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**THE FLAVOUR OF ORTHODOXY¹ OR
THE ROYAL PATH
THE ECCLESIOLOGICAL VIEWS OF HIEROMONK
SERAPHIM (ROSE)**

Part 3

The Dangers from the Right

1. The genuine zeal for the Faith and the zeal 'not according to reason'

Very often the deviations to the right of the royal path are defined as acts of zeal "not according to reason". This zeal is quite different from the zeal of Faith, about which Fr. Seraphim wrote in his article *The Zealots (the Devotees) of Mount Athos - the Leaven of True Orthodoxy Today*. This is how Fr. Seraphim distinguishes the true Orthodox zeal from the zeal "not according to reason":

"Orthodox zeal, needless to say, has nothing to do with soulless phariseeism or the attachment to the letter of the Church's law at the expense of its spirit; nor with the emotional revivalism which some substitute for zeal; nor, certainly, with the combination of phariseeism and emotionalism which prompts some misled converts to think they 'know better' than the Holy Fathers and ascetics themselves what Orthodoxy is. Such kinds of 'zeal', being only human, fade away, and only the true zeal inspired by the Holy Spirit remains ever fresh and burning. Bishop Theophanous writes: 'Do not confuse one zeal with another. Spiritual zeal entirely expends itself in pleasing God and saving the soul; it is full to overflowing with the fear of God and it preserves unceasing heedfulness toward God, in every way being concerned to allow nothing either in thoughts or in feelings or in words or in deeds that is not pleasing to God, as indicated by one's conscience, which it preserves as clean a mirror; it preserves the heart from any kind of attachments to anything save to God and Divine things, and in hope it is translated to another world, having cut off all earthly hopes'. "¹

It should be noted that when writing about the true zealots, the vehicles of the zeal inspired by the Holy Spirit, and calling them "zealots" (devotees), Fr. Seraphim uses this term in a positive sense. This is the case, for example, in the said article *The Zealots (the Devotees) of Mount Athos*. In other cases, when describing deviations to the right of the royal path, Fr. Seraphim employs the term "zealots" in the negative sense, in which, unfortunately, it is used almost exclusively in our time - as designating people who are fixated on the "betrayals" and "deviations" of others, and who live their Christianity by continually discovering and fighting "heretics" and the "enemies" of Orthodoxy. Examples of such use of the term can be found in Fr. Seraphim's letters to Fr. Alexey Young. These two meanings are complete

¹*The Zealots of Mount Athos*. The Orthodox Word, Nr. 46 (1972), pp. 219-228.

opposites and in order to avoid possible misunderstanding and confusion, we should always have in mind the context in which Fr. Seraphim used the term "zealots."

2. The neophytes (newly converted) in the Faith

Many of the newly converted to Orthodoxy young people in the West succumbed precisely to the zeal "not according to reason", which they first encountered in the bosom of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. With the intensity typical of neophytes, they immediately became opponents of liberalism and of the departure from the purity of Faith. At the same time, they had not yet sufficiently mastered the authentic Orthodox spirituality as a basis and substance of their inner spiritual life. In the absence of personally acquired spiritual pointers (the most important of which during ecclesiological discussions are humility and modesty as intellectual and spiritual qualities), they inevitably only scraped the surface and supported their reflections with formal reasons, which they "discovered" in the church canons.

In his letters to his spiritual son, priest Alexey Young (now Archimandrite Ambrose), Fr. Seraphim described briefly but very accurately the mentality and spiritual attitudes of people who yielded to such temptations. Above all, they suffer from a "canonical literalism." They continually cite the canons, without interpreting them in the light of the healthy Orthodox spirituality but detaching them from the context of true Christian life. Back in 1972 (in a letter dated 31st/18th o.s./ October), Fr. Seraphim wrote:

"Concerning canons: This is a great stumbling block specifically for converts, for one thing because of the temptation to Phariseism which we all have, and for another because the canons, representing the 'law' of the Church, **can only be understood and applied within the tradition of the Church and in the Spirit Who guides the Church** (bold typeface mine, KT). A large part of the Church's tradition is 'uncodified', being contained in Lives of Saints and patristic writings (to which there is no general index, thanks be to God - or else no convert would survive!), and part of the Church's tradition is still unwritten. The canons are the most obvious part of the Church's tradition, and therefore some converts experience shipwreck by jumping on them and trying to apply them without even being aware of the whole tradition of which they are but one part."²

As can be seen, at that time Fr. Seraphim was willing to explain the legalistic separation of church canons from true Orthodox spirituality and their turning into an autonomous and intrinsically ultra-authoritative system of literally understood rules primarily due to the inexperience of the neophytes and their ignorance of the Church Tradition in its entirety or in other words, due to their lack of spiritual experience and theological enlightenment. Later, he would establish that in the deviations to the 'right', the narrow-minded literal attitude to church canons and their use for church and political causes was also common among people who had lived for most of their adult life in an ecclesiastical and even in a monastic environment. As to the "neophytes", Fr. Seraphim meant primarily the English-speaking believers who joined ROCOR in America. These people were all too often young and intelligent, but coming from a different tradition or from a non- ecclesiastical environment, who until then had not had

² *Letters from Father Seraphim. The 12-year correspondence between Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose) and Father Alexey Young.* Nikodemos Orthodox Publication Society, Richfield Springs, NY, 2001, p. 61.

the possibility to communicate with Orthodox Christians and to experience the true Orthodox spirituality personally. They lacked this opportunity in the families in which they grew up or in their circle of friends and relatives. They were not given the chance to communicate in person with people carrying the true Christian spirit so that they could directly or even unconsciously develop the "feel" of what Orthodoxy is³. Like all novices, starting their way in the Faith with zeal but without any preparation, they inevitably pass through a stage of more or less clearly pronounced doctrinaire attitudes and extremist views, and this is exactly when they are in the greatest danger of deviating to the "right" from the road of salvation. Especially if they find an "authority" who gives them an example of a kind of "Orthodoxy" which has bogged down in the swamp of collective vanity and conceit, complacency, ecclesiastical politicking and self-perception as the only "true Church."

