。话说回来，世事如此纷乱：地球人口过多，环境又遭到灾难性的破坏，能源已然耗尽，圣经中许多预言一一达成，这一切都无不暗示着世界末日或实为期不远。

大概两千年前，我主耶稣驱逐邪灵时，恶魔常无耻叫嚣：「尔与吾等何干，上帝子耶稣？此时折磨吾等为时尚早！」令人惊讶的是，今日驱魔中，邪灵所言却截然不同：「留着我们吧，反正主来之日不远矣！」这不正是说他们比我们更清楚世界末日的来临么？」

「我们在科特科赫博士的书能找到涉此的内容，这位新教学者著有若干关于魔鬼学、通灵学和虚假奇迹的重要作品。具体可参见其书《基督与撒旦之间》中神秘的捆绑和释放》《魔鬼学今昔》，克雷格尔出版社，大急流市，密歇根州

世界末日

主教 亚历山大（米兰特）著

龚蕾 译

是不胜其难的。要记得，前文提到的那些受骗的修士都已奉献己身于基督。教父们出于对我们伟大的爱，告诫我们虔诚祷告，寻求谦卑，寻求神师的引导。他们清楚告诉我们，不要想方设法想看见天使，即使看见，也要持质疑的态度。教父告诫我们，我们对一个异象哪怕有一丁点的怀疑，也要说「我不知道」⁵⁵。然后将它置之不理，或是直接否认。他们告诉我们如果那异象是来自于上帝，上帝自会扭转我们的行动，天使也会为我们的谦卑和节制而欢欣雀跃。⁵⁶ 教父们告诉我们的道理和当今的流行读本作者所写是大相径庭的。

魔鬼是骗子，是惑乱的散布者，为了达到他的目的，他和他的群魔不但用言语欺骗我们，还通过伪装成其他模样说谎。任何造成惑乱或转移人对上帝注意力的非言语现象（所谓外星人绑架就是一个现代的例子）都可能是这样一种伪装。

⁵⁵ 参见慕善集索引，英文版第一辑、第三辑及第五辑，可见相关内容

比如，在关于属灵辨别之重要性的讨论中，圣约安·卡西安详细叙述了一个修道士是如何自杀的，另有一例，有个修道士是如何预备杀害他自己的儿子。两例的发生都是因为魔鬼伪装成天使¹³。基辅洞窟圣徒故事箴言集中记录了一个叫做尼基塔的年轻修道士向一个光明天使下拜，而这位天使告诉他，不必浪费时间在祈祷上，这位天使会为他祈祷的，因为花时间阅读对他更为重要。当魔鬼伪装成的天使代表他祈祷，尼基塔就变得洞察力非凡。不久他甚至不想听人提到福音书，宁可熟读圣经旧约。他的修士同伴，最终认出了魔鬼，用祈祷赶走了魔鬼。尼基塔痛悔前非，靠着上帝的恩典，他后来得以担任诺夫哥罗德的主教，成了羊群的牧者，一位显行灵迹者。他就是我们所熟知的闭关者圣尼基塔。

「你们要防备假先知，他们到你们这里来，外面披着羊皮，里面却是残暴的狼。凭着他们的果子，就可以认出他们来。荆棘上岂能摘葡萄呢？蒺藜里岂能摘无花果呢？」¹⁴「圣灵所结的果子，就是仁爱、喜乐、和平、忍耐、恩慈、良善、信实、温柔、节制。这样的事，没有律法禁止。凡属季度耶稣的人，是已经把肉体连肉体的邪情私欲钉在十字架上了。」¹⁴

因为人类软弱，罪恶深重，自欺欺人，而人神共同的敌人又有数千年的丰富经验，要把基督耶稣和圣帕弗罗所说这些关于辨别真天使和假冒天使的魔鬼的话付诸实践

¹³ 慕善集，第一辑

¹⁴ 玛特泰福音 /

太 / 玛 7:15-16

¹⁴ 致噶拉塔人书

/ 加 / 迦 5:22-

24

附录

斯特梵·布什纳尔博士作

冒牌天使

20世纪90年代上半叶，关于天使的书籍数量骤增。这些书中许多都有关于天使在日常生活对人的救赎发挥作用的感人描述。几乎所有都主张对天使持开放的心态，心怀感恩地接纳天使及其与人类的交流。许多作者都鼓励大家在生活中以天使为中心，寄望于天使经常介入影响，同时又主张大家认识到，有时候天使显现的方式表面上并不那么像天使。

