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THE FLAVOUR OF ORTHODOXY¹

OR

THE ROYAL PATH

THE ECCLESIOLOGICAL VIEWS OF HIEROMONK SERAPHIM (ROSE)

Part 4

After Fr. Seraphim

On 2nd September, 1982 the Lord summoned Fr. Seraphim from his difficult earthly life to the realm of the righteous. I doubt we could find a more suitable epitaph for him than the words selected by his godfather, Mr. Dmitri de Langeron, from the Book of Wisdom of Solomon, "But the righteous man, though he dies early, will be at rest. For old age is not honored for length of time, nor measured by number of years; but understanding is gray hair for men, and a blameless life is ripe old age. There was one who pleased God and was loved by him, and while living among sinners he was taken up. He was caught up lest evil change his understanding or guile deceive his soul.... Being perfected in a short time, he fulfilled long years; for his soul was pleasing to the Lord, therefore he took him quickly from the midst of wickedness. "(Wisdom of Solomon, 4, 7-11, 13-14)

Have Fr. Seraphim's expectations of the Russian Orthodox Church and Orthodoxy as a whole been justified after his death? Sometimes he expressed hopes which were too brave. In 1976 he wrote, "...perhaps one or more of the Local Churches may yet be persuaded to step back from this ruinous path (the path of apostasy - my text in brackets, KT) which will lead to the final liquidation (as Orthodox) of those jurisdictions that follow it to the end."² From today's perspective, when the processes in the official Orthodoxy appear to be definitely irreversible, such a hope seems unrealistic. But we should not forget that those words were spoken nearly four decades ago.

¹Translated from the Bulgarian by Velko Karaivanov. Edited by Lyubina Gagova.

²*The Royal Path. True Orthodoxy in an Age of Apostasy* - In: *The Orthodox Word*, Vol. XII, No. 5 (70), pp. 143-149.

As regards the Church in Russia in particular, throughout its existence until the overthrowing of the Communism system, the Church Abroad (and Fr Seraphim was no exception in this respect) lived with the hope and expectation of the day when Communism would fall and the Church would be freed from its Communist captivity. The larger part of the Russian emigration was convinced that this day would inevitably come. Fr. Seraphim also greatly desired this and shared his conviction, "God alone knows the future of the Russian Orthodox Church, but we cannot but believe that one day it will again be free."³

In most cases, naturally and by default, this expectation of emigrants was connected with the belief that after that moment of time, the normal church life in Russia would be restored and the unification of ROCOR with the long-suffering flock of Christ in the Russian homeland would become possible. In this respect Fr. Seraphim was more cautious, because he recognized the conditions under which that union would be possible. He was aware that the crisis in the local Churches in the countries from the Communist camp was not only limited to their subordination to the Communist regimes and it would not be resolved automatically with their fall, "The real crisis of Orthodoxy today — not only in Russia but throughout the world — has not been caused by submission to orders from atheists, and it will not be overcome by refusing to accept these orders".⁴

Fr. Seraphim was shrewd enough to see the essence of the crisis of modern Orthodoxy in its internal erosion, **the loss of the true Orthodox spirituality**, and consequently - in the involvement of the local Churches in the modern apostasy processes. From this perspective, he did not see a big difference between official churches in the countries of the Communist bloc and those outside it, "As a matter of Church principle, the question is in reality the same here as there; the only difference is that in the Soviet Union the hierarchs participate in apostasy ostensibly under the dictatorship of atheists, whereas in the free world the hierarchs do the same thing freely."⁵ "And indeed, no sensitive observer can fail to notice that the basic position of Orthodoxy in the USSR ... is different from the situation outside of Russia chiefly in degree rather than in kind. Many of the basic problems are the same: the profound ignorance of what Orthodoxy is, the political and other influences which enter Church life and attempt to swerve the Church from her spiritual path, the weakening of the spirit of confession; the basic difference

³*Russia's Catacomb Saints. Lives of the New Martyrs*, St. Herman of Alaska Press, Platina, CA 1982, p. 461.

