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THE FLAVOUR OF ORTHODOXY¹
OR
THE ROYAL PATH

THE ECCLESIOLOGICAL VIEWS OF HIEROMONK SERAPHIM (ROSE)

**„Не човецы спасают Церковь, / и ничтоже пользует согласие со враги Ея, /
но Церковь спасает человеки силою Христовою, / якоже подвиг ваш показа.**

**It is not man who saves the Church, and agreement with Her enemies brings no good, but it
is the Church that saves man with Christ's power, as your feat has proven.**

(From the last stichira of *O Lord I called Thee* at the Small compline
from the service of the Russian new-martyrs and confessors)

It is later than we think

Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose)

Part 1

THE ZEITGEIST IN WHICH FR. SERAPHIM LIVED AND WORKED

The 20th century caused a massive disruption to the Orthodox Church. The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and the establishment of communist regimes in Eastern Europe after World War II put the Orthodox Churches in those countries in an extremely difficult situation, under the

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oppression of the militant atheist authorities. With the establishment of this ideology, the communist regime aimed to destroy any faith in God. The authorities' policy towards the Church varied in its different periods from systematic measures for the Church's physical destruction to the more perfidious approach to transforming the Church mostly into a tool for its communist foreign policy.

At the same time, the ecumenical movement, which originated in the West, was steadily gaining traction. It gradually embraced the local autocephalous churches, badly eroding their ecclesiastical consciousness. Modernism, liberal views and innovations were pushed through and deployed by the senior hierarchs of the Church themselves, in an alliance with forces foreign to the Church. For a start, in the 1920s, the liturgical unity of the Orthodox was disrupted by the introduction of the liturgical use of the so-called revised Julian calendar in several of the local Orthodox churches. This happened as a result of the initiative of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which was motivated in doing so exclusively by selfish ecclesiastical and political considerations. Because of such considerations, the hierarchy of the Greek Archdiocese and the Romanian Orthodox Church supported Constantinople. This ecclesiastical and calendar reform caused divisions within the local Churches themselves. The emergent movement of Orthodox traditionalists in Greece and Romania ceased their Church communion with the bishops of these two local Churches. The secular and ecclesiastical authorities in both countries then subjected those who did not adopt the new liturgical calendar to repressions and persecution.

In the fifties of the 20th century, the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which all too often had notorious primacy in the apostasy among the official churches, went as far as announcing the mutual lifting of anathema with the Pope² without the agreement of the other autocephalous Orthodox Churches and, shortly after that, the name of the Roman Pope was entered for commemoration in the diptychs of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.³ In the late 60ies and early 70ies, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, Metropolitan Filaret (Voznesensky) addressed three consecutive Mournful Epistles to all Orthodox bishops in the world, calling on them to turn away from the path of apostasy and restore church life in their jurisdictions in the spirit of patristic tradition. These appeals to the episcopate of the official Orthodoxy remained without

²On December 7, 1965

³In 1968

response. The Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, though still not having formally ceased ecclesiastical communion with the official local Churches, remained isolated in its efforts to preserve the Orthodox faith in its fullness and purity. Positions similar to those of ROCA were only held by Orthodox traditionalists in different countries that had stopped communion with hierarchs of their relevant official local Churches.

In this troubling spiritual milieu, the ever-memorable hieromonk Seraphim (Rose) (1934 – 1982) adopted the Orthodox faith, lived and worked as a member of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. Today his books are well-known throughout the Orthodox world - both in the West and the East. It would not be an overstatement to say that he is one of the most loved and read Orthodox writers from the end of the previous and the beginning of this century. What accounts for his popularity among Orthodox Christians? In the first place, this is the fact that Fr. Seraphim lived with the spiritual pulse of his time. He responded promptly to all topical issues occurring in the spiritual life during the sixties and seventies of the 20th century. He wrote about problems which posed existential questions to the Christians of his time. Many of these issues were new; they were raised for the first time and were the result of the clash of the Orthodox worldview with the destructive spiritual and intellectual trends prevailing in the second half of the 20th century. The Christian mindset and value system were in a defensive position, pushed to the periphery of the ideas and values attracting modern humanity. They were branded by the zeitgeist irrevocably obsolete, conceptual anachronisms, which were helpless before the challenges of modern times. Scientific knowledge, the consumerism of the larger part of society, the collapse of traditional values - all of them created an intellectual atmosphere in which the Christian consciousness was declared backward and inadequate to modern progress. On the other hand, in the 20th century, internally Orthodoxy had already eroded enough to be able to withhold these vigorous attacks. The official local Churches lacked the spiritual resources and turned out to be unprepared to take a firm stand against them. The majority of modern theologians and hierarchs sought the solution in a compromising adjustment to the zeitgeist. All their courage usually amounted to feeble attempts at proving that the teachings of the Church did not contradict modern scientific theories and that the religious way of thinking and living could be integrated into their contemporary society. This was a defeatist position, which was trying to reconcile the Christian faith with the dominant scientific paradigms and the corrupt spirit of modern moral liberalism. Of course, attempts to adapt the Christian faith and way of life to their mere negation