3. In the Russian catacombs

It turns out, however, that not only the neophytes in the non-Orthodox countries are in danger of acquiring distorted models of "true Orthodoxy." Incorrect views and unhealthy spirituality also developed in a number of Russian catacomb communities abiding in compulsive self-isolation in the face of the communist persecution. Amongst them appeared the so-called "samosvyatski" communes and groups with obviously sectarian teachings and mentality. But we are not concerned with them here. We actually refer to the deviations among some members of the catacomb church, whose affiliation to Orthodoxy is beyond any doubt.

In the letter of an unknown catacomb shepherd from 1962, cited by Fr. Seraphim in his article *What does the Catacomb Church think?* we read, "the sharpness of the church battle led many among *the simple church people* to declarations that Grace had been taken away from the followers of Metropolitan Sergius, that their sacraments were not sacraments, and that attending their churches defiled a Christian and made him an apostate. These views became especially widespread when, **soon after the publication of the Declaration, the flock began quickly to be deprived of its shepherds and archpastors,** (bold font mine KT) who went into exile, prisons, and concentration camps."⁴

It is clear from the quoted text that it refers to the period immediately after the publication of the famous Epistle of loyalty to the Soviet authorities from 1927 (known as the 'Declaration') of Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodski) and his Synod, with which the Church was placed in total obedience to the ruling Bolshevik clique. The clergy's attitude toward the Declaration became a litmus test for their attitude to the Soviet policy with regard to the Church. Opposing the new church or more precisely the anti-church policy of Metropolitan Sergius "sanctified" the most principled and tough fighters, and the State Political Department (GPU) started arresting them as "counter-revolutionaries." Following speedy trials, they soon filled the concentration camps and prisons. The most distinguished bishops and

³ In fact, young people turning to the Faith in the traditionally Orthodox countries today are in almost the same situation, since in these countries the bearers of the Tradition are an ever-decreasing minority.

⁴This message is cited according to the publication *Russia's Catacomb Saints. Lives of the New Martyrs*, St. Herman of Alaska Press, Platina, CA 1982, pp. 516-517.

theologians of the Russian Church were torn away from the people. Only occasionally could they illegally sneak the faithful some epistles and letters.

Meanwhile the church struggle continuously exacerbated. The Sergianist hierarchs were at liberty and captivated the more superficial in the faith, for whom the ecclesiological issues seemed abstract, and their interests were restricted only to the presence of open temples and priests that could serve in them. The believers who sensed the lies and betrayal of Sergianism were in a very difficult situation. They were deprived of their leaders. Sometimes people travelled hundreds of miles upon hearing that somewhere in catacomb conditions served a priest who had not surrendered and had remained faithful to the Truth of Christ and to the bishops confessors. There was nobody to set the right spiritual tone, no one could give proper guidance. There was no one to arm the church people with the accurate theological answer, to outline and justify the correct Church position in order to counteract the apostates. People also needed support and encouragement. In the absence of shepherds, they began to preach to themselves. The preachers were secret nuns or monks, often even ordinary laymen - all without any theological training. They went around villages and carried simple messages, such as "Patriarch Tikhon proclaimed an anathema on the Bolsheviks, and we cannot have anything to do with them. The kolkhoz is a satanic institution and joining it leads to perdition. Serving in the army is unacceptable for a Christian - it belongs to the antichrist power. Accepting Soviet documents is a sin, it means accepting the military atheists." This sermon was simple and understandable, but too limited. Meanwhile, the Bolsheviks eradicated the church communities rejecting the Sergianist hierarchy with exceptional cruelty. The church life of those renouncing Sergianism went underground. People gathered in catacomb conditions to read the church services, most often without a clergyman - the "unclerical rite" - due to the lack of priests. The catacomb life often led to prolonged isolation of the community of believers, as a result of which there was usually no reliable source providing a corrective for the inevitable deviations from the healthy spiritual life, there was nobody who could offer a deeper understanding, or clarify the appropriate attitude to what was happening in the Church, to the Sergianist hierarchy and its religious status. In these harsh conditions and especially due to the lack of the necessary theological resource, simple and unambiguous assessments and explanations in which the Truth was mixed with narrow-mindedness were easily adopted - "Sergianism is treason and apostasy. The Sergianists' sacraments are not real and in their temples there is no God's Grace, they have already turned into shrines, in a "congregation of evil doers" (Ps. 26 5). True Orthodox Christians should not visit them, so as not to be deprived of Grace. "

So, as a result of persecutions and desperate circumstances, of people's deprivation of theologically educated shepherds, in a complicated religious and political situation, and due to the isolated underground church life, in a number of parishes of the True Orthodox Christians a form of extremely intransigent and even sometimes fanatical Church consciousness developed. It originated as a reaction to the Sergianist collaborationism and often manifested itself as its "reciprocal" theological response. Metropolitan Sergius declared the clerics and believers who had broken communion with him fallen away from the Church, while in their turn, the most right-wing in their ecclesiological stand true Orthodox announced that the Sergianist Synod, including its subordinates, had placed themselves outside the Church on their own through their treachery and collaboration with the militant atheists.

Metropolitan Sergius "banished" those bishops and priests who had separated from him, and declared them "schismatics devoid of Grace" because they did not recognize his church authority. In turn, his most extreme opponents announced that, on the contrary, Metropolitan Sergius himself and his subordinate hierarchy were devoid of Grace due to their unquestionable apostasy, and that the mysteries they performed were not only invalid, but they also defiled Christians, who had to stay away from them in order not to become deprived of Grace on their own accord and so as not to fall away from the true Church. In summary, we can say that if those Christians who held extreme "right wing" views lacked the necessary spiritual and intellectual resources, then the Sergianist hierarchs and their head Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodski), who had a reputation for being one of the most erudite Russian hierarchs of his time, apparently lacked the necessary spiritual and moral resources, as well as resilience.