⁴*The Catacomb Tikhonite Church 1974*, The Orthodox Word, Nov.-Dec., 1974 (59), 235-246.

⁵*ibid.*

is only that the Orthodox Churches of the free world *voluntarily* follow the path of apostasy which is followed in the Soviet Union under coercion."⁶

How would bishops from Communist countries behave when the atheists' coercion disappeared? Few had any particular idea on this issue at the time. Almost everybody had every expectation of a future free Council (Sobor) of the entire Russian Church, which would give authoritative solutions to all church problems.

This situation lasted while the Soviet Union and the Communist camp still existed. As regards the Moscow Patriarchate in particular, about which the most detailed information was available, Fr. Seraphim said, "...the Moscow Patriarchate has not changed and undoubtedly will not change until Communism itself falls in Russia..."⁷ This was the prevailing opinion but Fr. Seraphim added something very important, "... there is no hope whatever that a return to normal Orthodox church life will occur through the official church."⁸ This thought makes it clear that in the collapse of Communism Fr. Seraphim saw a prerequisite for the normalization of church life in Russia, but he did not believe at all that this condition was sufficient. What is more, he was convinced that the official Church in Russia, the Moscow Patriarchate, would be unable to do this alone even if freed from the oppression of the atheist government. Fr. Seraphim fully realized how substantial the distortions created by the Sergianist ideology were. For this reason exactly he believed (some thirty-five years ago) that in order to reach a real spiritual transformation, the official churches needed help. They could not achieve this return to the true Orthodoxy by themselves since the moral erosion and inertia were enormous. It was exactly in providing such assistance that the Russian church emigration saw the main mission of ROCOR throughout its history. In addition to preaching the apostolic Faith of the Church of Christ among the peoples in the Communist-free West, ROCOR was also called upon to preserve the true Orthodox spirituality, and the undamaged and pure faith for the Orthodox Christians in Russia, for the time when Russia would be liberated from the totalitarian regime.

Were these hopes and expectations of the Russian emigration fulfilled? Did ROCOR accomplish this mission? In Russia, for more than twenty years now, the political system of totalitarian atheistic Communism has been non-existent. Under the new legislation, the Church is free and

⁶*Russia's Catacomb Saints. Lives of the New Martyrs*, St. Herman of Alaska Press, Platina, CA 1982, p. 525

⁷*What Does the Catacomb Church Think?* - In: *The Orthodox Word*, No. 96 (1981).

⁸*ibid.*

independent from the state. On 17th May 2007 the larger part of ROCOR merged with the Moscow Patriarchate. The proponents of this unification argue that it fulfilled the covenants of the great overseas hierarchs Saint Philaret of New York (incidentally, for them, still not glorified), Saint John of Shanghai and San Francisco, Archbishop Averkiy (Taushev) and many others who yearned for the unity of the Russian Church.

Is that really so ? Have the yearnings of the overseas hierarchs for the restoration of the unity in **Truth** with the **Free** Church in their homeland been already satisfied ?

All of them saw this unity precisely as unity in **Truth**. According to them, the obstacles that stood before this unity and that had to be overcome were not simply reduced to a tragic separation caused by the political storms that led to the collapse of the historical Russian state and to its irreversible sinking in the past. They saw those obstacles primarily in the heavy damage inflicted on the Church in Russia, which was subordinated to the Communists and which had been held in captivity for many decades by the Sergianist conformity with the powers that be and by the suicidal collaboration with the enemies of Faith. Such severe wounds could not heal only with the change of the political situation and a few half-hearted declarations on behalf of the official Church represented by the Moscow Patriarchate. According to the righteous hierarchs of ROCOR, the beginning of a true healing process could only start with an honest assessment of the betrayals of Faith, of the collaboration which caused the Church body to decay and generally with a full confession before the church people of the wrong path along which they had been led by their hierarchs in the course of many decades. Exactly for this reason the activists of ROCOR emphasized it was imperative that the revival of the Church in Russia started with a general Church Council (Sobor) of the free Russian Church, which alone could give such an authoritative, accurate and thorough assessment.