这些书的作者几乎都未考虑到恶魔及其魔鬼军队是堕落天使，他们能把自己伪装成光明天使，带来人类灵魂的毁灭。从圣帕弗罗书信¹¹直到现今的时代，教会文献描述了这些堕落天使怎样不但将自己伪装成光明天使，还会把自己装成圣人、童贞玛利亚还有基督耶稣本人。

¹¹ 致科林托人书

二一 林后一 格后

11:14

混乱之时尤为有益。如果我们和天使失去了联系，他就无法影响帮助我们。如果一个人靠近了流沙或深渊，却闭目塞听，又有谁能帮得了他呢？」

因此，一个信基督的人应该谨记他的好心天使，因为终其一生天使都关注着他，于他灵性有所修为时为他而欢欣，于他跌倒之时为他伤悲。当一个人逝去之时，天使将他的灵魂带到主的身边。在许多记载当中都可以看到，灵魂一旦发现自己身处灵界，也就认出了他的守护天使。

以下是来自俄罗斯祷文书中对守护天使的一段晨祷短文：

上帝的天使，上帝为保护我从天上赐给我的神圣守护者，我热忱地恳

求你：启迪我并护佑我免于一切邪恶，在善行上指教我并引导我行走于得

救之路。阿门。

守护天使

伊稣斯传／书／
苏 5:15

礼拜时我们祷告道：「为平安的天使；忠实的引导者和我们灵魂及肉躯的护守者，让我们恳求主。」东正教会认为，上帝赐给每个孩子一位守护天使。我主基督耶稣如是说：「你们要小心，不可轻看这小子里的一个。我告诉你们，他们的使者在天上常见我天父的面」³⁹。

蒙福者奥古斯丁写道，「天使时时处处与我等同在，关心备至，热切无休。天使对我等予以帮助，预知我等需求，天使实为上帝与人类的桥梁，将我等的抱怨叹息呈于上帝……天使在我等一切旅途上一路相伴，他们与我们同出同入，关注我等于邪魔当前之时，能否心怀虔诚敬意而独善其身，为追寻上帝的国度又是何等尽力。」大圣瓦西里亦表达过类似的观点：「每个信徒有一位天使，天使如同孩子的指引者和牧羊人，指引着他的生活。」为证明此言不虚，他引用圣经诗篇中关于上帝所说：「他要为你吩咐他的使者，再你行的一切道路上保护你……耶和华的使者，在敬畏他的人四周安营搭救他们」⁴⁰。闭关者德奥梵主教在他的一封信中训诫道：「我们须要记得我们有一位守护天使，在我们的思想心灵中向其求助。平安之时这样做是好的，

³⁹ 玛特泰福音／
太／玛 18:10

⁴⁰ 圣咏 90:11,
33:8／诗篇
91:11, 34:7

同时，天使还是一心向主的。当人逾越了上帝的律令，天使就会阻止他，甚至对其做出惩罚。例如，当有罪之人被驱逐出伊甸园之时，上帝安设革鲁宾手持燃烧之剑守卫乐园的大门。另有持剑的天使在先知瓦拉穆（巴兰，巴郎）心怀恶意之时立于其前，阻挡他的恶行。还有在恺撒里亚（该撒利亚，凯撒勒雅）除杀伊若德王以惩其傲气的天使。启示录中也说到天使惩罚罪人。然而，重要的是要明白他们惩罚的目的亦总是慈悲为怀，乃为唤起其悔悟之心，助其归向上帝。³⁵

实际上，天使遵照上帝的旨意，积极地参与到全人类的生活中，其程度远胜于我们中大多数人的猜想。我们由先知达尼伊尔所见的异象可知，上帝已经委托了有些天使来看顾王国的命运，看顾所有栖居在世上的人们的命运³⁶。圣父就此表达了以下感想：「天使或侍立于至高上帝前，或合力撑持整个世界。」³⁷