4. The Josephites

At the same time, it should be noted that many of the highly knowledgeable bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church found that Metropolitan Sergius and his followers had placed themselves outside the Church of Christ and deprived themselves of the salvatory Grace on their own accord. In the turmoil of the bitter struggle to protect the freedom of the Church from the atheists and their collaborators in the church circles, this position seems understandable. The behavior of Metropolitan Sergius and the Synod appointed by him was extremely aggressive towards the confessors who protested against this new church policy pursued under the dictation of the GPU and refused to obey his orders, which continually dealt heavy blows to the Church. The vigorous opponents of Metropolitan Sergius and his new church policy became known by the name "Josephites" - after the name of their leader, Bishop Joseph (Petrovich) of St Petersburg. Metropolitan Sergius banished and took away from the rebellious bishops their episcopacy, brought them to trial before the Ecclesiastical Court, and excommunicated all those who had ceased their ecclesiastical communion with him. Then the GPU arrested them. Metropolitan Sergius declared the sacraments performed by the clergy who were "followers of Joseph" invalid and even prohibited funeral services for the laity who had died in communion with them. Many bishops and priests were intimidated by the threats that they would be banned from officiating and even defrocked. The Josephite leaders announced that the penalties imposed by the Sergianist Synod on the confessors were invalid because the Synod's own actions represented a betrayal to the Church. Moreover, as has been pointed out, many believers thought that by means of their actions Metropolitan Sergius and his Synod removed themselves from the Church. Bishop Joseph wrote:

"The defenders of Sergius say that the canons allow one to separate oneself from a bishop only for heresy which has been condemned by a council. Against this one may reply that the deeds of Metropolitan Sergius may be sufficiently placed in this category as well, if one has in view such an open violation by him of the freedom and dignity of the Church, One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic.

But beyond this, the canons themselves could not foresee many things. And can one dispute that it is even worse and more harmful than any heresy when one plunges a knife into the Church's very heart - Her freedom and dignity?

Which is more harmful - a heretic or a murderer (of the Church)?"⁵

In order to understand the position of the "Josephites" properly, the backdrop against which Sergianism developed should also be considered. Several years before Metropolitan Sergius' unfortunate Epistle in 1927, the Bolsheviks tried to take control of the governance of the Russian Church through inducing the renovationist schism. It was overcome as a result of a fierce struggle involving the extreme effort of all parties. On April 15th (April 2, o.s.) 1924, Patriarch Tikhon prohibited prayerful communion with renovationists. Following the ban, nobody in the Russian Orthodox Church regarded them otherwise than as schismatics who were outside the Church, beyond the salvatory fence and beyond Grace. This view was reinforced not only because of their uncanonical stance, but also because of their treacherous cooperation with the militant atheists against the Church.

Many of the fighters against Sergianism considered it neo-renovationist schism, which echoed the renovationist one. Therefore, it was natural for them to give the same evaluation of the belonging of the Sergians to the Church - they were outside Her. Of course, Sergianism is not such an open anti-church phenomenon as renovationism, and this is where the complexity of this second fight of the Russian confessors, which began after 1927, lies. The views and assessments of the church opposition regarding Sergianism vary widely. But by no means can it be claimed that those denying the possession of Grace by the Sergianist hierarchy held this belief because of bigotry, fanatical narrow-mindedness, Grace conceit, leadership ambitions, lack of theological knowledge or other similar weaknesses. On the contrary, at the height of the struggle, the understanding that Sergianism was fallen away from the Church was also shared by people of a deeply spiritual life, breadth of outlook and a solid theological background. Let's take just one example - Bishop Victor (Ostrovidov) of Glazov, glorified as a confessor-hierarchy by ROCOR in 1981. He was one of the pioneers who bravely took the principled stand denouncing the Sergianist collaborationism and required the termination of ecclesial communion with Metropolitan Sergius and his subordinated hierarchy. Bishop Victor's influence was so great that the historians of the Moscow Patriarchate, who preferred to present the anti-Sergianist movement as a network of separate "schisms", discussed the "Victorian schism", referring to Bishop Victor's followers both in his own diocese, as well in the neighboring ones.⁶ Bishop Victor definitely considered Metropolitan Sergius worse than a schismatic and a heretic; he identified his betrayal with apostasy, "By appearing in all his actions a heretic and an enemy of the Church, by transforming the Holy Orthodox Church from a home for gracious salvation of the believers into a carnal organization devoid of any Grace

⁵*Russia's Catacomb Saints. Lives of the New Martyrs*, St. Herman of Alaska Press, Platina, CA 1982, p. 129.

⁶This approach, i.e. presenting the confessors in the different regions of Russia as separate "schisms" such as the Josephites, the Buoyes, the Victorians, etc. is inaccurate, because all of them were in close contact and full church communion. During a certain period of time they were a unified structure and had more than 40 bishops, according to the research of the contemporary church historian M. V. Shkarovski. Presenting the confessors as belonging to separate trends deliberately aims to create the impression that the case in point concerned separate "schismatic groups" that had split from the "canonical" hierarchy headed by Metropolitan Sergius. The Sergianist thinking always connected "canonicity" with multiplicity and therefore it was believed that by presenting the confessors as separate groups, the claim that they were schismatics would be more convincing since in this way they did not seem to be so many.

and the spirit of life, at the same time, through his deliberate renunciation of Truth and his insane betrayal of Christ, Metropolitan Sergius is an open apostate from the God of Truth.