However, before the union in 2007 was formed, its supporters in ROCOR claimed: the Church in Russia was free and in the process of revival, the state supported it, church buildings were being returned, church life was flourishing; in 2000 the Patriarchy adopted its Social Stand, which stated that the Church could defy secular authorities in defense of the Faith; the New Martyrs and Confessors victims of the Bolshevik regime were glorified; there existed a true spiritual revival. They could not have asked for more. Besides the prejudices that had stratified in the course of time, there were no significant obstacles to the re-unification with the **Free** Church in the homeland.

Even without examining in detail the questionable value of all these assertions, we cannot ignore the meaningful fact that throughout the whole pre-accession process, its active participants avoided the topic of Truth, the necessity to achieve the desired unity in **the Truth**. They dedicated themselves entirely to political leveling and relativist reconciling of differences. But let us first of all try to answer the question: can we accept that the Church in Russia, represented by the Moscow Patriarchate, became free after the fall of Communism? Undoubtedly, the chains of fear of repression by the Communist state authorities had been broken. Yet, the Church remained in the grip of the typical Sergianist thinking and behavior characterised by opportunism, servile attitude to any ruling party, subservient relation to the powers that be at the cost of scorning the Truth of Christ. However, today a leading motive in this inherited code of thinking and behavior is not striving for survival but the pursuit of material goods and even luxury, of privileged social status. Even after the Communist era, the Moscow Patriarchate still remained captive of the attachment to the values of this world. The inner spiritual freedom of the true Church of Christ, which is **in** this world but not **of** the world, and is aware of its vocation to lead believers toward Christ and toward Christians' true homeland, toward true life, true glory, and true eternal good remained inaccessible to it. The Moscow Patriarchate has no inner spiritual freedom, because it did not wish to be cured of the longtime disease of Sergianism. It only feigned this freedom in the new Post-Communist conditions; behind a façade of changes and ever more unconvincing imitations it has aimed to preserve its old nature. The Moscow Patriarchate, and the same goes for the entire so-called "official Orthodoxy", is not free because it does not wish for freedom. Now it voluntarily bears the yoke of slavery and voluntarily participates in the apostasy from the Orthodoxy. And if at the time of Fr. Seraphim (Rose) it was possible to claim that "in the Soviet Union (and in the other Orthodox countries of the Communist bloc – my text in brackets, KT) bishops participate in the apostasy... under duress of the atheists ...", now it is already obvious that the larger part of the leadership of those churches has turned into a factor generating apostasy. Thus, the ultimate inspirer of the atheistic persecutions has achieved his goal. Coercion is no longer needed, repressions have been discontinued, the communist regime is unnecessary. In front of all of us is the result achieved in the sinister laboratory of the Communist church policy a shell of a church organism in which the spirit of Christ's Church has been replaced. A church organization has been created, which is no longer the pillar and upholder of Truth, the only Truth which can set us free. A new type of

hierarchy has been created, which consciously does wrong against the Faith, which knowingly and subversively diverts its followers from the fullness of Christ's Truth or simply tolerates this process cowardly. A church organism has been created that independently and voluntarily departs from Christ, an organism which can reproduce itself and develop in this direction, which can serve as bait to the searching souls and divert them from the narrow path of Christ's truth towards the easy paths of compromise and false spirituality. Can we assume that the unification of the larger part of ROCOR with the Moscow Patriarchate in 2007 in its state described above represented merging with "the free Church in the homeland?" Was this done in the spirit of Truth? The negative answer to this question is obvious. The Church body of the Moscow Patriarchate (and now we can definitely say this applies to all autocephalous official churches which constitute the official Orthodoxy) produces its non-freedom. And in Truth only can such a church community abide that defends its inner spiritual freedom in Christ. The surrender or the voluntary selling of freedom leads to falling away from Truth. It also causes the loss of authentic Orthodox spirituality. The unification with a church organism abiding in such a state cannot be an act of unity in Truth, because it does not stand in the Truth and it is not a free – Church in a deep spiritual sense. The inner spiritual freedom of the Church is not directly dependent on external political and social conditions in which She exists. In the first three centuries of Her history, the Church lived mainly in catacombs and was subjected to persecution, but She preserved in fullness Her inner freedom and independence from the earthly power of the pagan world. In our times, we can witness the reverse. In the conditions of political freedom and absence of persecution, the majority of the hierarchs of the official church organizations are willing to subordinate themselves to the powers that govern this world in exchange for their support. The political freedom and the external conditions in which the Church lives must not be mistaken for Her genuine inner spiritual freedom.