从古至今，教会的传统都是通过祈祷向天使传递心声。即便在旧约时期，希伯来人将革鲁宾的金像置于约柜之顶，后来置于至圣所中。犹太人常于其前祈祷。上帝亦于此二革鲁宾像之间传谕于摩伊息斯（摩西，梅瑟）。天使显现为上帝之神圣的承载者，所以伊稣斯见天使之际受命需：「把你脚上的鞋脱下来，因为你所站的地方是圣的。」³⁸

³⁵ 起源之书／创第三章；民数

之书／民一／户，

22:23；使徒行

实／徒一宗，

12:23；约安之

启示录／默第八章

至第十九章及

16:11

³⁶ 达尼伊尔书／

但／达第十章一

第十二章

³⁷ 神学家圣格里

高利，神秘赞歌，

训诫六

³⁸ 出离之书／出

25:18-22；众

王传三／列上

6:23；纳维之子

天使向人类显现常见于圣经新约。有天使向匝哈里亚（撒迦利亚，匝加利亚）传报施浸者约安的成孕。有天使向至圣童贞女玛利亚传报救主的降孕并在梦中向约熙福显现。有一众天使齐唱赞歌，赞美基督的诞生，天使又将这救主诞生的喜讯报告给牧羊人，并阻止博士们回去见伊若德（希律，黑落德）。圣子降临之后，天使的显现也显著增多，这是一个主向他的使徒预言了的事实，主说从今往后天要开了他们将要看见「上帝的使者上去下来在人子身上」。的确，在基督耶稣沙漠受感之时，是天使侍奉他。在格特塞玛尼（客西马尼，革责玛尼）园中，天使来加添他的力量。是天使告诉携香液女我主复活的消息，在我主升入天国之际，也是天使向使徒传达了他再次驾临的喜讯。是天使救众使徒脱离牢狱，还有被判死刑的使徒裴特若。是天使显现给科尔奈利（哥尼流，科尔乃略），指示他传来使徒裴特若，科尔奈利从而得蒙我主话语的教诲。³³

我主基督耶稣曾几次提到天使。据他所说，天使将死去的乞丐拉匝若（拉撒路，拉匝禄）的灵魂放在阿弗拉穆怀里。即便是看到一个悔恨的罪人，天使也欢喜快乐。他们在世界末日与上帝一起降临，要将恶人和义人分开。从救世主的教导中，从圣经和日常生活中的许多例子中，我们可以看到天使是良善的造物，他们不断与我们交往，他们关心我们的救赎、我们的福祉。³⁴

³³ 约安福音 / 约
若 1:51: 使徒
行实 / 徒 / 宗
5:19, 12:7-15
及 10:3-7

³⁴ 路略福音 /
路加 16:22 及
15:10: 玛特泰
福音 / 太 / 玛
13:39-41, 16:27

与人类有关的天使行动领域

和恶魔不同的是，善天使对我们充满同情，常常保护我们，帮助我们。有关于此，使徒帕弗罗写道，「天使岂不都是服役的灵、奉差遣为那将要承受救恩的人效力吗」？³¹

圣经中关于天使之助的叙述随处可见。这里就稍稍举几个例子吧。阿弗拉穆（亚伯拉罕·亚巴郎）派他的仆人去拿鹤那里，并使他相信我主上帝会派出天使与他同行，精心安排，使他此行不虚。是两位天使将罗特（罗得）和他的家人救离注定毁灭的所多玛（索多玛）城。族长雅科弗（雅各，雅各伯）在回到兄长以扫（厄撒乌）处的路上，在异象中见到众多上帝的使者，而受到了鼓励。在其离世前不久，他祝福孙辈时，向约熙福（约瑟，若瑟）说道：「救赎我脱离一切患难的那使者，赐福与这两个童子」。天使为救犹太人逃出埃及逃离奴役亦出力甚多。是天使在征服应许之地时帮助了伊稣斯（约书亚·若苏厄）。此后是天使在御敌之战中帮助以色列的士师。是天使除去包围耶路撒冷城的十八万五千亚述大军，救耶路撒冷人民于危难。是天使先在三子被投火窑之际救他们于火海，后救了被扔给狮子的先知但以理。³²