Even without formal ecclesiastical prosecution (which is impossible to initiate), he was 'being condemned of himself' (Titus 3.10-11)."⁷

In accordance with this understanding, Bishop Victor says, "... we declare former Metropolitan Sergius deprived of prayerful communion with us and with all the faithful in Christ and His Holy Orthodox Church, and render him to God's judgment, 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord' (Rom. 12:19)."⁸

In connection with the bans to perform religious rites imposed by Metropolitan Sergius on confessors protesting against his anti-church policy, Bishop Victor said that they did not have greater validity than if they had been imposed by Catholics, Protestants, renovationists, etc., "The only difference is that the Catholics, Protestants, etc. dropped off from the Church of God earlier and the apostates are dropping off now, and in our time are seduced by the devil and 'are taken captive by him at his will'(2 Tim. 2, 26)."⁹

Also, regarding Metropolitan Sergius' order that the militant atheistic authorities be commemorated during liturgy, Bishop Victor commented, "Against the word of the Lord, in the great and the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist he 'yoked together with unbelievers' (2 Cor. 6.14-18) bringing together the Holy Church and Her mortal enemies. With this blasphemy, the metropolitan violates the prayerful significance of the great sacrament and destroys its Grace-filled meaning for the eternal salvation of the souls of Orthodox believers. Hence the liturgy is not just devoid of any Grace because of a Graceless priest, but it becomes an abomination in God's eyes, and therefore both the one who performs it and the one who participates in it are subject to severe condemnation."¹⁰

Such uncompromising assessment might awaken in the modern reader associations with the "zealots not according to reason" familiar to us today. It turns out, however, that these words have nothing in common with a "zealot" full of confidence in their own righteousness and ready to "cut out" from the Church firmly, to declare devoid of Grace all those who do not share their "most pure" confession of faith. It is sufficient to mention only a few of the contemporaries' memories in order to outline the spiritual portrait of Bishop Victor, with his impressive moral supremacy. Here is what Prof. I.M Andreev wrote about him, "... always and with everyone gentle and friendly, with constant bright joyful discreet smile and radiant blue eyes. "Everyone needs to be somehow comforted ", he used to say and he knew how to comfort everyone and anyone. For everybody he encountered he had an amiable word, and often even a small gift. When, after a six-month break, shipping was resumed and in Solovki (Solovetsky camp - KT) the first steamer arrived, then Bishop Victor usually received many parcels with various items and food from the mainland. The bishop gave away all those parcels in a couple of days, hardly leaving anything for himself. He comforted many prisoners, often completely unknown to him ..."¹¹

⁷Губонин, *Акты Святейшего патриарха Тихона...*, Москва 1994, ПСТБИ, с. 635.

⁸Ibid., p. 635.

⁹Вятский исповедник: святитель Виктор (Островидов), Сикорская Л., Братонез, М., 2010, С. 317.

¹⁰Губонин, *Акты Святейшего патриарха Тихона...*, Москва 1994, ПСТБИ, с. 634.

Similar memories were also recorded by the future academician Dmitry Likhachov, "The clergy in Solovki was divided into 'Sergianists', those who had adopted the Declaration of Metropolitan Sergius about the recognition of the Soviet authorities by the Church, and 'Josephites', in agreement with Bishop Joseph, who had not recognized the Declaration. The Josephites were in the majority. All young believers supported the Josephites. And the reason for this was not only the usual radicalism of young people, but also that the head of the Josephites in Solovki was the extremely attractive Bishop Victor (Ostrovidov). He was highly educated, had his theological works published, but he looked like a modest village priest. He greeted everyone with a big smile (I don't remember him otherwise), had a sparse beard, rosy cheeks, blue eyes. Over his cassock he wore a knitted female blouse sent to him by someone of his flock. He radiated a glow of goodness and joy. He strove to help everybody and was capable of helping, since all treated him well and trusted his word."¹²

God Himself glorified his faithful confessor in the 1990s when his remains were unearthed in the village of Neritsa, in the far north of the Komi Republic. The relics proved incorruptible, although they had stayed in the marshy grounds of the local cemetery for nearly 63 years.¹³ Also, there are records of miracles which began to happen immediately after the bishop's death.

Confessor-Hierarch Victor is just one example. There are similar statements about the Sergianists made by many prominent bishops, leaders of the Josephite movement. All they were glorified in the regiment of the New Russian Martyrs and Confessors in 1981, and nobody in ROCOR has ever found any faults with their ecclesiological views or qualified them as extreme. In his book *The Catacomb Saints of Russia* Fr. Seraphim (Rose) also ranks the Josephites leaders among the most revered New Russian Martyrs and Confessors, or as he calls them with deep veneration and love, "the founding fathers of the Catacomb Church": Metropolitan Joseph (Petrovich), Archbishop Seraphim (Samoylovich), Archbishop Demetrius (Lyubimov), Bishop Victor (Ostrovidov), Bishop Maxim (Zhizhilenko), Bishop Alexios (Buoy) ... Actually, prominent hierarchs from ROCOR itself, including st. Philaret (Voznesensky), the third Primate of ROCOR, also made similar statements about the Moscow Patriarchate - as an organization devoid of Grace. Even Fr. Seraphim wrote, "The leading bishops who were still in freedom and were able to judge the issue came to the conclusion that Sergius himself had gone into schism by his "Declaration"..."¹⁴

At the same time Fr. Seraphim tells us that the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad "has been preserved from falling into extremism on the "right side" (such as might be a declaration that the Mysteries of the Moscow Patriarchate are without Grace)."¹⁵

¹¹ ² *Воспоминания о Епископе Викторе (Островидове)*, Проф. И.М. Андреев. Cited according to <http://catacomb.org.ua/modules.php?name=Pages&go=page&pid=172>

¹² ² *Лихачев Д. С. Воспоминания. СПб., Logos, 1995. с. 255.* Cited according to <http://www.sakharov-center.ru/asfcd/auth/?t=page&num=12670>

¹³ Currently they are exhibited for veneration in the town of Kirov (called Vyatka prior to the Revolution), in the Spaso-Preobrazhensky Monastery belonging to the Moscow Patriarchate (whose hierarchy was regarded by Bishop Victor as without Grace!).