So, the lifting of the threat of reprisals after the collapse of the Soviet Union does not mean that just by virtue of that, the Moscow Patriarchate achieved real freedom. Its spiritual liberation requires a deep inner transformation. The signing of the Act of Reunification on 17th May 2007 meant that the ROCOR episcopate accepted the communion with the Moscow Patriarchate in its then state, i.e. in the state of not being free. There could be only one explanation of this fact - the inner spiritual erosion among the ROCOR episcopate had already brought it to a state of non-freedom and readiness to sell the Truth, to a degree comparable to that of the bishops of the Moscow Patriarchate. The majority of ROCOR priesthood and congregation proved tragically incapable of spiritual resistance, of upholding the Truth, of protecting religious freedom, and

despite the reluctance of many, they accepted the union. The leading, active participant in this process was the Moscow Patriarchate⁹. It adopted the position of "the Mother Church" which accepted the structure that had separated from her as a result of "political turmoil" according to the obscure ecclesiastical and diplomatic wording of the union.

Is this how the spirit-bearing ROCOR hierarchs imagined the reunion **in Truth** with the **free** Church in the homeland? First of all, as was already stated above, they found it necessary that the unification was discussed at a **Unification Council** (Sobor). Why did they think they needed this Council (Sobor) and what did they expect from it? Who, according to them, had to participate in it? Father Seraphim repeatedly posed these questions in a number of articles and clearly formulated their answers.

Regarding the participants in the future Council (Sobor) of the free Russian Church, Fr. Seraphim believed it needed to represent "the entire Russian Orthodoxy", "Russian Orthodoxy today - betrayed by its hierarchs in the USSR, and represented only by the free bishops abroad and by a remnant of the faithful at home and abroad - lives in expectation of a restoration of true and canonical church order. This will doubtless come only at the longed-for Council of **all Russian Orthodoxy** (bold type mine - KT) after the fall of the Communist regime, when those who have kept the faith will be justified."¹⁰

As can be seen, by "the entire Russian Orthodoxy" Fr. Seraphim meant "the free bishops abroad and the remaining faithful at home and abroad." That is, he believed that full participants in the Council could be those who had kept the Faith and the ecclesiastical freedom intact. We should note that for Fr. Seraphim "the remaining faithful in the homeland" were not only the Catacomb Church. Their number also included the confessors of the faith in the Moscow Patriarchate itself, such as the well-known Boris Talantov, "Without passing judgment on those who remain in the Patriarchate, we abroad can nonetheless not help but see that the solution of the present crisis of the Moscow Patriarchate – which is actually the culmination, as Talantov points out, of the betrayal of 1927 – cannot come from within the Patriarchate alone but must come from the whole confessing Orthodox Church of Russia: **the believers in the Catacombs who remain faithful to the testaments of Metropolitan Joseph and the many bishops in 1927 who declared the "Sergianist" Church schismatic; the true believers who remain in**

⁹In fact, the driving force for the assimilation of ROCOR in the form of unification was the political leadership of the Russian Federation. Their role was not concealed. They generated the idea, they assigned the task, and with the help of their authority, diplomatic and financial resources the process was realized. The Moscow Patriarchate had its usual role of a contractor fulfilling the order placed by the ruling power.