³¹ 致希伯来人书

1:14

³² 起源之书 /

创 32:1-2 及

48:16; 出离之

书 / 出 14:19

至 23:20; 纳

维之子伊稣斯

传 / 书 / 苏

5:13-14; 众审

判者传 / 士 /

民 2:1, 6:12 及

13:3; 伊撒依

亚书 / 赛 / 依

37:36; 达尼伊

尔书 / 但 / 达

3:49, 6:22

罗也就属灵辨别发表了相同的看法：「要穿戴上帝所赐的全副军装，就能抵挡魔鬼的诡计。因为我们并不是与属血气的争战，乃是与那些执政的、掌权的、管辖这幽暗世界的，以及天空属灵气的恶魔争战」³⁰。

看过圣经上的这些告诫，我们就要时刻提醒自己，我们的生活时时处处皆有为我们灵魂的救赎而进行的持久战。不论情愿与否，每个人从幼年开始就卷入了一场关于选择的斗争，这是善恶之择，是一个服从上帝或魔鬼意志的选择。善恶之争由来已久，甚至始于开天辟地之前，又将延续不绝，直到世界末日。事实上，天国的战争早已告终，以恶的彻底失败而归告终。而今这争斗之所已转来尘世，更确切地说，转入人的思想和心灵。我们应该看到，善天使，尤其是我们的守护天使，在我们与恶争战中热心帮助我们。

曾看见撒但从天上坠落，像闪电一样」指的就是这桩史前事件，即撒旦和其他天使对上帝的背叛。在启示录中可见此事的如下详情：「在天上就有了争战。弥哈伊尔同他的使者同龙争战，龙也同他的使者去争战，并没有得胜，天上在没有他们的地方。大龙就是那古蛇，名叫魔鬼又叫撒旦……它被摔在地上，它的使者也一同被摔下去」²⁴。在启示录第十二章开头的部分说道大龙的尾巴拖拉着天上星辰的三分之一²⁵，有人据此认为那时鲁瑟伯引诱了三分之一的天使。这些堕落的天使被称为恶魔。

这些堕落天使心怀不轨之后，试图将人类引上罪恶的道路，从而受到地狱的诅咒。奇怪的是，这些堕落天使却害怕他们自己建立的国度，这被称之为地狱或无底坑的国度。的确，当救世主基督医治一个着魔的人，意欲送他们回到无底坑之时，鬼就央求耶稣，让他们投身入猪里去²⁶。救世主基督想到当时他化身为蛇，哄骗我们的祖先阿达穆和埃娃（夏娃，厄娃）破了上帝的诫，从而不得永生，因而称魔鬼为「他从起初是杀人的，是说谎之人的父」²⁷。魔鬼及其魔众从那时起就得以影响人类的思想、感情和行为，竭力一步步将人类拉下他们自己已陷身其中的罪恶的泥沼。「犯罪的是属魔鬼，因为魔鬼从起初就犯罪……所有犯罪的，就是罪的奴仆」²⁸。邪灵就在我们身边，这永远威胁着我们。因此使徒裴特若劝勉我们：「务要谨守警醒，因为你们的仇敌魔鬼，如同吼叫的狮子，遍地游行，寻找可吞吃的人」²⁹。使徒帕弗

²⁴ 约安之启示录
／默 12:7-9

²⁵ 约安之启示录
／默 12:4

²⁶ 路喀福音
／路

²⁷ 加 8:31

²⁸ 起源之书
／创

²⁹ 3:16: 约安福音
音
／约
／若 8:44

³⁰ 约安书信 1
／约壹
／若 1

³¹ 3:8: 约安福音
／约
／若 8:34

³² 裴特若书信 1
／彼前
／伯前 5:8

³³ 裴特若书信 1
／彼前
／伯前 5:8

³⁴ 裴特若书信 1
／彼前
／伯前 5:8

³⁵ 裴特若书信 1
／彼前
／伯前 5:8

³⁶ 裴特若书信 1
／彼前
／伯前 5:8

³⁷ 裴特若书信 1
／彼前
／伯前 5:8

那么这些灵界造物的使命是什么呢？很显然，他们为上帝指定，作上帝之伟大和荣耀的最完美映像，并须臾不离地分享他的福泽。「诸天述说上帝的荣耀」，^{5:19} 这是谈论看得见的诸天，那么歌颂上帝的荣耀更是灵界的当然使命。先知撒撒依亚（以赛亚，依撒意亚）不胜荣幸得见「主坐在高高的宝座上，他的衣裳垂下，遮满圣殿。其上有撒拉弗侍立，各有六个翅膀：用两个翅膀遮脸，用两个翅膀遮脚，两个翅膀飞翔。彼此呼喊说：『圣哉！圣哉！圣哉！万军之耶和華，他的荣光充满全地』」²³。