¹⁴ *Russia's Catacomb Saints. Lives of the New Martyrs*, St. Herman of Alaska Press, Platina, CA 1982, p. 115

¹⁵ ² *The Royal Path. True Orthodoxy in an Age of Apostasy* – In: *The Orthodox Word*, Vol. XII, No. 5 (70), pp. 143-149. Fr. Seraphim's claim that the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad had not declared the sacraments of the Moscow Patriarchate devoid of Grace is accurate because the statements of Metropolitans Philaret and Vitaliy presented

We might also add here the example of the unknown catacomb priest whose epistle to his spiritual children from 1962 Fr. Seraphim quotes in his article *What Does the Catacomb Church Think?*. At the time of the Khrushchev persecutions in the Soviet Union, in the 1960s, this priest, although not in communion with the Sergianist hierarchy, considered it acceptable, in the absence of another possibility, to allow his spiritual children to accept the sacraments from Sergianist clergy. Fr. Seraphim wrote, "... a profound church instinct tells him that, despite the tragedy of Sergianism *all* the sincere Orthodox believers of Russia are still part of the same Church."¹⁶

We can see that Fr. Seraphim regarded the Josephites of the 1930s favourably and never considered their views of Sergianism extreme, although many of the prominent representatives of the former believed Sergianism to be a schism devoid of Grace, a heresy or even something worse. At the same time, he believed that it would be falling into the extreme "right" if ROCOR declared the mysteries of the Sergianist Moscow Patriarchate without Grace. Isn't there a contradiction in Fr. Seraphim's views? There are two different assessments of the same position. Perhaps we should seek the explanation for this development in his standpoint from an "earlier" to a "later" period, for example? Even a cursory glance at the chronology of his writings, however, will convince us that we should not look for the answer in this direction. Both opinions were expressed at the same period of time. The article *What Does the Catacomb Church Think?*, in which he comments on the epistle of an unknown catacomb shepherd, was published in 1981, and the book "Catacomb Saints of Russia," in which he presents the positions of Josephite hierarchs was released in 1982 – the year of Fr. Seraphim's death. In other words, they both belong to the most mature period of his life. It should be noted that Fr. Seraphim himself shares the position of refraining from judgements regarding the presence of Grace in the sacraments of the Moscow Patriarchate and the other official churches, as well as refraining from ecclesiastical communion with them.¹⁷ Then why did he never judge the position of the Josephites as extreme "right"?

Fr. Seraphim has not left us a direct answer to this question. He just wrote about individual cases, about individual positions and expressed his personal views about them. These positions differ substantially in the historical contexts in which they were voiced. Taking this circumstance into account can contribute a lot to the understanding of Fr. Seraphim's equally positive stance on differing ecclesiological conceptions and those who held them. Thus, at the height of the intense initial struggle, when bold exposure and decisive action against the Sergianist betrayal were absolutely essential for the survival of the Russian Church, the somewhat extreme opinions of the confessors were completely understandable. Fr. Seraphim brought to the forefront what was most valuable in their position - not their judgments on the validity of the Sergianist sacraments but their selfless struggle against the

their views as personal opinion and not as ecclesiology of the Church Abroad.

¹⁶*What Does the Catacomb Church Think?* - In: The Orthodox Word, No. 96 (1981) pp. 21-23.

¹⁷Fr. Seraphim took this stand together with the small monastic brotherhood in the monastery in Platina in the 1970s even before the Russian Church Abroad announced breaking church communion with all official churches. In his letter to Fr. Alexey Young from 27th July (14th July, o.s.) 1976, he wrote, "For us personally, there is no problem: in view of the ever-increasing apostasy, we ourselves have no communion with non-Synod jurisdictions (of ROCOR – text in brackets mine, K. T.)..."

Sergianist betrayal, which subjugated the Church to her enemies,¹⁸ "... that is precisely why the Josephites separated from Sergius in 1927: not for incorrect ecclesiology or violation of canons, but because he deprived the Church of the thing most precious to her: her internal freedom."¹⁹

Later on, in the calm atmosphere of the West, in the decades after World War II, and mostly in hindsight, the condemnation of the Moscow Patriarchate as devoid of Grace would have been, according to Fr. Seraphim, falling into an extreme, a deviation to the "right" of the royal path, had it been proclaimed as the official ecclesiological position of ROCOR. Indeed, the history of opposition within the Russian Orthodox Church during the 1930's demonstrated how carefully one should consider the specific historical conditions when evaluating a particular ecclesiastical position and behavior.

But there is something else that determines Fr. Seraphim's attitude towards the discussed religious phenomena and defining them as walking along the royal path or deviating from it. This is **the assessment of the spiritual content**, whose manifestations are the ecclesiological positions taken on various occasions. As already mentioned, many of the Russian confessors denouncing the Grace among the Sergianist hierarchy were people of lofty spiritual life and their ecclesiological beliefs were not in the least the result of fanatical narrow-mindedness, lack of theological learning, bigotry, leadership ambitions or other such weaknesses. They had mastered the spirit of the Orthodox Tradition as the substance of their inner spiritual life but in the turmoil of exceptionally complicated and dramatic challenges in the life of the Church, they expressed rather extreme, polemically harsh and categorical judgements. In fact, exactly because of the spiritual meaning of their position, and not only because of their confessor's feat, neither Fr. Seraphim nor anyone else in ROCOR had ever defined their church position as a deviation to the "right".

5. The zealous "not according to reason"

The example with the Josephites gives us the key to understanding Fr. Seraphim's seemingly "contradictory" judgements on the same, from a formal point of view, ecclesiological views. In fact Fr. Seraphim never examined the ecclesiological conceptions formally; he never separated them from the attitude of their bearers toward the authentic Orthodox spirituality.