¹⁰*Russia's Catacomb Saints. Lives of the New Martyrs*, St. Herman of Alaska Press, Platina, CA 1982, p. 463.

the Patriarchate; and the Church Outside of Russia (bold type mine - KT)."¹¹ These lines reveal in detail the composition of the Council (Sobor) desired and expected by ROCOR: the Church Abroad herself, the Catacomb Church in Russia and the "true believers who remained in the Patriarchate." Among the latter there were many confessors on whom the church emigration laid great hopes and whose feat was highly valued. Fr. Seraphim expressed this by saying, "But in the same Moscow Patriarchate there is an increasing number of priests ... who do not participate in this betrayal, but speak in the spirit of the Catacomb Church and the free Russian Church Outside of Russia."¹² And not only that. Fr. Seraphim was convinced that those sincere Christian believers belonging to the Patriarchate could make a really significant contribution to the work of a future Council (Sobor), especially with regard to the condemnation of Sergianist collaborationism. He highly valued Boris Talantov's works and defined them as the most radical critique of Sergianism, which is even missing in the very ROCOR, "The works of Boris Talantov will doubtless be used as testimony at that longed-for Council of the entire free Russian Church, including the Churches of the Catacombs and of the Diaspora, that will finally judge the situation created by the Communist Yoke and Sergianism."¹³

Is this what happened in 2007? Was there a unifying Council (Sobor) to consider all the damage inflicted on the Church by the Sergianist schism? Who performed the union – were they exactly the participants and the forces envisaged by the Church Abroad? Even the most cursory comparison will convince us of the complete mismatch between what happened on the one hand, and the expectations and hopes of the church emigration on the other.

The Church Abroad saw the role of the unifying Council (Sobor) modeled after the Ecumenical and Local Councils of the past, during which the apostasy from the Truth was condemned and the confessors were justified and crowned, Orthodoxy triumphed, and apostates were accepted provided they repented or endured punishment. The Sergianist betrayal and the confession of the true Orthodox Christians had to stand against each other before the court of this Council (Sobor). Fr. Seraphim continually emphasized that these are two incompatible, divergent and opposing views and ecclesiastical positions: undoubtedly, the Council (Sobor) had to condemn Sergianism and give the true Orthodox due and proper evaluation. "The hierarchs of the Catacomb Church in Russia, as of the Russian Church Outside of Russia, have always deferred the final judgment of the Russian church situation to the future free council that will meet only when Communism falls. Then, we believe, the Catacomb Church will have the final word and justify its struggle, and those who gave in to Sergianism will be judged - according to God's judgment, which is revealed in the Church's true councils, and not according to man's opinions."¹⁴ Fr. Seraphim was convinced that without the truth being spoken, without an authoritative free Council (Sobor) giving a clear assessment of the two opposite types of

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 464.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 489.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 461.

¹⁴ *What Does the Catacomb Church Think?* - In: *The Orthodox Word*, No. 96 (1981) pp. 21-23.

behavior, it was not possible to free the ecclesiastical consciousness of the delusions and conformism of Sergianism. He believed this was the only way in which a reliable foundation for unity in Truth could be laid. For Fr. Seraphim this was obvious,

"Now, that almost half a century has passed, history has shown that these 'stubborn rebels', the followers of Metropolitan Joseph of Petrograd, were absolutely correct, and their significance now shines forth as equal to that of the great Confessors of Orthodoxy in ancient times."¹⁵ Also, "To the future historian of the Russian Church there will indeed be no doubt ... that the Josephites were correct and the Sergianists were fatally wrong ... Sergianism was not merely 'wrong', in its choice of church policy, it was something far worse: it was a betrayal of Christ based on agreement with the spirit of this world. It is the inevitable result when church policy is guided by earthly logic and not by the mind of Christ."¹⁶

The confessors of the Catacomb Church in Russia also expected the future Council (Sobor) to give an evaluation, and to state, " We believe that if human life is to continue on earth, then sometime there will gather a council which will justify our boldness and will justly evaluate the 'wise policy' of Metropolitan Sergius and his followers who wished to 'save the Church' at the price of her immaculateness and truth."¹⁷