could not lead to any result other than a further deepening of the crisis in the Orthodox consciousness. The theological thinking found theories like «Christian evolutionism» quite acceptable, which shows how much the faith of many was undermined by the «scientific» evidence of the modern and essentially anti-Christian doctrines. The life of Orthodox Christians was more deeply penetrated by the spirit of liberalism and the pursuit of material and spiritual comfort, while the attitude toward Christian asceticism as the basis and measure of spiritual life became more and more negative, and even hostile.

In these conditions Fr. Seraphim (Rose) did not hesitate to express his views in defense of the Faith and against the spirit of the times - a position which could no longer rely on the understanding and support of many who called themselves Orthodox. He gave *Orthodox* answers to the intellectual and moral challenges of our times. This is the second main reason for the popularity his works enjoy among Orthodox Christians today. Fr. Seraphim did not simply write about the concerns of believers living in the modern world; he was not simply “topical“. He voiced his opinions on current issues succeeding in making sense of them in the light of patristic theology, in presenting them to the reader with a rare intellectual and spiritual discernment revealing his unconditional acceptance of the truths of Orthodox faith. And he accomplished this with spiritual courage, which can only be demonstrated by someone inspired by true love for the Church Tradition, patristic teaching and spiritual practice. Without fearing that he could be declared marginal, Fr. Seraphim boldly announced that the Church Fathers are not “outdated“, that the Christian faith contains within itself the truths that are generally unattainable for scientific knowledge, and that science cannot claim to be able to prove or disprove the truth of Christian theology since thus it goes beyond its boundaries and enters an unfamiliar field in which its methods of enquiry are not applicable and can only lead to errors and delusions. Fr. Seraphim clearly shows that when «Science» seeks to displace and replace theology, under its mask actually lie the premises of anti-Christian ideology and philosophy, whose true and ultimate inspiration is the father of all lies. **True science and true theology cannot exist in contradiction with each other because all truth is from God.**

These ideas proved widely unpopular not only in communist countries, with their dominant atheistic ideology, but also in Western societies, in which religion was not openly subjected to persecution. At that time, the Soviet leaders announced that Gagarin went into space and found

no god, while in the west, evolutionism, whose main objective is to explain life and the world without God, was a measure of scholarly character.

Indeed, great intellectual courage is required in such an ideological atmosphere in order to defend the position that we can find the answers to all contemporary questions in the truths of Faith and the Church Tradition. Fr. Seraphim firmly believed in this and with the answers he found in his arduous spiritual and intellectual feat, he soothed the souls of many who yearned for the Truth in this modern spiritual desert. By climbing the steep road to his personal Orthodox Christian monastic feat and by deeply absorbing the spiritual and intellectual ethos of the Holy Fathers, he constructed his impeccable Orthodox mindset. His words are simple and genuine. They earned and still earn the trust of readers from different countries and nationalities not only with his sincerity and persuasiveness, but also with the deep spiritual and intellectual allegiance of their author to the Church tradition and patristic theology. Fr. Seraphim accepted this spiritual treasure directly from the living example of his mentors and teachers, who are some of the most ardent Orthodox holy men of the 20th century - Saint John of Shanghai, Archbishop Averky (Taushev), and Saint Filaret of New York.

Yet, Fr. Seraphim's alert Orthodox conscience did not remain indifferent to the controversial topics of contemporary church life. And this is quite natural - every true warrior for the Faith is concerned primarily about what is happening in the Church, and so imperceptibly even for themselves, they partake in the fight for Her protection. The center of this struggle has always been the effort to repel the heresies that bore down on the Church in Her two-thousand-year history. The heresies of our time are primarily ecclesiological. While in the past heresies distorted some truth of the Orthodox faith or other, today they erode the very concept of the Church. In the 20th century, the attack on the patristic teaching of the Church was twofold – from the inside and from the outside. The former is ecumenism. In its origin, it is a phenomenon external to Orthodoxy. Ecumenism appeared in the late 19th and early 20th century in Protestant circles as a movement towards the unification of all Christian churches. It perceives the doctrinal differences between Protestants, Catholics and the Orthodox as historically conditioned and surmountable with the help of mutual compromises. This is the ideology that inherently and by its very nature contradicts the Christian teaching of the Church as the one, indivisible and