Many contemporary zealots "not according to reason" refer to the new Russian martyrs and confessors, quoting their words (usually detached from the particular and the general historical context), considering and presenting themselves as heirs and successors of their ecclesiological views. However, this is not so, even when it seems that they held the same beliefs. The difference is in the inner spiritual substance, in their embracing a spirituality of a radically different quality. Fr. Seraphim found that the theological positions and concepts of the zealous "not according to reason", even when they were formally or "**externally correct**", were deprived of the true Orthodox spirit. Life and deeds best

¹⁸ Actually, for the new Russian martyrs and confessors the topic about the lack of Grace of the Sergianist hierarchy was extraneous rather than central.

¹⁹ *Letters from Father Seraphim. The 12-year correspondence between Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose) and Father Alexey Young.* Nikodemos Orthodox Publication Society, Richfield Springs, NY, 2001, p. 168

demonstrate the true content of these words, "... what the Fathers did is often so clear and unequivocal that it can't be twisted."²⁰ For this reason, according to Fr. Seraphim, it is very useful "citing incidents from their (the Fathers' - KT) lives, when appropriate."²¹ when defending a particular theological thesis.

Fr. Seraphim himself is a wonderful example of the spiritual immunity that we should have against the "Pharisaic temptation." Fr. Alexey Young wrote about him, "His first letter arrived just a week or so before we were received into the Church²² at the Cathedral in San Francisco. This letter is an example of his desire to help us understand the spirit behind the letter of the law. ... In this, as in so many of his letters, Fr. Seraphim never gave orders, never insisted on blind obedience, and especially never suggested that I was naive or stupid (although indeed I often was)."²³

"To help us understand the spirit behind the letter of the law" - indeed, it is difficult to put it more precisely. This was Fr. Seraphim's continuous pursuit - to achieve the authentic spirit of Orthodoxy. In another letter from (18/31 October 1972) he wrote:

"In general, however, the canons are doubtless too much stressed in polemics, and if we are to remain in the Church in these difficult times, it will be primarily because we are faithful to the Spirit of the Church, and not to the canons."²⁴

Of course, this does not mean taking an arbitrary attitude to church canons or freely operating with them "as appropriate", like with arguments that can be used to defend any cause related to church polity. There are some canons that every Christian must be familiar with by all means and he must carefully observe whether the hierarchy comply with them. There are others that should not be turned into legalistic absolutes and to them the principle of economy is applicable to a greater extent. What is the criterion? Fr. Seraphim wrote, "Some of them, to be sure, that concern us directly, we must know about and, if possible, being taught by or consulting with others wiser in the faith, must be prepared to defend - for example, the canons regarding common prayer with heretics, **the transgressing of which involves a betrayal of the very idea of the Church of Christ** (bold font mine, KT)."²⁵

In the deviations to the "right", thinking becomes a victim of a peculiar **ecclesiological legalism** resulting from the incorrect absolutization of the canons. As Fr. Seraphim stated, ... if either of these "laws" (canons - text in brackets mine, KT) is made absolute, Orthodoxy becomes Phariseeism."²⁶

Fr. Seraphim shows what the abuse of canons can lead to with an example that is well-known and understood by the faithful of ROCOR - the example of Sergianism, "... and to the whole question of

²⁰³*Letters from Father Seraphim. The 12-year correspondence between Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose) and Father Alexey Young.* Nikodemos Orthodox Publication Society, Richfield Springs, NY, 2001, p. 23.

²¹³*ibid.*, p. 22.

²²⁷This refers to the conversion of Fr. Alexey and his wife from Roman Catholicism to Orthodoxy under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad.

²³³*Letters from Father Seraphim. The 12-year correspondence between Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose) and Father Alexey Young.* Nikodemos Orthodox Publication Society, Richfield Springs, NY, 2001, p. 7.

²⁴³*ibid.*, p. 62.

²⁵³*ibid.*, p. 62.

²⁶³*ibid.*, p. 63.

"Sergianism" when it becomes possible for GPU torturers to "prove" to an Orthodox bishop that Metropolitan Sergius [of the Moscow Patriarchate] 'violated neither dogmas nor canons.' Perhaps he didn't – but do we therefore follow him and his "canons" into hell, or do we follow Christ on the narrow path to paradise, together with His, quite possibly, "uncanonical" followers²⁷ of the last times ?"²⁸

It is really a telling fact that Fr. Seraphim used an example referring to the deviations to the "left" – towards Sergianism – in order to draw attention to one of the most characteristic distortions in the deviations to the "right". It was exactly within the framework of the Sergianist mentality that the Church began to be perceived primarily as an **organization, i.e.** in its external dimensions, and not as an **organism, i.e.** as the body of Christ, in which leading are the spiritual life and the essential spiritual connections based on the like-minded confession of faith. It is amazing that Fr. Seraphim could afford to use an example from the opposing camp, that of the "zealots not according to reason", so as to show the dangerous tendencies of the direction they followed themselves. Relying more on the formal organization rather than on the spiritual unity of which it is a natural outward expression inevitably leads to "extinguishing of the spirit." The deviations to the "left" and to the "right" produce such a result. This is not surprising if we really understand that any deviation from the "royal path", regardless of its particular ecclesiastical and political orientation, is actually a deviation from the true Orthodox spirituality. There are certainly differences as well; there are specifics in both cases. In the case of the deviations to the "left", which are typical of the official Orthodoxy, **the organization** aims to gather as many followers under its rule as possible, regardless of their views. The unifying principle is the acknowledgement of the "canonical" church authority and the "obedience" to it. Nothing else matters. Therefore, inside the "canonical" community itself, there usually coexist different wings that may hold mutually exclusive views of the Church and, after all, entirely different faith. Therefore, in the circles of the official Orthodoxy there often occur manifestations of fanatical intolerance not only of the "schismatics", but also of those who should be considered their "own people". For the extreme "zealots", belonging to "our" Church is also a prerequisite for the believer's belonging to the "true" church. But unlike in the official Orthodoxy, among the "zealots" no one can be accepted in the "true" Church, if they do not profess the "correct" faith. As can be seen, for them the unifying principle is the unity in religion, which in itself is the correct approach. However, here is present a fascination with the opposite extreme: a painful fixation on the "correctness" of the confession of faith down to the last detail. "Ours" is the one who believes "correctly", in other words, the one who unconditionally accepts everything that we accept. What we have here is not only the typical legalistic attitude towards the canons of the Church, which keeps fanatically to the letter of the law and loses its spirit, the spirit of the Gospel of Christ. There is also the cult of the personal opinion regarding Faith and turning it into an absolute "norm of faith", into an unconditional criterion of correct faith. The legalistic attitude is the element of the Pharisaic rationalism in Faith. It satisfies the scrupulous and selfish human logic. It is clear that Faith grasped in this way cannot bring its followers to the gracious unity in Christ. By seeking to