And what role did Fr. Seraphim assign to the Sergianist hierarchy in the Unification Council (sobor)? With regard to the hierarchs, the leaders of the 'Sergianist schism'¹⁸, he unequivocally pointed to the example set by earlier councils in the history of the Church, "In previous Councils like this in the history of the Church, those most guilty for schism have been punished, while the innocent followers of schism have been forgiven and restored to communion with the Church (as indicated in the Epistle of St. Athanasius the Great to Rufinianus)."¹⁹

The expectation to undertake an assessment of both Sergianism and the struggle of the true Orthodox was not an end in itself or an expression of some concealed revenge. No one in the Church Abroad imagined that unity in the Truth with the suffering Church in the homeland could be achieved in any way other than telling the truth about church life. It was therefore necessary to provide an accurate and thorough assessment of the wrong path traveled so far, which the official Church, and especially her bishops, had to forswear. Such an assessment was also needed as a diagnosis of the state of the Church body, so that the necessary remedial changes in the church life could be initiated. In the 1970s, many members of the Church Abroad, who had a good understanding of church life in the official Orthodoxy and analyzed it carefully, were convinced that what already presented a serious problem were the distortions in the ecclesiastical consciousness of the mass of believers, of all those "innocent followers" of the Sergianists, as Fr. Seraphim called them. About them he wrote, "While considering the clergy and faithful of the

¹⁵*Russia's Catacomb Saints. Lives of the New Martyrs*, St. Herman of Alaska Press, Platina, CA 1982, p. 348.

¹⁶*ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁷*What Does the Catacomb Church Think?* - In: *The Orthodox Word*, No. 96 (1981) pp. 21-23.

¹⁸In his works, Fr. Seraphim (Rose) usually refers to Sergianism as schism.

¹⁹*The Catacomb Tikhonite Church 1974*, *The Orthodox Word*, Nov.-Dec., 1974 (59), 235-246.

Moscow Patriarchate as participants in apostasy and schism, True-Orthodox Christians view them with sympathy and love, but also speak the truth about them and refuse to participate in their deeds or have communion in prayer and sacraments with them, leaving their judgment to the future free All-Russian Council, when and if God should grant that it might be convened."²⁰

Generally speaking, such were the views of Fr. Seraphim and the Russian church emigration on a possible future union with the suffering Church in Russia. It is not difficult to establish that this vision of a unifying Council (Sobor), and of all conditions for the possible unification had nothing in common with the signing of the sorrowful Union in 2007. This perspective and the following act are diametrically opposite and mutually exclusive in their each and every aspect. During the unification process, the clergy and believers in the Moscow Patriarchate were not told anything about the nature of Sergianism, and the guilt of its hierarchy or its participation in "apostasy and schism" were never mentioned. The ideologist and the supporters of Sergianism were not identified, their deeds were not given any assessment and their "innocent followers" were not forgiven or restored to communion with the Church. On the contrary, the émigrés were received "graciously" by the Moscow Patriarchate in the "Mother Church." There was no Council dealing with establishing the truth. Instead, there was a pompous ceremony surrounding the signing of the unification act that commemorated the victory and triumph of Sergianist hierarchy over the "white Church". Fortunately, this triumph did not spread over the entire "white Church".

So, instead of convening a Council (Sobor) of the entire free Russian Church, during which the spiritual shackles of Sergianism could be broken and the church life could be normalized, what happened was just the opposite - the larger part of the Church Abroad fell into captivity under the power of the Sergianist hierarchy and was involved in the apostasy process gripping the official Orthodoxy. Did the Church Abroad envisage the possibility of such a development? Throughout the Bolshevik Revolution until the collapse of the Communist political system the Russian emigration lived primarily with the hope for the future liberation of Russia and the Church. At the same time, there were quite a few sober voices among prominent hierarchs and clergy of the Church Abroad, who reminded that God's Grace could be expected only if the Russian people showed repentance and embraced Faith and piety. For all his fervent faith and enthusiasm with which he expressed his bright hopes for the future of Russia and Russian Orthodoxy, Fr. Seraphim often had his cautious reservations which demonstrated that he did not forget about the spiritual and moral conditions, without which the longings of the Russian emigration could not be satisfied, "... judgment to the future free All-Russian Council, **when and**