preserving in their entirety the revelatory truths of the Faith leading humanity to salvation. Despite its incompatibility with Orthodox Patristic ecclesiology, at the beginning of the last century ecumenism began to win supporters among Orthodox hierarchs, clergy and theologians, and from the 20ies onwards it began to exert a real impact on the lives of local Orthodox Churches. For one reason or another, in the following decades, ecumenism penetrated deeply in them as outlook and practice, and today it is a benchmark of reputable modern theological thought and a determining factor in the church policy of almost all jurisdictions of the so called “official Orthodoxy”.

The main damage which ecumenism inflicts on the Church consciousness consists in obscuring Orthodox understanding of the boundaries of Christ's Church, its unity and spiritual identity. Together with this muddled thinking among the Orthodox appeared certain theological concepts which are foreign to the patristic teaching and nurture strong relativisation of the Church consciousness, leading to a distortion of the concept of the Church, to the impairment of the capability of authentic, spiritual and intellectual integration into the core of the Church Tradition. Through the ecumenical ideology of “love” and “Christian unity” the liberal theology, the intellectual and practical religious modernism and its various related innovations invaded the official local Churches. Even to this day the active supporters of ecumenism in the official churches come primarily from the circles of the modernists.

The second aspect of the Orthodox Church consciousness which was vigorously attacked in the 20th century arose among the Orthodox themselves. The origin and the peculiarities of this process can be most clearly traced within the Russian Orthodox Church, as Russia is the country where despite the relentless oppression of the totalitarian State, the firmest stand against this anti-Church trend was made. There it was known as “Sergianism“, named after the notorious Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodski), who was to become the first head of the Moscow Patriarchate during the Communist era. In Soviet Russia, in the 20ies and 30ies of the twentieth century, as well as in other Orthodox countries of the former Communist camp after World War II, the main factor for the development of Sergianism were the persecutions against the Church and the dedicated work of secret services for its unconditional subordination to the atheist regime. A distinctive feature of Sergianism is that the main tool in the hands of the atheistic authorities for the total subjugation and destruction of the Church is the very church hierarchy.

Sergianism reduces the theandric body of the Church to its visible part as an earthly organization, or at the very least, gives central importance to its preservation at all costs, to the safeguarding of church structures and, above all, of church management. This is a conformist ideology of survival, regardless of the price paid for any compromises, even for the unconditional assistance of the atheist government in its struggle against the Church.

However, seen from this perspective, Sergianism is not something typical only of churches under the oppression of the communist regimes. As an ideology and church practice, it is also accepted by the majority of hierarchs of the other local churches. In the past, this mostly happened in the face of adversity. Today Sergianism occurs as a result of the ever more widespread attitudes and value judgements that set material and moral earthly benefits as its true goal disguised behind Orthodox Church phraseology. Today the official Orthodoxy is almost completely dominated by the Sergianist mentality, which destroys the criterion of what is the acceptable limit of compromise with the powers that be, and thus severs the link between canonicity and truth in the Church. The theandric body of the Church is identified with its administrative structure; the body of Christ is replaced with church organization.

However, if the apologists of ecumenism in official Orthodoxy are primarily hierarchs and theologians with liberal and modernist views, then many believers, even those who consider themselves traditionalists and staunch “advocates” of the fight for the purity of Orthodoxy, but one that takes place from the “inside” and within the “canonical” churches, are subjected to the Sergianist understanding of survival and of the functioning of the Church. Among the latter there are both complacent “zealots” (in the negative sense of the word), who without hesitation condemn as “schismatic” any Orthodox Christians that have ceased their church communion with the hierarchy of official local Churches, as well as Orthodox Christians who view any manifestation of apostasy in their ecclesiastical jurisdictions with sincere disapproval, but are in the grip of fear that if one is not in communion with the official church hierarchy, they are inevitably “excommunicated” from the Church. From this perspective, Sergianism is an even more insidious and more dangerous enemy of the Orthodox consciousness than ecumenism. It extends the power of the apostate hierarchy upon the souls of sincere but insufficiently thoughtful Christians who do not sympathize with apostasy, but are caught in the nets of Sergianist concepts of “obedience” and “canonicity”.