²⁷Fr. Alexey Young explains, „Fr. Seraphim was talking here about the Russian Church Abroad, which has been regarded as uncanonical by certain jurisdictions because it would not recognize the “authority” of the Patriarchate of Moscow, which was dominated and controlled by the Communists. The Church Abroad also refused to enter into communion with those non-Russian jurisdictions that remained in communion with Moscow.”

²⁸*Letters from Father Seraphim. The 12-year correspondence between Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose) and Father Alexey Young.* Nikodemos Orthodox Publication Society, Richfield Springs, NY, 2001, p. 63-64.

satisfy human reason blinded by legalism and conceit, Faith becomes a victim of its particular weakness in no time. Human opinions inevitably vary, which naturally leads to more and more multiplications of opinions, i.e. of "confessions" of the "true" Faith. Hence, the multiplying divisions among the "correct" believers.

Fr. Seraphim was not only focused on the symptoms of right sectarian mentality, but he also looked at the deeper spiritual basis of this phenomenon. For him it was clear that ultimately the human passions are the main factor for the deviations to the right. In the first place, these are the various manifestations of pride, such as confidence and self-esteem. In his letter to Fr. Alexey Young on October 31st (October 18th o.s.) 1972 Fr. Seraphim wrote, "Do not trust your mind too much; thinking must be refined by suffering, or it will not stand the test of these cruel times. I do not believe that the 'logical' ones will be with Christ and His Church in the days coming upon us; there will be too many 'reasons', against it, and those who trust their own minds will talk themselves out of it."²⁹ Unfortunately, this prediction of Fr. Seraphim was confirmed in 1986, only four years after his death, when in ROCOR emerged so-called "Boston schism." The abbot of the Transfiguration Monastery in Boston, Archimandrite Pantaleimon, who was the informal leader of the extreme "right" wing in ROCOR, accused its Synod of ecumenism and dogmatic irregularities and with his followers joined the Greek Old Calendar jurisdiction of Archbishop Auxentius. Ten years earlier, with his fine spiritual sensitivity Fr. Seraphim discerned the symptoms of irrational zealotism and wrote, "Zealotry is definitely in the air now; it has even become the fashion in the English-speaking wing of our Church, and the more moderate position of our bishops will now come to seem intolerable to those who think 'logically'."³⁰

For Fr. Seraphim this "spirit of zealotism" was unacceptable. He had no doubts about it, "We cannot follow the line of 'Boston Orthodoxy'."³¹ He clearly perceived it "to be mostly 'correct', but [it] is actually outside the tradition of Orthodoxy, a creation of human logic. It's a terrible temptation for our times, and most of the converts will probably be drawn into it."³² At the same time Fr. Seraphim approached every phenomenon in the church life very carefully, because he felt how great the danger was when in the desire to avoid one extreme, one could actually fall into the other. Zealotism itself was an example of how far the fervor in the negation of ecumenism and Sergianism could go when one confidently approached the analysis and evaluation of these apostatic phenomena and forgot that salvation should be pursued "with fear and trepidation." On the contrary, Fr. Seraphim always posed disquieting questions, "Where do we stand now? Where do we go from here?"³³ These words lack any self-confidence, any self-esteem and any reliance on one's own understanding. If we turn to the Holy Fathers, we can easily find that they teach exactly this - salvation implies entrusting all our hope to God, not relying on our own powers and understanding, on our own judgment, but walking with the fear that we can go wrong at every step and lose the right direction. Fr. Seraphim gives us a wonderful example of mastering this patristic teaching in depth. The following words clearly show what he counted on in order to withstand the trials and remain on the royal path of salvation, " We feel very crucial times ahead for

²⁹ibid., p. 67.

³⁰ibid., p. 167.

³¹ibid., p. 167.

³²ibid., p. 167.

³³ibid., p. 167.

us and our whole Church, and we want to ask Vladika John³⁴ very fervently now just what we should do, how we should proceed. By his prayers may we stay on the right path and stay firm in the midst of the temptations ahead."³⁵ How alien this thinking is to the arrogant conceit that "we" are the true Christians that our (personal, group) confession of faith is the only true Orthodox denomination, that precisely (and only) we are the "pure as crystal" Church of Christ and all the others, if they want to save themselves, should join us!