²⁰ibid.

if God should grant that it might be convened (bold type mine - KT)²¹; "... the future of Russia, **if it is to be Orthodox** (bold type mine - KT), belongs to the Catacomb Church."²²

As early as 1974, Fr. Seraphim gave his assessment of an ecclesiastical unity achieved at the cost of betraying the Truth. In his words sounds the voice of the entire ROCA, as well as the voice of the conciliar patristic understanding of Church unity, "But if it be *not* in the Truth, but by means of some compromise in the Truth—such unity is abhorrent to God and His Holy Church ... The great confessors of Orthodox history have been precisely those who rose up *against false unity*, preferring, if necessary, to be *alone against the world* if only they might be with Christ and His Truth."²³

And, as if in order to issue a clear warning to those who at the beginning of this century wanted to "discover" in the Moscow Patriarchate the "free" and "resurgent" Russian Church, Fr. Seraphim made the following statement which is relevant not only to the 1970s but also to our modernity, "Even so, he who looks for the Church in the Soviet Union today finds – a hole in the earth, a deep wound in the Orthodox Russian people that is not at all hidden by the false front of the Moscow Patriarchate."²⁴

Fr. Seraphim also left his warning about the mortal danger that threatens the official Church in Russia if it continues on the path of apostasy - a warning similar to the one he gave the whole "world Orthodoxy": "If normal Orthodox Church life is not restored to Russia, the Moscow Patriarchate will follow the path of Roman Catholicism and eventually wither and die in apostasy, and the innocent people who follow it will find themselves beyond any doubt *outside the Church of Christ*. And then it will only be those who are one with the True-Orthodox Christians of Russia who will still be in the Church's saving enclosure."²⁵

With the subjugation of the larger part of ROCA, the Moscow Patriarchate had the misfortune to be the winner in a major battle fought, alas, against Russian Orthodoxy. Through this victory it practically destroyed the possibility to receive the necessary support so that it could be delivered from the stream of apostasy dragging it into a destructive direction. Since 2007, there has not been any hope that in the future a unifying Council (Sobor), such as the one the Church Abroad expected in the past, could be held. Equally impossible seems a future General Orthodox Council (Sobor). Those who seek to abide in the fullness and purity of Faith today can no longer rely on their confessional position being recognized by the wider church circles, they cannot rely even on any interest in the word preaching the truth. Similarly to the unknown catacomb pastor whose message Fr. Seraphim quotes in his article *What Does the Catacomb Church Think?*, they may have the consolation of saying , "... it is not out of light-mindedness or prejudice that we have made our choice and it is not out of lightness of mind and

²¹ibid.

²²*Russia's Catacomb Saints. Lives of the New Martyrs*, St. Herman of Alaska Press, Platina, CA 1982, p. 21.

²³*The Catacomb Tikhonite Church 1974*, The Orthodox Word, Nov.-Dec., 1974 (59), 235-246.

²⁴*Russia's Catacomb Saints. Lives of the New Martyrs*, St. Herman of Alaska Press, Platina, CA 1982, p. 123.

²⁵*The Catacomb Tikhonite Church 1974*, The Orthodox Word, Nov.-Dec., 1974 (59), 235-246.

stubbornness that we do not change it. We have made it to the best of our judgment, and we are ready to stand with it at God's judgment."²⁶ Fr. Seraphim himself declared three decades ago, "The true Orthodox Christians [even] of the free world, in a profound sense, are already a 'Catacomb Church' as against the official apostate bodies that are everywhere recognized 'Orthodox'."²⁷