墮落天使

众天使为上帝所造初皆为良善的天上生灵。然而与人类一样，上帝亦赋予其自由意志，能够选择服从或对抗我主，能够拣选从恶或从善。路西法²⁴ 是最为亲近上帝的天使之一，以其为首的一些天使误用了上帝赋予他们的自由，背叛了我主上帝。他们被驱逐出天堂，创建了他们自己的国度——地狱。Lucifer 意为光的信差，后重命名为撒旦，意为对抗者。他也被称为魔鬼（意为诽谤者）、蛇或是龙。救主的话「我

二 4:1 和 5:20:
艾斯德拉纪二

5:19 注：斯拉夫圣经艾斯德拉纪三，也就是英王钦定本的艾斯德拉纪二，或者是武加大译本附录中的艾斯德拉纪四。

²³ 伊撒依亚书 / 赛 / 依 6:1-4;

耶则基伊尔书 /

结 / 则第 10 章

²⁴ 拉丁语：Lucifer

fer; 希腊语：

Εαυρηφωρος /

Posteros

掌权天使、有能天使和主治天使中，就有了五级。加之以天使、总领天使、革鲁宾和塞拉芬，乃有九级天使。

另外，一些教父的观点认为，将天使分为九品只涉及上帝言语启示了的天使之名，而不包括那些我们尚未得着启示的其它天使及其等级之名。譬如，神学家使徒约安在启示录中提到的神秘造物 and 上帝宝座前的七灵：「但愿从那昔在、今在、以后永在的神和他宝座前的七灵……有恩惠、平安归于你们」¹⁵使徒帕弗罗在他给艾弗所（以弗所，厄弗所）人的书信中写道，基督在天国中所居住的地方，远高于我们所提及的天使，「一切有名的，不但使今世的，连来世的也都超过了」¹⁶。这也就暗示了在天堂仍有其他其名尚未启示于人的灵界造物。

在圣经当中有的天使以其自己的名字称呼。比如先知达尼伊尔使徒儒达（犹大）和启示录中所提到的总领天使弥哈伊尔（米迦勒，弥额尔）。¹⁹「弥哈伊尔」之名在希伯来语中意思是「谁像上帝？」。在圣经中，提到他是上帝的天军，他被描述成对付恶魔及其奴仆的主力。他的画像常手执燃烧之剑。「加百列」之名指神的力量。先知但以理和传福音者路喀（路加）都提到过加百列²⁰在圣经当中他被描绘成传报上帝奥秘的信差。他的圣像手执百合。圣经中还称名提到其他三位天使：拉法伊尔——上帝的助力，鄂里伊尔——上帝之火，撒拉斐伊尔——向上帝的祈祷书。²¹

¹⁵ 约安之启示录
／默 1:4

¹⁶ 致艾弗所人书
／弗 1:21

¹⁷ 纳维之子伊稣
斯传／书／苏，

5:33；达尼伊尔书
／但／达 10:13

和 12:1；儒达书
信／犹，9：约

安之启示录／默
12:7-8

¹⁹ 达尼伊尔书／
但／达 8:16, 9:21；
路喀福音／路加
1:19-26

²⁰ 托维特传／多
3:16 和 12:12-

15；艾斯德拉记

千千，在他面前侍立的有万万」，只是因为先知穷尽词藻，亦无法表达更为浩大的数量了。¹¹

考虑到天使数量众多，也就自然而然可以推断出天使世界同尘世一样，也有不同的完善程度，并因此而拥有不同等级或是神力级别。这也是上帝分别称他们为天使和总领天使的缘故所在。¹²