Moreover, Fr. Seraphim also looked back at the travelled road with unsparing self-criticism, in full readiness to expose his own errors. "Saving face" was unknown to him. Without a trace of any concern that his spiritual authority could be undermined he shared with his spiritual son (Fr. Aleksey Young) the thought that tormented him, namely that perhaps he himself had contributed to the spirit of zealotism, "We fear that all our articles about zealotry in the past years have helped to produce a monster."³⁶ Of course, even in itself, this willingness to be honest, to take responsibility, to recognize that he was wrong, powerfully shows us how far Fr. Seraphim was from the spirit of sectarian bigotry and self-satisfied fanaticism. In fact, he was always far from it. Fr. Seraphim invariably distinguished true Orthodox zeal on the one hand from the zeal "not according to reason", from the "soulless Pharisaic ... or legalistic attitude toward ecclesiastical laws" on the other - distinctions that he made exactly in his article about the zealots of Mount Athos. When he shared his fear that he might have contributed to the establishment of zealotism (in the negative sense of the word), Fr. Seraphim did not simply want to say that he was willing to reconsider his position regarding the contemporary forms of apostasy seizing the official Orthodoxy. Let us remember that in the last year of his life he published *Catacomb Saints of Russia*, a book dedicated to the struggle of the Russian martyrs and confessors against the treacherous church policy of the Sergianist Moscow Patriarchate. Fr. Seraphim's fear was different - he was afraid that perhaps in his articles he had not found the right balance of accents, that he might have placed in the forefront the polemic against the "apostate Orthodoxy" before disclosing and recognizing the true Orthodox spirituality. Of course, even if we assume that there existed such emphasis on the polemic aspect in some of Fr. Seraphim's works, then it is still far away from going beyond the authentic Church Tradition, which is typical of the unreasonable zeal. However, Fr. Seraphim was afraid that he had supported this trend, albeit indirectly. His conclusion is, "For the future we will have to emphasize the 'feel' of Orthodoxy, without which zealotry is empty and even harmful."³⁷

This conclusion is very important. It should attract the attention of all Orthodox Christians who in today's difficult times for the Church strive to remain faithful to Orthodoxy. Thus the more powerful weapon in the fight against apostasy is not its exposure, although it is inevitable and necessary, but the full life in the Church, in the spirit and truth of the Orthodox Tradition. It is precisely then that the polemic against the contemporary forms of apostasy such as ecumenism and Sergianism, has its own meaning and justification, and only then can we avoid their diametrically opposite extremes. Fr. Seraphim wrote, "We who wish to remain in the true tradition of Orthodoxy will have to be zealous and

³⁴Holy Hierarch John of Shanghai and San Francisco, who had not yet been glorified in the Church at that time.

³⁵*Letters from Father Seraphim. The 12-year correspondence between Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose) and Father Alexey Young.* Nikodemos Orthodox Publication Society, Richfield Springs, NY, 2001, p. 168.

³⁶*ibid.*, p. 167.

³⁷*ibid.*, p. 167.

firm in our Orthodoxy without being fanatics ... Above all, we must strive to preserve the true fragrance of Orthodoxy ..."38 How can we achieve this? How can we prevent fanaticism? By making efforts to keep the spiritual continuity with the bearers of the true Orthodox spirit, "We *must* keep up the living contact with the older Russian clergy... First of all, of course, our instructors must be the giants of that older generation: Vladikas John, Averky and those like them."39

Besides, we have to be "at least a little 'not of this world', detached from all the cares and politics even of the Church, nourishing ourselves in the otherworldly food the Church gives us in such abundance."40 This is the true antidote to any kind of sectarianism and fanaticism - warming up the internal innermost life in Christ.

Fr. Seraphim realised that, unfortunately, nowadays the destructive zeitgeist drains the zeal for spiritual life and forces many to seek substitutes for it - usually on the shallow level of church politics, where the lack of real and valuable spiritual resource is offset by condemning the "heretics" (publicly) , excommunication, anathema and other similar manifestations perceived as fidelity to the Church and signs of true zeal, and eventually regarded as a true Christian life. For Fr. Seraphim it was not difficult to make the following prediction, "The 'right wing' of Orthodoxy41 will probably be divided into many small jurisdictions in future, most of them anathematizing and fighting with the others."42

These are sad words that we have unfortunately seen fulfilled today. We witnessed the cold, fanatical "hyper-correctness" experienced as Christianity through the constant crushing of the enemies, the stigmatization, perpetual anathema to any deviation from the "proper" profession of Orthodoxy, of everything that differs from one's grotesque y absolute own position. Nowadays we even have jurisdictions that have reached the absurdity to consider themselves the only remaining Orthodox and condemn all others as heretics and schismatics. According to those who have been captivated by the extreme spirit of fanaticism, salvation is possible only for those belonging to the "true Church", which is simply reduced to their own jurisdiction. Here imperceptibly starts the shift in thinking, as a result of which the prerequisite is considered sufficient. Moreover, in this downward slip, there exists the conscious though unvoiced thought that those who belong to the "right" Church will be saved exactly because and (in a more concealed way) only by virtue of belonging to Her. And here suddenly we encounter the amazing coincidence of extremes. The "mandatory condition" of fanatical and sectarian thinking coincides with the "mandatory requirement" of the official Orthodoxy, for which, in exactly the same way, those who do not belong to its corporate union are "outside the Church" and represent schismatics who cannot be saved in such a state.

In fact, this coincidence seems paradoxical only at first glance. Distancing from the royal path means moving away primarily from the Christian spiritual life, regardless of whether the starting point

38³bid., p. 168.

39³bid., p. 167-168.

40³bid., p. 168.

41³Fr. Alexey Young explains that by the "right wing of Orthodoxy" Fr. Seraphim meant not only the Boston group in ROCA but also some extreme Greek Old Calendarists.

42³*Letters from Father Seraphim. The 12-year correspondence between Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose) and Father Alexey Young.* Nikodemos Orthodox Publication Society, Richfield Springs, NY, 2001, p. 167.

for this is liberalism with its more comfortable "new editions" of Orthodoxy, or the complacent fanaticism, which also loses sight of the vital need for authentic Christian spiritual life. Untruths, hypocrisy, double standards, horrific moral downfalls - these are the fruits of the two "opposing" deviations from the royal path redolent with the scent of Orthodoxy - the path of authentic Orthodox faith, **inextricably** linked to the authentic Orthodox spiritual life.