Radical Orthodox Anti-Globalism
1999–2002
Electronic Tax Codes – a Topical Theme for Fundamentalists

Russian Orthodox fundamentalism (hereafter simply ‘fundamentalism’) – a perception of the world based on extremely mythologized notions about the pre-revolutionary Orthodox monarchy – is very widespread in the Church. Moreover, fundamentalism in the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has been on the rise since the early 1990s, and there are no grounds for believing that this rise will stop in the near future.

Orthodox fundamentalists are basically opposed to liberals and Westerners, perceived by them as almost the same. The concept of ‘the worldwide Kike-Masonic conspiracy’ with its spear-point aimed precisely against Russia is to some extent characteristic of practically all Russian Orthodox fundamentalists. And when the theme of ‘globalization’ became popular in the West and then in Russia too, these assumptions naturally gave birth to a specific Orthodox anti-globalism.

This anti-globalism was first evidenced by statements against the commodity bar code, in which our fundamentalists – prompted by like-minded Greek ones – discovered the number 666.\(^1\) Hegumen (presently Achimandrite) Tikhon (Shevkunov), father superior of the Sretensky Monastery in Moscow, became the main herald of this new trouble from the West, which is regarded as nothing less than the advance of the Antichrist,\(^2\) as early as 1998. Given that Sretensky Monastery is one of the Church’s largest publishing houses,

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\(^1\) It is not appropriate to go into details of the bar code here. Suffice it to say that the presence of three sixes in it is a kind of optical illusion.

\(^2\) See, for example, Hegumen Tikhon (Shevkunov), Amerikantsy ob Antikhriste: s nim
the propaganda has proved to be rather successful. In the Church’s press and parishes believers began to passionately discuss whether it was admissible for the Orthodox believers to buy bar-coded goods.

Then they began to discover ‘the Seal of the Antichrist’ in all kinds of codes, first of all on all kinds of magnetic cards (credit cards and so on). And the taxpayer’s individual number (individualniy nomer nalogoplatelshchika – INN), which according to the Ministry of Taxes’ plans should be given to each resident of the country, was considered the most obvious case. Besides, in the consciousness of the majority of fundamentalists, INN for some reason merged with the bar code and the belief spread that ‘the Number of the Beast’ was somewhere inside INN as well.

A powerful campaign was unleashed against INN in the autumn of 1999. Hundreds of parishioners, monks and even fathers superior of monasteries were signing petitions with the demand not to introduce INN. The motivation in all cases was apocalyptic, so the heat of passions at once became very high. Certainly, the actions in favor of the canonization of the last emperor Nicholas II and family, and against ‘the heresy of ecumenism’ continued too. But the anti-INN campaign was aimed directly against the policy of the state authorities, that fact giving it an additional impetus in the radical environment and creating an additional problem for the leaders of the Church.

The Synod tried to stop the new campaign by making a compromise proposal. The Synod’s decision of 7 March 2000 ruled3 that INN was not ‘the Seal of the Antichrist’, but repeated the assertion that the bar code contained the number 666. Without arguing against the introduction of INN in essence, the Synod actually asked the authorities to condescend to the most superstitious believers and introduce – no less! – a system of bar codes different from the rest of the world.

‘I.N.N. JIHAD’

It was no surprise that the Synod’s decision did not stop the campaign, but it was surprising that the campaign was actually suspended for a few months.

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3 _Uvazhat chuvstva veruyushchikh. Khranit khristianskoye trezvomysliye_ (To respect the believers’ feelings. To preserve sober Christian thinking), statement of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, 7 March 2000. Accessible at: http://www.russian-orthodox-church.org.ru/nr00/3083.htm