在古教会作家和教父观点的引导下，东正教会将天使世界分为九品或九级。该九级又分为三等，每等三级。第一等由最接近上帝的精灵所组成，包括有位天使、革鲁宾和塞拉芬。第二等，也就是中间等级，包括掌权天使、主治天使和有能天使。第三等的天使和我们更为接近，分别是天使、总领天使和执政天使。因此在圣经里关于天使和总领天使存在的证据随处可见。在先知书中提到赫儒文¹³和塞拉芬¹⁴。Cherubim 是靠近的意思，因此是指接近上主的天使，Seraphim 指热情如火，或火热充满。其他的天使等级之名在使徒帕弗罗（保罗，保禄）写给以弗所人的书信中提到说，基督在天上「远超过一切执政的、掌权的、有能的、主治的」。¹⁵

在上述天使等级之外，圣帕弗罗在致科罗西人书中传授道，我们看见和看不见的万事万物都为上帝之子所造，「有位，主治的，执政的，掌权的」都为其所造¹⁶。所以我们将有位天使加入其他四种使徒向以弗所人提到的天使，即执政天使、

¹¹ 致德撒洛尼基人书——帖前 /

得前，4:16；儒

达书信 / 犹 9

¹² 基路伯，革

鲁宾；希腊

语：Χερουβιμ；

英语：Cherubim

¹³ 撒拉弗，色

辣芬；希腊

语：Σεραφίμ；

英语：Seraphim

¹⁵ 致艾弗所人书

/ 弗 1:21

¹⁶ 致科罗西人书

/ 西 / 哥 1:16

的权威和管辖。⁵即便是如此尊贵的品质，亦有其限制。圣经指出，天使并不知晓我主上帝的实质之深奥，这是只有上帝的圣灵才知晓的秘密⁶。他们不知道未来，这也是只有上帝才知道的⁷。同样，他们并不完全清楚救赎的奥妙所在，尽管他们很愿意洞察个中真味⁸。他们甚至并不完全清楚人类的想法⁹。最后，如果未经上帝意志的许可，天使不能自行施行奇迹。

圣经中所描述的天使世界非常广大。当先知达尼伊尔（但以理，达尼尔）看见天父以「亘古常见者」的形象彰显，他注意到「事奉他的有千千，在他面前侍立的有万万」¹⁰。耶稣在伯利恒（白冷）诞生时，「一大队天兵」为他来到尘世而高唱赞歌。¹¹

耶路撒冷的圣基里尔如是说：「想想看罗马有多少人，想想看其他那些现存野蛮部族的人数之多，过去一百年他们中有多少人死去，想想一千年要有多少人入土为安，想想看，从阿达穆（亚当）开始时至今日所有众人，其人数可谓浩如烟海。但与天使的数量相比，这数量仍是微小的，天使比这要多得多。天使是寓言中的九十九只羊，而人类不过是一只。因我等须据宇宙空间之广推算其居民之数。我们所居之整个地球在诸天中不过如沧海一粟，却已容纳了如此众多；围绕地球的诸天使将容纳怎样的数量呢！天上的天安能不广纳超乎想象之数？若先知写『事奉他的有

⁵ 裴特若书信二／彼后／伯后 2:11

⁶ 致科林托人书

一／林前／格前

2:11

⁷ 玛尔克福音／

可／谷 13:32

⁸ 裴特若书信一／

彼前／伯前 1:12

⁹ 众王传三／列

上 8:39，注：斯

拉夫圣经之列王

纪三，也就是英

王钦定本的列王

纪一

¹⁰ 达尼伊尔书／

但／达 7:10

¹¹ 路喀福音／路

加 2:13

因为天使与人类迥异，要领会天使的生活以及他们所生活的那个世界于我等而言绝非易事。我们知道，天使事奉上帝，执行上帝的意愿，赞美上帝。他们属于灵界，非人所寻常能见。「若天使顺从上帝的旨意，出现在配得的人面前，他们并非按照本相显现，而是在一种变化了的、可见的状态中显现」——蒙福的约安（约翰，若翰）·达玛斯基诺如是解释。在著名的托维特传中（圣经旧约），陪伴托维特父子的天使自述道：「你们虽然天天见我吃喝，其实我并没有吃喝什么；你们看见的，只是个现象而已」。³「实际上，」据约安·达玛斯基诺所言，「天使之称为无形灵物仅乃较之于吾等而言。因为与上帝吾神相较，万物皆为尘世俗物，惟上帝吾神实为无形神灵。」