These issues were crucial to Fr. Seraphim (Rose) and he did not ignore them. Moreover - he considered them matters of utmost importance for the salvation of every Christian in the modern world. Throughout his life as an Orthodox Christian, Fr. Seraphim continuously reflected on the question of the proper ecclesiastical position, of the true Orthodox ecclesiological orientation among the ever-increasing complexity of the problems of church life in the 20th century. He unceasingly sought the true road of the Holy Fathers or “the royal path” as he called it, and with his accurate spiritual sense outlined the ever more subtle detours to the left and right of this road. For Fr. Seraphim, the road taken by the official Orthodox churches in our time, is, beyond a shadow of a doubt, not the “royal path” of the Orthodox Church of Christ, but is a diversion to the «left» of it, which ultimately leads to dropping out of the Church. Fr. Seraphim devoted much energy and work to analyzing the spiritual nature of this deviation to the «left». He wrote a number of articles clarifying various aspects of apostasy among the official Orthodoxy. They were released by the English language magazine *Orthodox Word*, to whose editorial board belonged Fr. Seraphim himself. His ecclesiological views are presented in a voluminous work entitled *Russia's Catacomb Saints: Lives of the New Martyrs*’, St. Herman of Alaska Press, Platina, CA 1982. Fr. Seraphim published this book in the last year of his life. It is dedicated to the heroism of the Russian martyrs and confessors, who ceased their communion with the Moscow church authorities because of their cooperation with the persecutors of the Russian Orthodox Church. Unfortunately, the book has not been translated and published in Russian, and we do not know of any translations in other languages. Moreover, the same applies to the already mentioned articles of Fr. Seraphim dedicated to the ecclesiological issues raised by apostate processes among the Orthodox today. The lack of translations of these works of Fr. Seraphim (Rose) enunciating his views on such important issues of church life seems rather strange. It is hardly necessary to remind the Orthodox Christians today of the great interest in his life and work. Suffice it to say, there are numerous translations of his works, including his lectures, which are recorded on tape. Yet, Fr. Seraphim’s ecclesiological works remain in the shadow and, accordingly, his ecclesiological views are almost completely unknown to the many Orthodox readers who cherish the sacred memory of the humble priest from Platina. The simple explanation of this seemingly strange fact is that Fr. Seraphim’s ecclesiological views are extremely uncomfortable for the hierarchs and apologists of the official Orthodoxy, not only

because they expose their apostasy from the Orthodox Tradition, but also because they show Orthodox Christians the only way in which they can actually fight for the preservation of their Orthodox faith and spirituality in today's environment – by ceasing communion with the Church hierarchs of the official Orthodoxy. That is the reason why the official local Churches keep quiet about Fr. Seraphim's ecclesiology and do not tolerate any translation or publication of his works.

The efforts of Fr. Seraphim to protect modern Orthodox Christians from the roads leading to the betrayal of Christ and His Church are aimed primarily at exposing these detours to the “left”, that is, the apostasy, the apostate process sucking the official local Churches deeper and deeper in its maelstrom, in the waters of concealed disbelief, of the masked decay of the Orthodox consciousness, of liberalism, of the religious and political ecumenism, of Sergianist servitude to the powerful in this world. This is natural because the main spiritual dangers for Orthodoxy today come from this direction. In his articles, Fr. Seraphim gives clear warnings primarily to those Orthodox Christians who, due to their insufficient meticulousness and interest in their faith or because of misplaced “obedience” to their hierarchs, continue to follow them blindly along the path of apostasy. He warned them that this road ultimately leads outside the Church of Christ and they run the risk of finding themselves there.

At the same time, Fr. Seraphim also confronted other dangers threatening the Orthodox consciousness and the true spirit of Orthodoxy from a seemingly quite unexpected direction – the “right.” These were the detours from the “royal path” taken by many opponents of liberal views who are fervent champions for the purity of Faith, but their zeal is “not according to reason”.

Fr. Seraphim encountered this type of thinking and its corresponding spiritual attitudes when the so-called “Boston schism” was brewing in the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. In the light of this turbulence, he contemplated the spiritual meaning of the diversions to the “right” of the true path of Orthodox moderation in our deceitful times.

So, by examining in depth the dangers of slippery deviations to the “left” and “right” of the “royal path”, and by warning Orthodox Christians about them, Fr. Seraphim concluded that the true reliable benchmark for us may consist of developing a “sense” or a “taste” of what he called the “flavor of Orthodoxy”- the authentic Orthodox spirituality.

But in order to reach an adequate understanding of the importance that Fr. Seraphim invested in these expressions, we should methodically study the warnings he left us about the dangers stalking Orthodox Christians from the left and from the right of this “royal path“.