

THE SEAL OF THE ANTICHRIST

By Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

About ten years ago, during a trip to Greece, I was told a story in three slightly different versions, on three separate occasions, in different locations. As best as I can remember, it ran as follows:

A Greek man had travelled to Greece from America, and was visiting Docheiariou Monastery on the Holy Mountain, Athos. During his visit, he was about to enter the monastery's main church, the Catholicon, when he discovered, much to his consternation, that he could not make the sign of the Cross. No matter how much he tried, he could not do it. Finally, weeping with dismay and frustration, he collapsed at the entrance of the church. This matter was reported forthwith to the abbot, who rushed to the side of the stricken man, and asked him what was wrong. The ailing man explained to the abbot that, when about to enter the church, he found that he could not make the sign of the Precious Cross, no matter how hard he tried. Then the abbot solemnly asked him, "My son, where are you from?" "From America," answered the man. "Did you, by any chance, fly to Athens through Kennedy Airport?" asked the abbot. The man answered in the affirmative. "Then you should know, my son, that when you handed over your passport to be checked at Kennedy Airport, your right hand was secretly sealed with the seal of the Antichrist, and that is why you cannot make the sign of the Cross now."

When I first heard this story, several questions came to my mind right away. First of all, the abbot pointed out that the man was "secretly sealed" with the sign of the Antichrist when he handed over his passport. If he was sealed "secretly," then how did the abbot know about it? How did *anyone* know about it, if it was a secret?

Second, when I asked for the name of this Greek-American gentleman who had gone through Kennedy Airport, nobody could tell me what it was. Neither did anybody know where the man lived in America.

The second time I heard this story, all the details were essentially the same, except that instead of Docheiariou Monastery, it was Dionysiou Monastery on Mt. Athos. Thus, evidently, the abbot of Dionysiou also knew about this "secret" seal at Kennedy Airport's passport control.

The third time I heard the same story again, all the details were identical, but this time it was Gregoriou Monastery on Mt. Athos. So, the abbot of Gregoriou was also privy to what was going on at passport control at Kennedy.

And, of course, nobody knew the man's name or where he lived in America.

An unverifiable story — also known as an "urban legend."

In other variants heard later by others, the man had to have his hand severed in order to be able again to make the sign of the Cross and thus be saved.

Needless to say, neither I, nor any of my friends or colleagues, nor, to my knowledge, any of the thousands of Orthodox Christians who have gone through Kennedy Airport, have had any trouble making the sign of the Cross.

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Then, there was the time when His Eminence, Metropolitan Makarios of Toronto and I went shopping at a supermarket in the Halándri suburb of Athens. After we got the items we needed, we came to the check-out line to pay for the articles. The young woman at the cash-register saw us in our rassa (but she had also overheard us speaking to one another in English), so she asked us if we were Orthodox. When we said yes, she asked us, "What do you think about the bar-code they're putting on all the items now? Do you think we're renouncing Christ and worshipping the Antichrist, if we purchase these items? That's what everybody is saying nowadays."

Metropolitan Makarios gave her a very succinct answer. "Tell me," he said, "Who do you think is mightier, Christ or the Antichrist?"

"Well, Christ is mightier, of course," she responded.

"All right then, if you're an Orthodox Christian, then you are *already sealed by Christ*, in your Holy Baptism, your Holy Chrismation, and in Holy Communion, by the Body and Blood of Christ. Unless you voluntarily and consciously deny Christ and thereby receive the true seal of Antichrist (whatever that is), you have nothing to fear."

First of all, no one has proven to us in a convincing way that bar codes (or microchips, or any such devices) are the seal of the Antichrist. Even if the number 666 is included in these devices, that number, of itself, has not been copyrighted by the Antichrist; it can be found in countless numbers of books, and even on our license plates, and for years — nay, centuries — nobody ever avoided these numerals as if they were the long-expected "seal."

Secondly, even if one did mistakenly and involuntarily receive these automated "seals" (like our mythic Greek-American at Kennedy Airport), has he automatically lost his free will also? Is there no possibility for repentance? Cannot he correct his inadvertent mistake? Is this person "pre-destined" to eternal damnation, no matter how much he desires or strives to be saved?

What nonsense!

Where did these crypto-Augustinian, crypto-Calvinistic teachings come from?

One father from the Holy Mountain let the cat out of the bag. He said, "All the best books and tapes about the Antichrist come from America." That is to say, the best books and tapes about the Antichrist originate from *Fundamentalist Protestant* groups in America and are translated into the languages of our Orthodox people.

The real problem is that practically nobody reads the Lives of the Saints and the commentaries of the Holy Fathers on the Scriptures, and so, for the most part, both the clergy and the laity are uninstructed in matters of the Orthodox Catholic Faith. So, what happens? They wind up reading materials that are written by "modern" theologians, or even by non-Orthodox writers, and their brains get all jumbled up. They *think* they are Orthodox, but they have just learned material that has been either directly prepared by heretical writers, or heavily influenced by them. And just because it's in the language of

our Orthodox people (whether that language is Greek, Russian, Romanian, or whatever), they *think* it's Orthodox, but it is not.

So, to conclude: if you are an Orthodox Christian, you have *already been sealed by Christ* in your Baptism, your Chrismation, and every time you receive the precious Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion. Since you are *already* sealed by Christ, and since our Saviour, the Destroyer of death, is mightier than Antichrist, no bar code, no microchip, or any such other claptrap nonsense, can force you involuntarily to renounce Christ.

However, if you believe that the seal of the Antichrist is stronger than the seal of Christ, and that, even if you receive it involuntarily and unawares you are nonetheless damned, then, my friend, ***you have already renounced the Christian faith.***

In one generation, Protestants have become impotent as a moral force here in America, but, what is sad is that, through the translations of their Calvinistic books, they seem to be picking up disciples in "Orthodox" countries, where people who have not learned their own faith are becoming obsessed with mythologies about the Antichrist.

Truly [in a bad sense], as the Prophet Esaias says, "Zeal shall lay hold of an untaught people" [Es. 26:11].