就诸精神力量而言，天使远胜人类。但天使亦为上帝所造，有其局限性。因为天使没有肉身，他们与人类相比，更能独立于空间和时间之外。然而，惟吾神上帝无所不知，无所不能。圣经描述天使，或是自天降地，或是升返天庭。天使受造即永生，正如圣经中见证道，天使不死⁴。然而天使的永生非天性使然，亦非属绝对，天使的不朽和我们灵魂的不朽一样，完全取决于上帝的意愿和仁慈。

天使是没有肉身的灵物，可以内在自身提高达至最高层次。他们拥有比人类更高的智慧。使徒裴特若（彼得，伯多禄）解释道，天使的力量权能超越一切的世间

³ 托维特传／多

12:19

⁴ 路喀福音／路

加 20:36

天使的天性——天使的级别和职务

据圣经所言「天使人类和万物皆为上帝所造。」「起初，上帝创造天地」¹从这句话，我们可初步领悟是上帝创造了属灵世界。与尘世这个实际的世界相对应，这个世界被称为天堂。在上帝造星空的时候，天使就已经存在了，这点我们从上帝对约弗（约伯）所说的话中可见一斑，「那时晨星一同歌唱，神的众子也都欢呼」²。

就上帝造天使，神学家格里高利表达观点如下：「上帝是有德之神，仅仅专注于默想自身是不够的，神需远播福祉，远而弥佳，好让得享恩典者之数多多益善（因这乃是最高的美德的特性）——因此，上帝首先构想了众天使天军，该想法落实为行动，是由圣言实行，由圣灵完善……正是由于最初的造物得上帝的欢喜，上帝设计了另一世界：这是一个物质的可见的世界，天与地及其间万事万物的有序组合。」³

希腊语中，天使是信差的意思。这主要表明了天使和人类的关系。天使，如同我们的兄长，向我们传达上帝的意愿，帮助我们得到神的救赎。自人类从伊甸园的时候起，便知道天使的存在。许多古老的宗教中这一点都有所反映。

¹ 起源之书 / 创

1:1

² 约弗传 / 伯 /

约 38:17

世界。正是由于这些发现，再加上人类的太空飞行，在当代文学界和影视界引发了一股全新的风潮，谈及与其它星系、其它世界生物的不期而遇。然而不幸的是，这种对于外星族类及异类的兴趣往往和病态的幻想交织纠缠，带有部分的魔性。然而，现代社会对世界的概念扩大化的趋势却是显而易见的。

这些不过是放纵之辞，见神论者和招魂术士的凭空想象。基督教的信仰却与之大相径庭，为当代人提供了有关属灵世界清晰而可靠的教导。基督教信仰教导，在我们存在的物质世界之外，还有一个庞大的天使国度。天使和人类一样，拥有与我们相似的智慧，自由的意志和感情，但他们是没有肉身的灵体。实际上，我们可见的这个世界上帝的造物中，不过是沧海一粟。

物质世界和精神世界

如果我们这个世界仅仅由人类可以触摸和感知的事物组成，那么这世界也未免实在内容贫乏，索然无味。在这样一个世界里，既没有有意义的历史，也没有高尚的目标，死亡可以粗暴地中断一切创造性事业、一切为善德美福做出的孜孜努力，生存本身都会变成一场悲剧性的矛盾。

然而，人类用理智和洞察力能够感知到，这个世界里有比只是依靠肉体的感觉可以感受到的多得多的深奥和神秘。人们会意识到，在实实在在的物质世界之外，他们还生活在一个巨大的属灵世界里。上世纪末本世纪初，出现了一股唯物主义的思潮，他们认为除了世上生活的人类之外，绝不可能还存在着其他形式的生命。还好，在最近五十年里，科学飞速发展，现代人所了解的范围得到了相当大的扩展。时至今日，大家都知道我们所居住的这个宇宙虽广阔却并非无边无际。对世界的描述已经大大属灵化了。科学家们也开始理解，物质并非坚硬、不可分割、永恒不变的实存，而是能量的一种表现形式。而能量也可能采取与我们熟悉的原子分子完全不同的其它存在形式。因此，在我们生活的这个可见的世界之外，可能还存在着截然不同的

天使

上帝蒙福的信使

主教 亚历山大（米兰特）著
龚蕾、季·米·罗曼诺夫 译

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