These words are still valid for all true Orthodox Christians of our time for an even better reason. What direction should their path take today? In all matters of such importance Fr. Seraphim sought answers in the examples of the great confessors of the Church. Very often he turned to the feat of those closest to us in time - the Russian martyrs and confessors - especially when it came to the search for the paths which Orthodox Christians should follow in our difficult times. He showed us the example of the specially venerated by him martyr Metropolitan Kiril of Kazan, "... Metropolitan Cyril's emphasis on the *oneness of mind* (bold type mine - KT) of those travelling the path of true Orthodoxy shows us our own path today. The leaders of 'World Orthodoxy' are pursuing a ruinous policy of renovationism and apostasy, but it is a hazardous and self-defeating thing to attempt to define the precise point beyond which they, and especially their unwitting followers, will have left Orthodoxy without hope of return. This judgment is not ours to make. But to us is given to stand firm in the true tradition of Orthodoxy handed down to us by our Fathers, to refrain from communion with those who participate in the apostasy from true Christianity, and to seek out those of like mind who are resolved to be faithful to Orthodoxy to the death."²⁸

We should seek the like-minded in the Faith, we should strive for unity with the faithful to Christ's Truth. This, according Fr. Seraphim, is the right direction revealed to us by the new martyrs and confessors of Christ's Church. Indeed, it seems God Himself confirmed their covenant both with their life and their death. In the year of the most fierce Bolshevik persecution, among the countless host of new martyrs and confessors, God's providence brought together in the last days of their earthly life, the two most prominent among the then living hierarchs of the Russian Church, Hieromartyr Cyril Kazan and Hieromartyr Joseph of Petrograd, and crowned them with the wreath of martyrdom at the same place and time²⁹. The confessors' example shows

²⁶³What Does the Catacomb Church Think? - In: The Orthodox Word, No. 96 (1981) pp. 21-23.

²⁷³Russia's Catacomb Saints. Lives of the New Martyrs, St. Herman of Alaska Press, Platina, CA 1982, p. 525.

²⁸³ibid., p. 259.

²⁹³Metropolitans Kiril (Smirnov) and Joseph (Petrovich) were the spiritual leaders of the more moderate and the more radical wing of the anti-Sergianist opposition respectively. During the last years of their life both of them were sent into exile in Kazakhstan, where they could communicate with each other. It is remarkable that their positions regarding the treacherous policy of the Sergianist Synod completely converged. In a letter to hieromonk Leonid from 8th March 1937, Metropolitan Kiril wrote about the "renovationist nature of Sergianism" and emphasised, "I am in brotherly communion with Metropolitan Joseph and gratefully value the fact that it was exactly with his blessing that the Petrograd diocese voiced the first protest against the line taken by Metropolitan Sergius and everybody was warned about the imminent danger." Almost at one and the same time, in the summer of 1937, both of them were arrested and held in custody in the town of Chimkent in the same cell. They were sentenced over the same lawsuit and were executed by firing squad on 20th November (7th November o.s.) together with another bishop and around 150 priests.

the path to the Christians who come after them – this is Fr. Seraphim's profound conviction expressed by him in the following words, "Of inestimable spiritual value is the fearless stand for Christ's Truth by the New Martyrs of Russian. Especially by their manful act of testifying where the Truth was to be found at a time when many did not see this - the Josephite confessors of 1927 and thereafter historically preserved the savor of Orthodoxy for generations to follow."³⁰ "The savor of Orthodoxy", the true spirit of Orthodoxy - this is for Fr. Seraphim the most important reference point both in the search for roads to personal salvation and for reaching the correct ecclesiastical position. This is the true solid foundation – the steadfast adherence to the authentic Church Tradition. Not just to its letter, but to its spirit as well, "... the importance of the Catacomb Church is not in its 'correctness', it is in the preservation of the true spirit of Orthodoxy, the spirit of freedom in Christ."

For Fr. Seraphim this is the most reliable touchstone for the pursuit of the royal path. Only those can walk it who have a "taste for Orthodoxy", who have a sense of its spiritual "aroma" and seek its fragrance.

³⁰*Russia's Catacomb Saints. Lives of the New Martyrs*, St. Herman of Alaska Press, Platina, CA 1982, p. 348.